Attitudes Toward Muslim Americans Post-9/11

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Abstract

Attitudes toward Muslim Americans have been largely understudied in the psychological field. It is important to identify negative attitudes that may be present in particular situations for Muslim Americans in order to better understand and adapt to situations in which negative attitudes are expressed. For this study, 208 subjects (170 females and 38 males) from a California State University campus were recruited; the study explored situational attitudes toward Muslim Americans within the context of social desirability and universal orientation. Contrary to expectations, negative attitudes appeared to be specific rather than global. Implications of the study findings for Muslim American mental health and prevention/intervention programs are discussed.

Attitudes Toward Muslim Americans Post-9/11

Following September 11, 2001, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) reported a 1,700 percent increase of hate crimes against Muslim Americans between 2000 to 2001 (Anderson, 2002). During the process of adjusting to the aftermath of September 11, Muslim Americans faced an upsurge in negative stereotypes expressed by the larger society (American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, 2003; Cassel, 2006) and Muslim immigrants, more than any other

immigrant group, were met with negative attitudes (Council of American Islamic Relations, 2003; Saroglou & Galand, 2004). Since then, increased racial and religious animosity has left Arabs, Middle Easterners, Muslims, and those who bear stereotyped physical resemblance to members of these groups, fearful of potential hatred and hostility from persons of other cultures (Abu-Ras & Suarez, 2009; Baqi-Aziz, 2001; Kira et al., 2010; Rippy & Newman, 2006).

Although Muslim is a religious label and does not pertain to race, the line between racism and religious discrimination is often blurred (Allen & Nielsen, 2002). Muslim Americans are often perceived as a monolithic group (McCarus, 1994; Nyang, 1999), conceptualized as a religious minority thought to act, think, and behave similarly despite wide ethnic differences that exist within the Muslim American community (Abu-Ras & Suarez, 2009; McCarus, 1994; Pew Research Center, 2010).

Despite negative stereotypes of Muslims reported in the media, little psychological research has been conducted to characterize non-Muslim attitudes toward Muslim Americans. One study was published exploring negative attitudes toward Arabs, whereas none has been conducted regarding Muslims (Sergeant, Woods, & Sedlacek, 1992). Research focusing on *Islamophobia*, a dread or hatred of Islam, has been conducted in Europe where a survey in the United Kingdom indicated that discrimination against Muslims has increased in recent years (Sheridan, 2006).

As many Muslim Americans are visibly culturally distinct, it would be of value to explore whether attitudes of non-Muslims toward Muslim Americans resemble attitudes expressed by European non-Muslims toward members of these minority groups. In the aftermath of September 11, because of the higher occurrences of discriminating incidents directed toward Muslims and those perceived to be Muslims (Sheridan, 2006), it is important to identify the particular situational contexts in which Muslim Americans are most vulnerable to experiences of expressed negative attitudes toward their self or their cultural group. Such information may help Muslim Americans process and understand negative experiences through the lens of racism and racism inoculation (Comas-Diaz & Jacobsen, 2001). The present study explores situational attitudes toward Muslim Americans. We examine negative attitudes that may be present toward Muslim Americans which may have detrimental effects on the Muslim American's experiences in specific contexts.

It has been established that discrimination toward Muslim Americans was present before the attacks on September 11, which may relate to Islam being frequently portrayed by the media as intrinsically intolerant and violent (Giger & Davidhizar, 2002). However, it would be beneficial to study situational attitudes toward Muslim Americans post-September 11, 2001, as the attacks by Muslim terrorists seemed to worsen the general public's attitudes toward mainstream Muslim Americans. Since Muslim Americans are part of American society,

negative attitudes and discrimination would have detrimental effects not only on the recipients of the negative expression (Abu-Ras & Suarez, 2009; Rippy & Newman, 2006; Kira et al., 2010), but also on society at large. Greater understanding of non-Muslims' affective response to Muslims might be useful information to guide efforts to reduce prejudice toward this group. However, the effects of situational factors on attitudes toward Muslim Americans in the aftermath of September 11, 2001 have not been directly examined. In the present study, we explore the type of situation-specific attitudes held by undergraduate non-Muslim students toward Muslim Americans post-September 11, 2001.

To be able to assess an individual's affect toward a particular situation, it is important to understand the role of social desirability. Social desirability bias is "the tendency for individuals to portray themselves in a generally favorable fashion" (Rudmin, 1999, p. 229). The tendency for an individual to do this varies and may depend on the context. It becomes important to measure social desirability bias when using various self-report questionnaires in social, clinical, and personality psychology research (Rudmin, 1999). Typically, social desirability bias has been assumed to be a function of two factors- first, the general strength for the need of approval by others, and second, the demands of the particular situation (Phillips & Clancy, 1970). The overreporting of socially desirable behaviors and the underreporting of socially undesirable behaviors becomes problematic when researching sensitive attitudes. Social desirability bias can attenuate, inflate, or moderate the relationships found between variables (Fischer & Fick, 1993). In relation to attitudes toward Muslim Americans, one would assume if a person is high on traits of social desirability he may minimize negative attitudes held toward Muslim Americans.

Furthermore, when considering attitudes toward Muslim Americans, it is important to consider if respondents' worldview is non-prejudicial. Allport, in his theory of universal orientation, argued people have a "slant, a directional set, a posture, to the mind" that begins the process of selective perception (Allport, 1954; as cited in Phillips & Ziller, 1997). Universal orientation describes the process by which one integrates perceptual data into a sense of oneself and others (Phillips & Ziller, 1997). According to this theory, a person, depending on their orientation, attends to an array of potentially colliding stimuli and focuses on information that reinforces her original view of self or other. Hence, as cited in Phillips & Ziller (1997) "orientation is one of the earliest processes in the perceptual-cognitive sequence and is an interactive feature of a perceiver's personality that allows the actor to actively construe a supporting social niche for the self" (pp. 421-422). Therefore, universal orientation is characterized by a "slant, set, perceptual readiness" or a customary orientation toward finding and attending to similarities between self and others. Using this model, we argue that persons with non-prejudiced orientations toward others are more likely to respond with more positive attitudes toward Muslim Americans due to a genuine tendency to emphasize universal commonalities.

The present study is designed to examine the following hypotheses:

(1) Participants responding to various specific situations in which a Muslim American is present will evaluate those situations more negatively than participants evaluating a situation in which the party or parties are not given a specific Muslim American ethnic designation; (2) Respondents who demonstrate high social desirability and nonjudicial orientation will express more positive attitudes toward Muslim Americans.

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited from the psychology subject pool at California State University, Sacramento. Participants did not receive any monetary gain for completing the study, however, students at this university are required to participate in research studies as part of their studies in psychology. The inclusion criteria consisted of students who were currently enrolled in psychology classes at the university.

A total of 208 subjects (170 females and 38 males) participated in this study. Among the participants, 36.5% were Caucasian/European American, 25% were Asian/Pacific Islander, 13.5% were Hispanic/Latino, 8.2% were Black/African American, 3% were Middle Eastern, and 32% were “other” or unidentified ethnic origin. The participant’s ages ranged from 18 to 49 years old with a median age of 21 years old. Of the 208 participants, 36.1% were Catholic, 29.3% were Christian, 4.8% were Buddhist, 1.9% were Muslim, 1.9% were Atheist, 1.4% were Jewish, 1% were Hindu, 10.1% were “other, and 13.5% reported “none” for religious affiliation. Muslim American and Middle Easterner participants were excluded from analysis. The remaining 204 participants were included in analyses.

Materials

Situational Attitude Scale

Participants were given the Situational Attitude Scale (SAS). Sedlacek and Brooks (1970) developed the Situational Attitude Scale (SAS) to assess if a given group may experience negative attitudes by others. The SAS is composed of ten personal and social situations followed by ten bipolar semantic differential scales. Two versions are utilized, one that is ethnic specific (in this study, Muslim American) and one that does not designate ethnicity. Reliabilities for each

situational scale have been reported to range from alpha coefficients of .71 to .91, with a median of .84 (Sergeant, Woods, & Sedlacek, 1992).

The SAS has been used to assess attitudes toward various racial, cultural, and ethnic groups. For example, groups such as African Americans (Balenger, Hoffman, & Sedlacek, 1992), Hispanics (White & Sedlacek, 1987), American Indians (Ancis, Choney, & Sedlacek, 1996), Asian Americans (Leong & Schneller, 1997), persons with disabilities (McQuilkin, Freitag, & Harris, 1990), women (Minatoya & Sedlacek, 1983), Arab Americans (Sergeant, Woods, & Sedlacek, 1992) and Jews (Gerson & Sedlacek, 1992) have been studied using variations in which the appropriate ethnic term is used in ethnic specific form.

In this study, the situations utilized with the SAS were adopted from the study conducted by Sergeant, Woods, and Sedlacek (1992) regarding attitudes toward Arabs. However, this study used "Muslim Americans" rather than "Arabs" to encompass all ethnicities that regard themselves as Muslims. The 10 situations utilized in this study are listed in table 1.

Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale

The Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (MCSD) was developed to measure if "bias towards affirming social norms" is present in respondents (Rudmin, 1999). The MCSD scale is one of the oldest and most widely used scales measuring social desirability (Crown & Marlowe, 1964). The scale consists of 33 positively and negatively keyed items to which respondents can respond "true" or "false". Individuals whose responses to this scale are more socially desirable are thought to be more "conforming, cautious, and persuadable, and their behavior is more normatively anchored than persons who depict themselves less euphemistically" (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964, p. 189). The authors reported obtaining a Kuder-Richardson reliability coefficient of .88 and a test-retest correlation of .89 (Leite & Beretvas, 2005).

Universal Orientation Scale

The Universal Orientation Scale (UOS) was developed by Phillips and Ziller in 1997. This measurement consists of 20 positively and negatively keyed items involving a 5-point Likert rating scale. Universal orientation theory posits that some individuals attenuate and emphasize self-other similarities resulting in integration of self and others. The importance of measuring nonprejudiced thinking is based on the idea that intergroup thinking is crucial for improving intergroup relations (Brown, Boniecki, & Walters, 2004).

Respondents with higher scores on the UOS are more accepting and less discriminating between minority and nonminority control targets, are concerned about the value of human equality, and are more willing to interact

with a wide range of others (Phillips & Ziller, 1997). The scale has a moderate reliability of .75 and alpha coefficient of .76 (Nicol & Boies, 2006). Additionally, the UOS has been reported to be uncorrelated (-.05) with the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (Bringle, Phillips, & Hudson, 2004).

Procedure

Participants were asked to sign up for a time slot to complete this study on the research website for the psychology department. Participants attended their assigned time and independently completed the survey in a laboratory setting in groups of eight.

Two versions of the survey packets were constructed. These packets were identical in content, with the exception of the SAS, where each packet contained either Situational Attitude Scale (SAS) ethnic specific (Muslim American) form or SAS ethnicity not specified form. Both packets contained the demographic questionnaire, the Marlow-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (MCSD) and the Universal Orientation Scale (UOS). Packets were randomly distributed to participants. Each participant had an equal chance of receiving either version. Participants were unaware that two different versions of the packets existed.

Results

Data coding and preliminary analyses

The Situational Attitude Scale (SAS) was coded according to the direction of the attitude toward each situation. Each situation included ten bipolar semantic differential scales that were coded with higher scores indicating more negative attitudes. For the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (MCSD), the negatively keyed items were reverse coded as directed by the author (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964); with higher scores indicating more socially desirable responses. Negatively keyed items on the Universal Orientation Scale (UOS) were also reverse coded as indicated by the authors Phillips and Ziller (1997). Higher scores on the UOS indicated higher nonprejudiced thought.

On the SAS, mean scores were computed for each situation across the ten items pertaining to that situation. To reduce the number of potential dependent variables, a principal component analysis was conducted using the mean scores for the ten different situations of the SAS. Two factors had Eigenvalues greater than 1 - all situations except seven and situation seven by itself (see Table 1). Together these two factors accounted for 49.90 % of the variance.

TABLE 1. Summary of Principal Component Analysis on the Ten Situations of the Situational Attitude Scale (SAS)

Factor Names and the High Loading Variables	Factor Loadings	
	1	2
General Situational Attitudes (<i>Eigenvalue</i> = 3.91)		
new person in group	.77	-.07
boarding a plane	.73	.05
vacation w/friend	.70	.02
religious service	.64	-.02
on-campus demonstration	.63	.15
t.v. show about custody	.63	.28
crowded bus	.63	-.02
financial aid	.62	-.22
buying a used car	.54	.26
Cheating Situation Attitude (<i>Eigenvalue</i> = 1.08)		
cheating student	-.02	.93

The nine questions with high loadings on General Situational Attitude component had good internal consistency, Cronbach's $\alpha = .83$. The mean scores for the nine situations were used to create a mean score, which was used as the dependent variable (general situational attitudes) for further analysis. Situation seven (cheating situation attitudes)—“You notice a student cheating on an exam”—was analyzed separately.

Attitudes toward Muslim American versus unspecified ethnicity

The first hypothesis suggested that attitudes toward Muslim American individuals would be more negative than attitudes toward individuals of unspecified ethnicity in specific contexts. To assess this hypothesis, the average attitude scores for each situation were entered as dependent variable into separate one-way between-subjects analysis of variances (ANOVAs) with form type as the independent variable. The results indicated that in three of the ten situations, attitude scores were significantly different toward the Muslim American individual versus the individual of unspecified ethnicity. These included situation one, “You are standing on a very crowded bus surrounded by many (Muslim American) people”; situation three, “You are boarding a plane for a vacation in Florida, and two young (Muslim American) men are boarding immediately behind you”; and situation four, “You are buying a used car from a (Muslim American) salesman”. Attitudes toward Muslim Americans were more negative in the plane and buying a used car but more positive in the crowded bus situation (see Table 2).

TABLE 2. Means and Standard Deviations for Each Form Type

Situational context	Form type	
	Non-specified (<i>n</i> = 102)	Muslim American (<i>n</i> = 102)
crowded bus*	2.81 (.61)	2.62 (.60)
vacation w/friend	2.19 (.57)	2.15 (.65)
boarding a plane**	2.44 (.65)	2.75 (.77)
buying used car*	2.40 (.59)	2.98 (.74)
t.v. show about custody	2.48 (.55)	2.59 (.63)
religious service	2.46 (.81)	2.58 (.81)
cheating student	3.43 (.70)	3.53 (.58)
on-campus demonstration	2.28 (.59)	2.42 (.69)
financial aid	1.97 (.59)	2.11 (.67)
new person in group	2.19 (.62)	2.17 (.66)
Total	2.52 (.34)	2.53 (.46)

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Note. Numbers in parentheses indicate standard deviations. Higher scores indicate more negative attitudes.

Pearson correlations were conducted to examine if there were any relations between attitudes toward Muslim Americans in situations one, three, and four and the UOS and MCSD (see Table 3). The MCSD negatively correlated with attitudes in situation one (bus) and situation three (plane); indicating respondents who had higher socially desirable responses also expressed more positive attitudes toward Muslim Americans in these situations. An analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) testing attitude differences toward Muslim Americans versus unspecified individuals was significant when MCSD was entered as a covariate for situation one, $F(1, 102) = 7.42$, $p < .01$, and situation three, $F(1, 102) = 14.52$, $p < .001$, indicating more negative attitudes toward Muslim Americans

TABLE 3. Correlates between SAS (Muslim American) for Q1, Q3, Q4 and UOS and MCSD (*N* = 102)

	Q1	Q3	Q4	UOS	MCSD
Q1	—				
Q3	.59***	—			
Q4	.46***	.45***	—		
UOS	-.13	-.14	-.04	—	
MCSD	-.26**	-.36***	-.16	.24*	—

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

Note. Abbreviates: Q1 = "You are standing on a very crowded bus surrounded by many (Muslim American) people", Q3 = "You are boarding a plane for a vacation in Florida, and two young (Muslim American) men are boarding immediately behind you", Q4 = "You are buying a used car from a (Muslim American) salesman". Higher scores on situations indicated more negative attitudes; higher scores on UOS indicate more nonprejudiced attitudes and high scores on MCSD indicate higher socially desirable responses.

in the plane situation and more positive attitudes toward Muslim Americans in the bus situation could not be fully explained by social desirability.

Attitudes were also analyzed using the general situational attitude mean score averaged over the nine questions. A one-way between-subjects ANOVA revealed no significant difference between attitudes expressed toward Muslim Americans and attitudes toward individuals of unspecified ethnicity, $F(1, 202) < 1$.

Predicting attitudes toward Muslim Americans

The second hypothesis indicated individuals expressing nonprejudiced universal orientation would overall have more positive attitudes toward Muslim Americans. Additionally, it was hypothesized that individuals with higher socially desirable responses would have more positive responses toward Muslim Americans.

Pearson correlations of demographic data with the SAS scores revealed four relevant factors (age, gender, generational status, and race). These factors were utilized with the UOS and MCSD as independent variables in a standard multiple regression analysis. The analysis examined the relationships between the six independent variables and the general situational attitudes toward Muslim Americans across the nine situations. The regression model was significant, $F(6, 88) = 3.43, p < .05$. The regression model included one significant predictor; MCSD responses (see Table 4). High MCSD scores predicted less negative attitudes toward Muslim Americans. The regression model explained 19% of the variance. A similar standard multiple regression analysis predicting negative attitude in the cheating situation produced a model that included two significant predictors: age and if participant was born in the United States (see Table 5). The model was significant $F(6, 88) = 3.10, p < .05$, and explained 17% of the variance; indicating older and US-born participants expressed more negative attitudes toward the Muslim American individual in the cheating situation.

TABLE 4. Results of Standard Linear Multiple Regression Predicting General Situational Attitude scores for Muslim Americans ($N = 94$)

Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
$R^2 = .19, F(6, 88) = 3.43, p < .05$			
Age	-.01	.01	-.04
Gender	-.16	.12	-.13
UOS	-.08	.14	-.06
MCSD	-.89	.31	-.31*
Generational Status ^a	-.23	.11	-.21
Race ^b	.16	.12	.15

* $p < .05$.

^aGenerational status coded U.S. Born or Non-U.S. Born

^bRace coded White or non-White

TABLE 5. Results of Standard Linear Multiple Regression
Predicting Cheating Situation Attitude scores for Muslim Americans
($N = 94$)

Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
$R^2 = .17, F(6, 88) = 3.10, p < .05$			
Age	.03	.01	.23*
Gender	-.20	.14	-.14
UOS	.01	.16	.01
MCSD	-.57	.37	-.17
Generational Status	-.37	.13	-.29**
Race	.02	.14	.01

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Discussion

A major goal of this study was to examine if attitudes toward Muslim Americans were in fact more negative than attitudes expressed toward individuals whose ethnicities were unspecified. It was hypothesized that attitudes would be more negative in instances where a Muslim American was identified versus instances where the ethnicity of the individual was unspecified. Rather than global negative attitudes, we found more negative attitudes to be present in specific situational contexts; specifically when Muslim Americans were boarding a plane to Florida or selling a used car. Additionally, older and US-born participants appeared to have more negative attitudes toward a Muslim American cheating on an exam. However, attitudes toward Muslim Americans appeared to be more positive than those toward nonspecified group members in the context of a crowded bus situation. These results were not expected.

It was hypothesized that participants who scored higher on the social desirability scale and the scale of nonprejudice would report more positive situational attitudes toward Muslim Americans. As predicted, findings indicated social desirability predicted higher expression of positive attitudes toward Muslim Americans; however, nonprejudiced universal orientation was not found to be related to attitudes toward Muslims. When social desirability was covaried, significant differences between attitudes toward Muslim American versus unspecified individuals still existed, indicating results could not be explained solely by social desirability for the presence of positive attitudes in situation one (bus) and negative attitudes in situation three (plane).

Our findings did not support the hypothesis that attitudes toward Muslim Americans would be more negative overall. Significant differences were not found in all situations. These findings may suggest attitudes toward Muslim Americans may be situationally variant.

Specific versus global attitudes

In situations where Muslim Americans were boarding a plane, higher negative attitudes were present. In light of the September 11 events, negative attitudes in plane situations might be expected more than negative attitudes in other situations. Specifically, individuals may express fear related to being on an airplane with a Muslim American. However, individuals did not express negative attitudes toward Muslim Americans in most other situations.

Research indicates that situations that are most salient in individuals' cognition tend to be more accessible. Due to the saliency of the traumatic events of September 11, generalizing the terrorists of 9/11 to all Muslims could possibly explain the presence of these negative attitudes. Evidence for this is found in reports that directly after September 11, individuals identified to be Muslim in Europe were targeted and attacked because they were perceived to be associated with the terrorist acts (Sheridan, 2006). However, the presence of negative attitudes may represent an intensification of preexisting attitudes toward Muslim Americans rather than signifying a new problem (Sheridan, 2006).

Additionally, due to the length of time between this study and the events of September 11, and the daily exposure of news content being lessened (Persson & Musher-Eizenman, 2005), there are several possible explanations for this pattern of small to moderate effect. Consistent with the accessibility principle, it is possible the higher amounts of media coverage immediately after the attacks presented vast amounts of negative images related to Muslims and Arabs in general, thus leading to greater but temporary prejudices toward this group (CAIR, 2001). Furthermore, some research has indicated that manipulating the salience of people's own death alters attitudes toward out-group members (Persson & Musher-Eizenman, 2005). Perhaps images of victims and death broadcast following the terrorist attacks exacerbated viewers' negative attitudes toward Muslim Americans (Persson & Musher-Eizenman, 2005).

Other research has indicated Americans possess a lingering resentment toward Arabs and Muslims in America post-September 11, as examined by opinion poll articles in the *Washington Post* (Panagopoulos, 2006). However, results of this study indicated people may feel negative in situations where they are more likely to feel threatened rather than holding negative attitudes overall toward this group. Thus, findings indicated negative attitudes are situation specific rather than global.

Role of social desirability

In line with the initial prediction, results indicated a positive relation between higher social desirability scores and higher positive attitudes toward Muslim Americans. In other words, the data indicated the need for individuals to por-

tray themselves favorably is related to positive attitudes expressed toward Muslim Americans; possibly indicating attitudes toward Muslim Americans are in fact worse than indicated by the data. Additionally, results indicated positive attitudes toward Muslim Americans in the bus and negative attitudes toward the airplane situation could not be fully explained by social desirability. Findings of relatively positive attitudes toward Muslim Americans in the bus situation may indicate a perception of stereotypes that Muslim Americans are quiet, polite, and unobtrusive. Because these findings are counter to hypotheses, they should be replicated in future studies before placing a great deal of confidence in them.

It is also possible that people hold ambivalent feelings toward Muslim Americans. Due to both negative and positive experiences with this group, individuals may respond positively in some situations (such as the bus situation) and respond more negatively in other situations (such as airport situation). The presence of both these feelings and attitudes may not be a contradiction of each other; rather, it may explain the impact of the direct or indirect experiences of September 11.

Limitations and generalizations

Regarding methods of this study, possible improvements include examining a larger and broader participant population. The California State University at Sacramento campus represents one of the largest diverse college campuses in California. The city of Sacramento includes 41% of non-Hispanic whites, 15.5% of blacks, 22% of Hispanics, and 17.5% of Asians/Pacific Islanders (Stodghill & Bower, 2002), possibly indicating students at this campus have a higher awareness of diversity and have had prior interactions with Muslim Americans. This exposure to other cultures and Muslim Americans may have contributed to this population being more culturally aware and/or sensitive. Additionally, due to assessing student attitudes in an educational setting, results may not generalize to employment or other social settings, as college students may express more inclusive attitudes than the general population.

Alternative situational contexts could have been measured, as the ten situations utilized do not represent the range of intercultural interactions among Muslim Americans and non-Muslims. An additional limitation of this study included a higher rate of female subjects and subjects being limited to college students in psychology classes.

Future Research

The results of the current study point the way to future research. Future research exploring attitudes toward Muslim Americans may benefit from ex-

panding the participant pool into communities that are less ethnically diverse, sociopolitically liberal, and highly educated. The current study utilized participants from a highly diverse university setting in a highly diverse, sociopolitically liberal community in a liberal state. Therefore, the current study may not represent the attitudes of students or others from less diverse or more conservative contexts. For example, a recent Pew opinion poll (Pew, 2010) found that Republicans express an unfavorable opinion of Islam two times higher than Democrats, and that college graduates report a 19% more positive view of Islam than those who have not graduated from college.

Future research may benefit from assessing factors that may contribute to positive or negative attitudes in non-Muslim individuals. The recent Pew opinion poll (2010) considered such factors as age, education, political affiliation, and familiarity with Islam. Additional factors such as ethnic identity, cultural mindedness/racism, religious identity salience, political awareness/involvement, and socioeconomic status may play important roles in identifying and understanding the factors that contribute to attitudes toward Muslims. This research may help elucidate the findings of this study where college students reported negative attitudes toward Muslims boarding planes, but positive attitudes on a bus.

Future research may also explore whether people make distinctions between Muslim Americans and Muslims from other countries. It would be helpful to explore whether situational contexts in which negative attitudes are expressed toward Muslim Americans remain stable over time or whether they change with political conditions and public exposure.

Finally, possible follow-up studies can explore the influence of media exposure in positive and negative attitude toward Muslim Americans.

Further implications

The findings of this study suggest that there are likely specific situational contexts in which negative attitudes are more likely to be expressed. The findings of negative attitudes in airport situations points to the need for continuing efforts at public education regarding the diversity of Muslims and the nature of Islam and its beliefs. Understanding that expressed bias is linked to specific contexts can be useful in planning programs to help combat prejudicial attitudes and develop tolerance.

For example, rather than focusing on general attitudes toward Muslim Americans, which most non-Muslims would likely report as generally positive, anti-discrimination programs may benefit from identifying the common specific contexts in which negative bias is expressed. Then, as situation-specific biases are identified, tolerance programming may consider utilizing the social desirability tendency to engage non-Muslims in combating their own biases.

Raising awareness of these biases in people with high social desirability tendencies will likely produce motivation to combat their internal biases. Relying on the findings that perception of threat to safety impacts salience of negative attitudes toward out-group members (Persson & Musher-Eizenman, 2005), anti-bias programs may consider including data based educational content. Specifically educating non-Muslims with information and objective data regarding safety and low probability of harm. Anti-bias programs may then coach non-Muslims to utilize the data for cognitive mediation of anxiety. Lowered anxiety, in turn, may assist in decreasing bias.

It appears that the U.S. population reports less generalized bias toward Muslim Americans than expected, and therefore, anti-discrimination programs may benefit from identifying salient situation specific settings in which bias is more likely to be acknowledged, and target psychoeducation and training toward these more specific and contextualized awareness.

Additionally, in relation to Muslim Americans, these findings suggest, as indicated by the Pew study (2010), Americans appear to be conflicted in their orientation toward Muslim Americans and Islam. Therefore, Muslim individual self report of anxiety resulting from unpredictability of negative sentiment toward Muslims (e.g., experiences with discrimination or racism) should be validated. Mental health prevention/intervention programs should consider psychoeducational strategies that validate such cognitive/affective experiences and provide coping strategies for management of anticipation anxiety and discrimination trauma (Rippy & Newman, 2006; Kira et al., 2010).

Muslim Americans who experience daily life interactions with non-Muslims as generally positive may experience a greater internal reaction to the periodic negative experience. Utilizing the concept of racism inoculation (Comas-Diaz & Jacobsen, 2001) in mental health intervention/prevention programs may be beneficial to Muslim Americans. As research findings better clarify the contextual variables that contribute to negative attitudes toward Muslim-Americans, the information should be incorporated into programs to aid Muslim Americans in understanding of the contexts in which non-Muslims are likely to possess negative attitudes toward Muslims. This will better prepare Muslims to process, engage in meaning-making, and, specifically, depersonalize these negative experiences.

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