

## An Exploration of Cultural Identity Patterns and the Family Context among Arab Muslim Young Adults in America

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*While many studies have explored cultural adaptation and development and its correlates among adult Arab immigrants to the United States (U.S.), little empirical work has focused on Arab youth who were raised in the U.S., particularly Arab Muslim young adults. The present study explores cultural identity patterns and the sociodemographic and family contexts of 150 Arab Muslim American young adults ages 18–25 who completed an Internet study. The participants fell into three cultural identity groups: High Bicultural, Moderate Bicultural, and High Arab Cultural. Although all three groups demonstrated positive general family functioning, the Moderate Bicultural group was distinct in that they were less likely to be engaged or married, and they experienced less family support and more family acculturative stressors. The results highlight the importance of the family context in contributing to a stronger sense of cultural identity for young adults who fall at the intersection of Arab and American culture and Muslim faith.*

Cultural identity is one of the most important aspects of life for non-European immigrants to the United States (Phinney, 2003; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). For minority adolescents, ethnicity plays a significant role in identity development and it has been linked with psychological well-being and academic achievement (Dubow, Pargament, Boxer, & Tarakeshwar, 2000; Fuligni, 1998; Rayle & Myers, 2004). Yet little is known about the cultural identity of Arab Muslim youth in the U.S.; a minority population gaining increasing attention in the post 9/11 era (Kosmin, Mayer, & Keysar, 2001). The juxtaposition of lack of knowledge against mounting visibility has led to Arabs Muslims being viewed with skepticism in the western world (Said, 2004). The aim of the present study is to explore patterns of Arab Muslim cultural identity adults

and association with family acculturative stress and support.

In order to provide the context for understanding issues of cultural identity among Arab Muslim young adults, we provide a brief introduction about Arab immigration to the U.S. Thereafter we discuss the limited applicability of current theoretical models of ethnic identity development to Arab Muslim youth as justification for our study. Finally, we test the assumptions of the associations between family stress and support on the one hand, and cultural identity on the other; factors that are inextricably linked in other ethnic immigrant populations (Liebkind, Jasinskaja-Lahti, & Solheim, 2004; Rumbaut, 1994).

### **Arab Immigration to the U.S.**

We use the term “Arab” to refer to persons from the 22 North African and Middle Eastern member states of the Arab League. While Arabs have been immigrating to North America since the late 1800s (Abu-Laban & Suleiman, 1989), the majority have immigrated since the 1960s (AAIF, 2002; Naff, 1994; McCarus, 1994). Estimates of Americans of Arab descent in the U.S. range from approximately 1.2 million (Brittingham & de la Cruz, 2005) to in excess of 3.5 million

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(AAI, 2003). The majority of Arab American adults over 25 years of age are fluent in English (75%); greater than 40% have a bachelor's degree or higher and are employed in professional industries; and on average they have a higher family median income than other families residing in the US (Brittingham & de la Cruz, 2005). In other words, on sociodemographic characteristics Arab immigrants are more advantaged than other immigrant populations (NRC & IM, 1999; Reardon-Anderson, Capps, & Fix, 2002). Within the Arab immigrant population, however, differences have been noted between Arab Christians and Arab Muslims with the former more socioeconomically advantaged than the latter. This is in part because Christians represent the majority of the former waves of Arab immigration whereas Muslims dominate the more recent wave of immigrants, many of whom are refugees (Abu-Laban & Suleiman, 1989; Ammar, 2000).

The understanding of who is an Arab in America is primarily expressed via the term "Arab-American" and generally refers to Arabic speaking immigrants and their U.S.-born descendants currently residing in the United States (Suleiman, 1994). However, what it means to be an Arab in America in terms of cultural identity has yet to be fully explored. In this section we present our conceptual framework for understanding the multi-faceted nature of identity for Arab Muslim youth.

### Theoretical Models of Ethnic Identity

Most models of ethnic identity have focused on more recent immigrants of color, e.g., from Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean (Rumbaut, 1994) as skin color is a significant component of ethnic identity for many of these immigrant populations (Spencer, Noll, Stoltzfus, & Harpalani, 2001). This has informed theoretical and measurement models of ethnic identity (Alarcon, Szalacha, Erkut, Fields, & Garcia Coll, 2000; Clark & Clark, 1947). However, the ethnic identity of Arab Muslims in the US does not align with the theoretical assumptions underlying these models, because Arabs are technically not immigrants of color; they are categorized as "White" on the Census tract. Consequently, we question the applicability of current models of ethnic identity for Arab Muslim adolescents.

In this study, we use the term "cultural identity" and define it as a multidimensional construct referring to a developing sense of self as a member of one or more groups (Raman, 2006). The term as used in the past captures the interplay between religion, culture, ethnicity and national identities (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006; Leibkind,

1992). It is broader than ethnic identity, which refers to affiliation with a specific group that shares a common ancestry, history, and traditions (Smith, 1991). From a developmental perspective, cultural identity formation progresses through stages from a diffused notion of identity to a more considered understanding of self (Phinney, 1991; 2003) with response to significant reference groups (Esses, Dovidio, Jackson, & Armstrong, 2001). Consequently, the dimensions of identity (e.g., national, ethnic, religious) may develop at differential paces and vary independently (Bourhis, Moïse, Perreault, & Senécal, 1997). In this study we sought to understand in particular ethnic aspects of cultural identity for Arab Muslim young adults within the context of the family; a strong influence on the process of identity development (Berry et al., 2006).

### The Family Context

Given that immigration to the U.S. is typically a "family affair" (Rumbaut, 1997, p. 6), exploring the family context then becomes increasingly important for understanding identity. Of the major contextual factors associated with self-cultural identification, family relationships are dominant (Bornstein & Cote, 2006; Knight, Bernal, Garza, Cota, & Ocampo, 1993; Rosenthal, 1987). However, deciphering the interplay between the characteristics of familial context and cultural identity formation is a challenge because of the complexities inherent in family ecologies, socialization processes, and cultural adaptation patterns (Dosanjh & Ghuman, 1996; Rumbaut & Portes, 2001; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). One of the most widely used models of cultural adaptation promulgates four primary strategies to explain acculturation—integration, separation, marginalization, and assimilation (Berry, 1984). In this study we test characteristics of the family that have been linked with cultural identity formation (Berry et al., 2006; Sam, 2006) in an understudied population.

One of the critical tasks in cultural identity formation is navigating between the immigrant home culture and the more mainstream culture (Garcia Coll & Magnuson, 1997). Narrower conceptualizations of the relationship between family and individual development are based on the premise of uni-directionality (e.g., from family to individual), while broader perspectives emphasize the complex nature of family interactions and acknowledge its dynamic and multidimensional nature (Garcia Coll & Pachter, 2002; Siegal & Aboud, 2005; Singh-Manoux & Marmot, 2005). When the two cultures, the family and society,

are at odds, developing a sense of cultural identity is challenging.

Family functioning and support, characterized by harmony, care, responsibility, and competency of the family (Lewis & Feiring, 1998), are aspects of a family system linked with acculturation (Rueschenberg & Buriel, 1989). Under some situations, a well functioning immigrant family can serve as a critical buffer for adolescents against acculturative stress associated with adapting to two cultures (Arends-Toth & van de Vijver, 2006; Castillo, Conoley, & Brossart, 2004; Chun, 2006). However, in others, the family may have an opposite effect, that of creating barriers to acculturation (Sarroub, 2006). Given the literature on Arab Muslim families is unambiguous on the centrality of family life and family values within the Arab culture (Abudabbeh, 1997; Abudabbeh & Nydell, 1993; Benson & Kayal, 2002), we are interested in exploring the associations between family functioning and youth cultural identity development among Arab Muslim youth who were raised in the U.S.

### Study Questions

The present study explores cultural identity and the family context for Arab Muslim American young adults. Three sets of questions are addressed in the study.

First, what patterns of cultural identity can be discerned in a sample of Arab Muslim young adults in the U.S.? Based on the literature, we hypothesized that three identity patterns would emerge from the data—a predominantly Arab cultural identity, a predominantly American cultural identity and a bicultural identity (Dosanjh & Ghuman, 1996; Garcia Coll & Magnuson, 1997; Rumbaut, 1994).

Second, what is the association between socio-demographic characteristics and cultural identity for these Arab Muslim young adults? We hypothesized that older youth would have a clearer sense of identity compared to the younger participants in the study (Phinney, 2003). Based on previous studies with Arab Americans, we hypothesized that females and those who were married would have stronger affiliation to the Arab culture than males and those who were single (Amer & Hovey, in press; Ajrouch, 2004). We also hypothesized that youth who were living in the five states with the largest Arab populations (California, Florida, Michigan, New Jersey, New York; de la Cruz & Brittingham, 2003) would have a stronger sense of Arab identity compared to those living in the other states of the country.

Third, what is the association between family context and cultural identity? Family context

was explored in terms of the family environment, family functioning and support, and family acculturative stress (Bornstein & Cote, 2006). Family environment included parental education and exposure to Arabic language (Britto, Fuligni, & Brooks-Gunn, 2006; Dosanjh & Ghuman, 1996; Rumbaut, 1994). We anticipated that greater exposure to the Arab culture (e.g., use of Arabic in the home, proximity to extended family), and greater family functioning (e.g., communication, affective responses and involvement) and support (e.g., being there for the young adult) would be linked more strongly with Arab cultural identity than with American or Bicultural cultural identities (Rumbaut, 1994).

## Methods

### Participants

A total of 150 second-generation Arab Muslim Americans were selected for this study. We limited the sample to U.S.-born second generation and early immigrant participants to avoid confounding the issues of cultural identity in light of the literature suggesting that length of residence in the U.S. is linked with decline in cultural identity and increase in adoption of American cultural, social, and family values (Faragallah, Schumm, & Webb, 1997; Jasinskaja-Lahti & Liebkind, 2000; Meleis, Lipson, & Paul, 1992). The majority (66%,  $n = 99$ ) indicated that they were Sunni, 10 participants indicated that they were Shiaa, and the remaining 41 participants did not write what their religious denomination was. Nearly three quarters of the sample was female (74.0%,  $n = 111$ ), and more than one-fourth was male (26.0%,  $n = 39$ ). Ages ranged from 18 to 25, with a mean age of 21.2 ( $SD = 2.16$ ). The majority were single (80.0%,  $n = 120$ ), while 8.7% ( $n = 13$ ) were engaged to be married and 9.3% ( $n = 14$ ) were married. The respondents were well educated: about half (52.7%,  $n = 79$ ) had completed some college classes and one-third had obtained a bachelors degree or higher (34.2%,  $n = 51$ ). The average annual family income was high, with 51.3% ( $n = 77$ ) of respondents residing in homes with an income of \$50,000 or higher.

Parents of the participants were from 12 Arab states, with largest groups of participants of Egyptian (26.7%,  $n = 40$ ), Palestinian (25.3%,  $n = 38$ ), Lebanese (12.7%,  $n = 19$ ), and Syrian (8.7%,  $n = 13$ ) backgrounds. A total of 13.4% ( $n = 21$ ) had parents who each came from a different Arab state. Participants were currently residing in 22 states and the District of Columbia.

About half the sample (49.3%,  $n = 75$ ) were living in the five states with the largest populations of Arabs.

### Design

Data for this study were extracted from the database of the Arab Culture and Mental Health Survey #2, collected by the second author. Conducted in 2004, this was a non-random convenience sample in which over 600 Americans of Arab descent completed a series of acculturation and mental health questionnaires hosted at an Internet Web form. The increased use of computers and the interconnectivity achieved through the Internet is causing and will continue to make significant changes in conducting behavioral science research (Krantz, Ballard, & Scher, 1997). Internet based surveys are becoming more frequent, as they provide anonymity and privacy that can help diffuse some of the fears and reluctance associated with completing research studies (Amer & Hovey, in press; Barry, 2001). In addition, participants also report lower social anxiety and social desirability using Internet based survey methodologies compared to paper and pencil questionnaires (Joinson, 1999). Additional advantages to Internet based surveys include less costly and more efficient data collection, wider access to a large and diverse population of individuals, and accessibility of previously not easily accessible or hidden populations (Kraut et al., 2004; Rhodes, Bowie, & Hergenrather, 2003; Schmidt, 1997). Moreover, Internet methods have been recommended for research with Arab Americans (Amer, in press; Barry, 2001).

These participants were solicited for the original study through the use of e-mail invitations sent to Arab American individuals, religious groups, university clubs, and cultural Web groups; several channels that are used more frequently by individuals seeking to maintain ties with their ethnic and religious background. The overall database from the original study contained data for Arab participants of diverse age ranges, generational statuses, and religious backgrounds; however, for the present study we were interested in examining cultural identity patterns and family context specific to second-generation young adult Arab Muslim Americans. Therefore, we extracted the data for Muslims ages 18–25 who were born in the U.S. or had arrived to the U.S. at the age of five or younger. We elected to combine 2nd generation youth with those who arrived in the U.S. prior to age 5 because children who move to the U.S. before age 5 would be expected to have similar experiences to the second generation (i.e., would speak English without an accent, etc.) and

the number of participants who had arrived to the U.S. at age 5 or younger was small ( $n = 26$ ; 17%) and they did not differ from the total sample on key sociodemographic variables.

### Measures

*Sociodemographic Survey.* Participants completed a series of questions assessing sociodemographic indicators such as gender, age, marital status, highest education achieved, income, location of residence (city and state), parental country of origin, and parental education. Additional items assessing Arab family environment included location of residence of extended family members, frequency of Arabic versus English language use at home, and frequency of watching Arabic TV. With the exception of age, all of the sociodemographic and family factors were rated using nominal or ordinal categories.

*Cultural Identity.* To assess cultural identity, a modified version of the Vancouver Index of Acculturation (VIA; Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2000) was used. The original VIA is a 20-item questionnaire rated on a 9-point Likert-type rating scale. Ten of the statements reflect identification with the person's heritage culture and 10 are matching statements assessing identification with mainstream North American culture. The final score for each of these subscales is the mean sub-scale score. For the present study, the questions were modified for clarity and to reflect current Arab and American cultural identities. For example, the item "I often participate in my heritage cultural traditions" was changed to "I often participate in Arab cultural traditions" and the item "I am interested in having North American friends" was changed to "I have friends who are mainstream American." This latter question was also modified so that the question would reflect current (rather than intended) cultural identity, making it more consistent with the remaining VIA questions. Based on results from a previous pilot study using Rasch rating scale analysis of category functioning, the rating scale was shortened to a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree" (Amer, 2005); therefore final scores on the subscales ranged from 1 to 5 ( $\alpha = .86$  for the Arab subscale,  $\alpha = .80$  for the American subscale).

The items on the Arab and American subscales fall into three conceptual dimensions of cultural identity: values and traditions; social interactions; and cultural interests. The mean of the four items on the Arab Values and Traditions dimension was 4.07 ( $SD = 0.69$ ;  $\alpha = .76$ ; e.g., "I believe in Arab values.") Four items represent the Arab Social Interactions dimension ( $M = 4.39$ ,  $SD = 0.65$   $\alpha = .75$ ;

e.g. “I enjoy social activities with people of Arab ethnicity.”) The two-item Arab Cultural Interests dimension had a mean of 4.12 ( $SD = 0.85$ ,  $\alpha = .66$ ; e.g., “I enjoy Arab entertainment”). Similarly, three dimensions using the equivalent American items were derived for American values and traditions, social interactions and cultural interests. The mean for the American Values dimension was 3.12 ( $SD = 0.77$ ;  $\alpha = .73$ ) and the mean for American Social Interactions was 3.61 ( $SD = 0.72$ ;  $\alpha = .59$ ), and the mean for American Cultural Interests was 4.14 ( $SD = 0.85$ ;  $\alpha = .68$ ).

*Acculturative Strategy.* The Arab Acculturative Strategy Scale (AASS; Amer, 2002) consists of two questions that assess acculturation strategy consistent with Berry’s (1984) four-factor model. The first question asks respondents to select one of four statements regarding their desired acculturative strategy. The 2nd item contains the same choices; however, participants are asked to select the choice that best represents the strategy that they have already adopted. This nominal scale is a modified version of the “Identification with U.S. Culture” questions that were used previously with Arab Americans (Faragallah et al., 1997; Schumm, 1995), with high convergent validity between respondents’ AASS selections and their scores on a continuous measure of Arab acculturation strategy (Amer, 2002).

The 2nd item of the AASS was used in the present study to test the external validity of the cultural identity patterns obtained. The question was “To what extent do you think you have adopted the American culture so far?” The four response categories were: “I see myself as an American rather than an Arab or Arab-American” ( $n = 4$ , 2.7%); “I see myself as a regular American who is proud of his/her Arab background and follows some American traditions” ( $n = 82$ , 54.7%); I see myself mostly Arab in my values and culture ( $n = 54$ , 36%); and I don’t see myself as either Arab or American, neither category describes me ( $n = 10$ , 6.7%).

*Family Functioning.* To assess this aspect, the General Functioning subscale of the Family Assessment Device (Epstein, Baldwin, & Bishop, 1983) was used. It consists of 12 items that assess family problem solving, communication, roles, affective responses and involvement, and behavioral control (e.g., ability to lean on one-another for support during a crisis, problem-solve and make decisions, plan family activities). The statements are rated on a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 4 = “strongly agree.” Six of the items are reverse-scored. The total score is divided by 12 to produce a family functioning index ranging from 1 to 4, with higher numbers indicating greater family

distress (Epstein et al., 1983; Messer & Reiss, 2000). For ease of data analysis interpretation, items in the present study were scored in the reverse manner so that the mean index score represented positive family functioning rather than dysfunction ( $\alpha = .92$  in the original study, and  $\alpha = .89$  for the present study).

*Family Support.* Two items were taken from the Personal Resource Questionnaire 85 (Weinert, 1987) to assess additional aspects of family support. The PRQ85 includes 25 items measuring social support across family, peer groups, and work, which are rated on a 7-point rating scale. Based on previous work with Arabs and Arab Americans the rating scale was shortened to five choices ranging from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree” (Amer, 2002; Bilal et al., 1987). Given the focus of the study was on understanding family support, items directly addressing family were selected: “I can’t count on my relatives and friends to help me with problems” (reverse coded;  $M = 3.81$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ) and “My family lets me know that I am important for keeping the family running” ( $M = 3.81$ ;  $SD = 1.29$ ;  $\alpha = .57$ ).

*Family Acculturation Stress.* Items from a modified SAFE Acculturative Stress Scale were used to measure family stress associated with the acculturation process. The SAFE Acculturative Stress Scale (Mena, Padilla, & Maldonado, 1987) consists of 24 items representing acculturative stressors, for which respondents are asked to first consider if they had experienced the stressor in their life, and if so, rate how stressful they perceived the stressor to be in their lives on a six-point rating scale. The rating scale was shortened to four categories ranging from 0 = “not at all stressful/have not experienced” to 3 = “very stressful” (Amer, 2002). A choice of zero represented lack of stress related to that item, either because the stressor was not experienced, or because it was not perceived to be a stressor. For the present study, the mean score of four items related to family stressors (for example, having different values from other family members) represented family acculturative stress ( $\alpha = 0.73$ ).

## Results

### 1. What Patterns of Cultural Identity Can Be Discerned in This Sample of Arab Muslim Young Adults?

Cultural identity patterns were determined using the VIA scale. Mean scores on the Arab and American identity subscales ( $r = 0.11$ , n.s.) were recoded into three levels based on degree of strength of identity: low (1.0 to 2.0); moderate

(2.01 to 3.99); and high (4.0 to 5.0); the combination of Arab and American identity levels yielding nine potential identity groups. Three patterns of cultural identity emerged from the sample: Moderate Bicultural (i.e., moderate levels on both Arab and American subscales,  $n = 31$ , 20.7%), High Bicultural (i.e., high levels on both subscales,  $n = 27$ , 18.0%); and High Arab (i.e., high level on Arab and moderate level on American subscales,  $n = 81$ , 54.0%). The cell sizes of the remaining groups were either nonexistent or too small (Low Bicultural,  $n = 1$ ; Low Arab/High American,  $n = 7$ ; High Arab/Low American,  $n = 3$ ; remaining groups,  $n = 0$ ); consequently, they were omitted in the subsequent analyses.

To confirm the distinctness of the three cultural identity patterns, correlational analysis and analysis of variance using GLM procedures were conducted. Tamahane's T2 post-hoc multiple comparisons was used, as it provides a conservative estimate when unequal variances are assumed. The bivariate correlation coefficient between Moderate Bicultural and High Bicultural was  $r = -.26$  ( $p < .01$ ;  $n = 139$ ), between Moderate Bicultural and High Arab was  $r = -.63$  ( $p < .01$ ;  $n = 139$ ) and between High Bicultural and High Arab was  $r = -.58$  ( $p < .01$ ;  $n = 139$ ). The Moderate Bicultural group had significantly lower mean scores on the Arab identity scale than the High Bicultural ( $F[56,1] = 95.28$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and High Arab cultural identity groups ( $F[110,1] = 196.55$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The High Bicultural identity group had significantly higher scores on the American identity subscale compared to the Moderate Bicultural group ( $F[56,1] = 88.28$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and the High Arab Cultural identity group ( $F[106,1] = 107.39$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Differences between the cultural identity pattern groups on the three American and Arab cultural identity subscales are presented in Table 1. The results suggest that the three dimensions are integrated and increase together simultaneously when

a particular cultural identity is high (i.e., Arab), regardless of the level of the other cultural identity (i.e., American).

The next set of analyses were conducted to determine the association between identification to the mainstream American culture and identification to the Arab culture. Bi-variate correlational analyses were conducted to examine the links between the values and traditions, social interactions, and cultural interests sub-scales of the Arab and American scales. Interest in American culture was low to moderately associated with identification with Arab values and traditions ( $r = 0.32$ ;  $p < .0001$ ), Arab social interactions ( $r = 0.33$ ;  $p < .0001$ ), and interest in Arab culture ( $r = 0.28$ ;  $p < .001$ ). No significant associations were noted with the remaining two American cultural identity subscales (values and traditions and social interactions) and the three Arab cultural identity subscales. Also no significant associations were noted between the total scores on the American and Arab cultural identity scales. In addition, the mean score on the Arab values and traditions subscale was significantly different compared to the mean score on the American values and traditions subscale ( $t = -11.184$ ;  $p < .0001$ ) as were the mean scores on the Arab and American social interactions sub-scales ( $t = -10.361$ ;  $p < .0001$ ). Significant differences were also noted between the mean scores on the American and Arab cultural identity scales ( $t = -10.36$ ;  $p < .0001$ ). No significant differences were noted between the Arab and American cultural interests subscales. These results suggest a low to modest link in the degree of identification with both cultures, American and Arab.

External validation was conducted to validate acculturation differences among the three groups using the second item of the AASS where respondents were asked to state the degree to which they saw themselves as Arab and/or American.

**Table 1.** *Cultural Dimensions by Cultural Identity Group*

Cultural Dimension	Moderate Bicultural ( $n = 31$ )		High Bicultural ( $n = 27$ )		High Arab ( $n = 81$ )		$F(136,2)$
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Arab identity							
Values and traditions	3.44	0.44	4.48	0.38	4.48	0.33	96.11***
Social interactions	3.80	0.77	4.74	0.37	4.60	0.37	34.88***
Cultural interests	3.29	0.76	4.40	0.70	4.42	0.59	35.54***
American identity							
Values and traditions	3.02	0.58	4.01	0.48	2.86	0.61	40.41***
Social interactions	3.60	0.66	4.25	0.40	3.39	0.58	22.69***
Cultural interests	3.62	0.87	4.77	0.25	4.18	0.69	20.61***

Note: Cultural dimensions taken from the modified Arab version of the VIA.

\*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Results from Chi square analyses indicate a significant difference between the three groups based on this item, lending support to the division of the sample into these three cultural groups ( $\chi^2[6, N = 139] = 26.48, p < .001$ ). The majority of persons in the Moderate Bicultural group described themselves as integrated (77.4%) or did not see themselves as either Arab or American (12.9%). The majority of persons in the High Bicultural group described themselves as integrated (74.1%) or mostly Arab in identity (22.2%). Participants in the High Arab group saw themselves as mostly Arab in identity (53.1%) or integrated (39.5%). Significantly fewer people in the High Arab group described themselves as integrated into both cultures compared to the other two groups ( $\chi^2[2, N = 76] = 8.20, p = .02$ ), and significantly more people in the Higher Arab group described themselves as separated (i.e., mostly Arab) than the other two groups ( $\chi^2[2, N = 51] = 15.2, p = .001$ ). No significant differences in cultural identity were found between the participants who were born in the U.S. compared to those who moved to the U.S. at age five or younger.

## 2. What Is the Association Between Sociodemographic Factors and Cultural Identity for the Young Adults?

The three cultural identity groups in this sample—High Bicultural, Moderate Bicultural, and High Arab—were compared on sociodemographic characteristics. Group differences for age were examined using one-way ANOVA. Group differences for categorical variables of gender, marital status, education, income, and residence in the 5 U.S. states with the largest Arab populations (versus other states) were examined using

chi square analyses and pair-wise comparisons using a .05 significance level (Table 2).

Marital status was collapsed into a dichotomous variable of single versus engaged and married. The three cultural groups differed based on marital status, with a significantly lower percentage of married respondents in the Moderate Bicultural group (64.3%) compared to the other two groups (85.2% each). The majority of participants were either current college students or had obtained a Bachelors degree, with very few participants at the below high school ( $n = 1$ ), high school ( $n = 7$ ), Associates degree ( $n = 11$ ) or post-graduate degree ( $n = 3$ ) levels. Therefore, educational level was collapsed to two levels: some college education or less versus an Associates degree, Bachelors degree, or higher. Significant differences were noted for respondents' education with a significantly higher percentage (67.7%) of the Moderate Bicultural identity group reporting completion of a degree post high school compared to the other two groups (19.2% and 40.7% for the High Bicultural and High Arab cultural groups, respectively). The three groups did not differ on other sociodemographic factors of age, gender, income, and residence in Arab populous states of the U.S.

## 3. What Is the Association Between Family Context and Cultural Identity?

Several characteristics of the family sociocultural environment were examined via chi square analyses: parental education (high school or less versus some higher education); whether or not both parents came from the same Arab country; location of extended family (mostly in the U.S., about evenly divided between U.S. and Arab

**Table 2.** Sociodemographic Characteristics by Cultural Identity Patterns

Characteristics	Moderate Bicultural ( $n = 31$ ; $n, \%$ )		High Bicultural ( $n = 27$ ; $n, \%$ )		High Arab ( $n = 81$ ; $n, \%$ )		<i>df</i>	$\chi^2$
Gender							2	0.08
Male	9	29.0	8	29.6	22	27.2		
Female	22	71.0	19	70.4	59	72.8		
Marital status							2	6.28; $p < .05$
Engaged/Married	18	64.3	23	85.2	69	85.2		
Single	10	35.7	4	14.8	12	14.8		
Education							2	13.92; $p < .001$
High school or less	10	32.3	21	80.8	48	59.3		
Some higher education	21	67.7	5	19.2	33	40.7		
Annual income							4	0.66
Below \$35,000	8	30.8	7	31.8	19	27.5		
\$35,000 to \$74,999	8	30.8	7	31.8	19	27.5		
\$75,000 and above	10	38.5	8	36.4	31	44.9		
Place of residence							2	0.50
Top 5 Arab populous states	15	48.4	13	48.1	44	51.8		
Other U.S. states	16	51.6	14	51.9	37	45.7		

**Table 3.** Family Environment Characteristics by Cultural Identity Patterns (N, %)

Characteristics	Moderate Bicultural (n = 31)		High Bicultural (n = 27)		High Arab (n = 81)		df	$\chi^2$
Parents from same Arab country							2	3.67
Shared country background	26	83.9	21	77.8	74	91.4		
Different country backgrounds	5	16.1	6	22.2	7	8.6		
Location of extended family							4	18.99***
Mostly in U.S.	3	10.0	12	44.4	8	10.1		
Half U.S., half in Arab world	13	43.3	5	18.5	29	36.7		
Mostly in Arab world	14	46.7	10	37.0	42	53.2		
Language use at home							4	8.31+
Mostly English	14	45.2	9	33.3	16	19.8		
English and Arabic the same	12	38.7	15	55.6	50	61.7		
Mostly Arabic	5	16.1	3	11.1	15	18.5		
Frequent exposure to Arab TV							4	21.74***
Never or once in a while	20	64.5	11	40.7	16	19.8		
Sometimes	7	22.6	8	29.6	29	35.8		
Often or always	4	12.9	8	29.6	36	44.4		

Note: Only significant results presented; + $p < .10$ .

\*\*\* $p \leq .001$ .

world, or mostly in Arab world); frequency of use of Arabic versus English language at home; and frequency of watching Arabic TV (see Table 3).

The second set of analyses examined differences in the three cultural groups based on family functioning as measured by the FAD-GF, and family support as measured by the PRQ85 items (see Table 4). Group differences were examined via deviation contrasts as part of the General Linear Modeling procedure on adjusted means, controlling for parental country background (shared or not) and mother's and father's education. Family functioning did not differ significantly among the cultural identity groups. In terms of family support, the Moderate Bicultural identity group reported it as being less important for the functioning compared to the High Bicultural and High Arab Cultural Groups ( $d^1 = 0.39$ ,  $p < .05$  and  $d = 0.55$ ,  $p < .05$ , moderate to high effect sizes respectively; Cohen, 1988). Similarly, on other items of family support, the Moderate Bicultural identity group reported lower levels of being able to count on relatives and friends for help compared to the High Arab Cultural ( $d = 0.48$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and High Bicultural ( $d = 0.68$ ,  $p < .01$ ) identity groups, respectively.

The third set of analyses examined group differences in family acculturation stress. To test the hypothesis a hierarchical OLS regression model was built. In the first model, similar to the GLM analyses, parental shared background and mother's and father's educational levels were entered as controls. The cultural identity groups were entered in the final model. The final model

was significant ( $F[133,4] = 4.48$ ;  $p < .01$ ), with family stress significantly associated with the three cultural identity groups ( $\beta = -1.67$ ;  $p < .05$ ). Group differences were examined via deviation contrasts as part of the GLM procedure on adjusted means controlling for the same factors as previous models. The High Arab Cultural identity group ( $eM = 1.03$ ) reported significantly lower stress than the Moderate Bicultural identity group ( $eM = 1.30$ ;  $d = 0.29$ ). The moderate effect size indicates differences in stress levels of the two groups. The results suggest that Arab Muslim young adults with a High Arab cultural identity appear to live in homes with less acculturative

**Table 4.** Family Functioning and Support by Cultural Identity Group

	Moderate Bicultural (n = 31) M	High Bicultural (n = 27) M	High Arab (n = 81) M	F(2,132)
Family functioning	2.90	3.06	3.08	1.12
Family support				
Important to keep family running	3.46	4.13	3.93	3.02+
Can count on relatives, friends for help	3.25	4.18	3.93	4.93**

+ $p < .10$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

Note: Family functioning was measured by FAD-GF. "Important to keep family running" and "Can count on relatives, friends for help" are items from the PRQ85. Family acculturation stress was measured by family items from the revised SAFE. Means are estimated means controlling for mother's education, father's education, and parents' country backgrounds (shared or not). Standard deviations are not reported for Estimated Means.

<sup>1</sup> $d$  = effect size (CL effect).

stress than the Moderate Bicultural identity group. Differences were not noted between the High Arab and High Bicultural identity groups.

### Discussion

The twin thrusts of the importance of cultural identity for the psychological well-being of ethnic minority adolescents and lack of knowledge about the cultural identity of Arab Muslim youth in the U.S. propelled the aims of the present study. We explored what patterns of cultural identity might be obtained with Arab Muslim young adults residing in the U.S., and if these patterns would replicate the ethnic minority cultural identity literature. Second, we tested the existing hypotheses regarding the association between cultural identity and family context: environment, support, and acculturative stress.

Three cultural identity patterns emerged from the data—Moderate Bicultural identity, High Bicultural identity, and High Arab Cultural identity—with low to modest degrees of association noted between identification to both cultures. The three groups differed both vis-à-vis socio-demographic characteristics and family support and stress. The Moderate Bicultural group was more likely to be single and with higher academic achievement compared to the High Bicultural and High Arab cultural identity groups. On the other hand they also experienced greater acculturative stress and less family support compared to the other two groups. These results are further discussed in the ensuing three sections.

#### Cultural Identity Patterns Among Arab Muslim Young Adults

The three cultural identity patterns obtained varied on affiliation to Arab and American cultures, and strength of these affiliations. Two primarily bicultural identity groups and a predominantly Arab cultural identity group were revealed by the analyses. These results to a great extent align with the literature on cultural identity in youth. Self-selecting a bicultural identity is common among minority adolescents (Garcia Coll & Magnuson, 1997; Rotherham-Borus, 1993); therefore it was not surprising that bicultural patterns were obtained. As the names suggest, the bicultural groups identified more or less equally with both the Arab and American referent cultures. The High Arab Cultural identity group, on the other hand, appeared to show a stronger sense of affiliation with the Arab culture and a moderate affiliation with the American culture. The two

bicultural groups demonstrated a sense of belonging to both cultural communities and a preference to engage in behaviors of both cultures (Tropp et al., 1994). In contrast, the High Arab cultural identity group—albeit bicultural—could be considered more comfortable with the practices and values of the Arab culture with a lesser sense of belonging to the American culture. In support of these results, a significantly higher number of the High Arab group self-identified as separated (i.e., mostly Arab) in their acculturation, and significantly fewer self-identified as integrated (i.e., affiliated to both cultures) compared to the other two cultural groups. We had hypothesized cultural identity differences based on affiliation to reference groups, but not expected differences in the strength of the affiliation. However the results showed otherwise and the construct of bicultural identity was differentiated on the basis of strength of the affiliation.

According to LaFromboise, Coleman, and Gerton (1993), biculturalism exists on a continuum. Therefore an individual's position can change on the continuum vis-à-vis cultural affiliation with one or more cultures. From a developmental perspective, the hypothesis to explain this pattern would be in terms of identity formation; i.e., members of the Moderate Bicultural group are in the process of forming their cultural identity (Phinney, 1991; 2003). However, the age results did not bear out this premise as non-significant results were obtained on the age analyses. In addition, no significant differences were noted between the two groups, which could be a consequence of the narrow age band. Another explanation for the results might rest in the work of Bourhis and colleagues (1997) that posits that the differential aspects of identity develop at different paces. It is possible that the results obtained are an indication of variation in the development of facets of cultural identity.

Although the resultant cultural groups were in some ways consistent with literature, they did not entirely conform to our expectations. Specifically, we hypothesized that in addition to predominantly Arab and bicultural identities, a third cultural identity would emerge in which affiliation to the American culture would be greater than affiliation to the Arab culture. This predominantly American cultural identity was not found in the sample. A practical explanation for this could be the study's methods, in that the study was advertised among Arab cultural centers and Web groups that would most likely attract membership from persons with higher levels of Arab identity. However, further research is needed to explore other possible explanations. For example, it could be that because the Islamic faith

is interwoven within the Arab culture (Abudabbeh, 1997; Abudabbeh & Nydell, 1993), youth who are self-identified as “Muslim” may be more likely to retain their Arab heritage. It may also be the case that Arab Muslim young adults face more challenges when trying to incorporate American culture in their identities than other ethnic and religious minority youth. These challenges include differences noted between American and Muslim values and behaviors as well as a perception of feeling ostracized and not being entirely included in mainstream American culture (Abraham, 1994; Akram, 2002; Amer & Hovey, in press).

Finally, it is also possible that the results are an indication that for some Arab Muslim young adults (i.e., for those in the Moderate Bicultural group), affiliation with Arab or American reference groups may not be the only referent groups. The results obtained via the sociodemographic analyses could be considered to lend support for this hypothesis. The Moderate Bicultural group, on average, had a higher level of educational attainment compared to the other two groups. It is possible the Moderate Bicultural group may have a sense of affiliation to academic communities as a cultural referent. The Vancouver Index of Acculturation, unfortunately, does not contain items that tap into the academic and educational aspects of the referent cultural groups, therefore we are unable to explore this hypothesis further. However, these preliminary results could be considered to lend support to the hypothesis that for Arab Muslim young adults cultural identity might extend beyond ethnic groups.

#### **Differences in Sociodemographic and Family Context Variables for the Cultural Identity Groups**

In addition to education, differences between the three cultural identity groups were explored for other sociodemographic and family context variables. The three groups did not differ on income levels, which may be a consequence of the relatively high incomes within the sample. However, there was a difference in marital status in that those in the Moderate Bicultural group were more likely to be single compared to those in the High Bicultural and High Arab groups. This is consistent with a previous study that found that married second-generation Arab Americans endorsed stronger Arab ethnic identity related to religious and family values (Amer & Hovey, in press). Because family and marriage are so important to the Arab culture, it is not surprising that in the present sample the cultural identity groups with stronger Arab identities were more likely to have cultivated such relationships.

The family is not only central to Arab culture and the Islamic faith, but it is in general an important context for development (Britto & Brooks-Gunn, 2001; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) and for immigrants the family is given even more worth (Booth, Crouter, & Lansdale, 1997). Consequently, we examined aspects of the family context that have been linked with cultural identity for the Arab Muslim participants in the present study. Contrary to our expectations no links were found between participants’ cultural identity and their parents’ levels of education and country of origin. Because the majority of the sample—similar to the Arab American population in general—came from relatively high socioeconomic levels, it may be that there was not enough variability in the sample to discern any differences. It is also possible that parental education and origin are not as important factors for development of Arab Muslim young adults living in the United States as other parental variables such as parental ethnic identity and religiosity levels, and perhaps even norms and values that define their parenting styles. Unfortunately such characteristics were not captured in this study. Future research might examine in greater detail the links between development of Arab Muslim young adults and these parental characteristics that were not asked in the present study.

Other examined aspects of the family environment explored included exposure to Arabic language and Arabic TV at home. Language use has been closely linked with cultural identity (Rumbaut, 1994) and the findings were replicated in the present study with the High Arab Cultural identity group reporting greater use of Arabic in the home compared to the other two cultural identity groups. While the links between media and identity development have been studied extensively (Huntemann & Morgan, 2001) TV viewing as an avenue of cultural exposure in immigrant families is less studied. The results clearly differentiate the High Arab Cultural identity group from the Moderate Bicultural identity group on frequency of watching Arabic TV at home. These findings lend support to the developmental literature on the influence of media on identity development and make a case for further research to explore how exposure to media at home may be an influential factor for cultural identity development.

We also examined the presence of the extended family as an aspect of the family context. The largest number of respondents from the High Bicultural group reported presence of extended family in the U.S. compared to the other two groups. These results suggest that affiliation with the two cultures might be linked with the presence of extended family, whose presence can help

facilitate the nurturing of a strong Arab identity within the context of a mainstream American cultural identity.

A well-functioning and supportive family has been cited as a positive influence on the development of self-concept, social development and identity for immigrant adolescents (Castillo et al., 2004; Liebkind et al., 2004). The results obtained in the present study add to this body of literature by exploring family functioning, support, and acculturation stress for the three Arab Muslim groups. Results indicate that across the three groups, general family functioning was uniformly positive and there were no significant differences. However, the Moderate Bicultural group demonstrated lower scores compared to the other two groups with respect to more specific aspects of family support (feeling needed by the family on the one hand and counting on family and relatives for help on the other). These findings suggest that a supportive family environment is linked with a higher sense of belonging to the cultural referent groups, as the High Bicultural and High Arab Cultural identity groups reported significantly greater levels of interactive support. Not only did the Moderate Bicultural group report a lesser sense of being needed for and depending on the family, but they also reported significantly greater acculturative stress in the home compared to the High Arab Cultural identity group. In part, the level of acculturative stress might explain the lesser level of affiliation with the referent cultural groups for the Moderate Bicultural group compared to the other two groups. These results prompt the question of possibly great inter-generational conflicts between Arab Muslim parents and their children when these children have a less clear sense of personal identity, particularly on Arab identity. Responses by the Moderate Bicultural group indicate greater feelings of disengagement and cultural differences with their family members. Further research, perhaps with the use of qualitative interviews with these young adults, can help shed light on the complex relationships between acculturation stressors related to the family life and a more diffused sense of cultural identity.

### **Strengths and Limitations of the Study**

Several limitations of the study need to be acknowledged in interpreting the results. First, the sample was not balanced in terms of gender representation: over two-thirds of the respondents were female. It is possible that the female gender of the research investigator served as a deterrent for potential male respondents, similar to a previous

study in which the male gender of the researcher led to difficulty accessing female Arab American participants (Barry et al., 2000). Given the prevalence of female participants, the results might be gender biased, as gender influences on cultural identity have been noted (Phinney, 1991; Rumbaut, 1994) and cultural identity tends to vary for Arab Muslim boys and girls (Ajrouch, 2004). Although Internet data collection procedures led to a sample that was diverse in country background and geographical location, and although it is appropriate given the relatively high levels of education and income seen in the Arab community, it may have excluded participants from economically disadvantaged families. Moreover, some potential participants declined to complete the study, indicating to the researcher that despite the enhanced security and confidentiality provided by the Internet, they were concerned that their personal answers could be identified electronically or that the study's results in aggregate could be used to harm the Arab community in a post September 11 climate that is already harshly critical towards Arabs.

Certain limitations with the measures and measurement model are also noted. The data included in this study were taken from an existing study. Consequently, missing from the data set were variables that could have shed further light on the construct of cultural identity. In particular, the existing data set did not measure religiosity or religious attitudes and behavioral practices or parental religious background. Given that religion is an important component of an Arab Muslim identity, lack of religious measures hampered our ability to fully deconstruct what cultural identity means for Arab Muslim young adults. Therefore we were only able to explore the ethnic aspect of cultural identity in the present study. Also missing were questions on exposure to the mainstream American culture, through media and TV. Finally, it should be noted that certain constructs, in particular acculturative strategies and family support, are based on a small set (1 to 2 items) and therefore possess limited reliability.

Notwithstanding the limitations of this study, several strengths should be noted. First, this study is unique in that there are only a handful of studies examining issues of identity for Arab Muslim young adults in the U.S. Second, the issues of family functioning, stress and support explored in the present study is a relatively nascent area of inquiry for Arab Muslim immigrant families, thereby making the results of this study valuable for this emerging area of inquiry.

The findings of this study hold significant implications for understanding Arab Muslim youth

development. In terms of specifically further understanding cultural identity in Arab Muslim young adults, the next sets of work should examine the function of religion, the role of parental characteristics (such as their acculturation strategies and parenting norms and behaviors) on the development of the young adults' cultural identity. Possible correlates or outcomes of cultural identity development, such as academic performance and satisfaction with social relationships, are other areas that deserve future attention. This research can be used to inform various audiences ranging from developmental scholars to mental health practitioners and school-based counselors to better understand the experiences and development of Arab Muslim youth in contemporary American society.

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