

**Evaluating the Efficacy of Multicultural Education Programs at Reducing Anti-Muslim Prejudice on College Campuses.**

**Abstract**

Colleges and universities are becoming increasingly aware of the need to foster more diverse and inclusive spaces. The present study sought to investigate the effectiveness of Multicultural Education Programs (MEP) at a research university in the Southeastern United States. Whereas prior research evaluated such programs, none have examined their effect in reducing anti-Muslim sentiment, which has been on the rise since 9/11, and more recently throughout the presidency of Donald J. Trump. Using a quasi-experimental independent group posttest design, students from two groups (MEP and non-MEP) were surveyed to examine the effects of the MEP in reducing anti-Muslim sentiment. The sample consisted of 125 respondents from a control and experimental group. Data were collected and analyzed through a survey to measure symbolic threat, realistic threat, and Islamophobia. Relying on *t*-tests and linear regression, findings suggest that those engaged in MEP's were less likely to perceive Muslims as threats and less likely to hold Islamophobic views of their peers from the control group.

**Keywords:** Islamophobia, Diversity and inclusion, Higher education, Prejudice, Anti-Muslim Hate

### **Introduction**

One way to counter anti-Muslim rhetoric is to focus on education policy, specifically, higher education. While academics and politicians often tout multiculturalism as a solution to the struggles of heterogeneous societies, little attention is given to the implementation of empirically supported multiculturalism policies as a countermeasure to increased intergroup hostilities (Edgberg, 2004). While the development of multicultural programs has shown some measure of success in the public-school system, there is a dearth of substantive literature on anti-Muslim prejudice in postsecondary educational institutions; to the contrary, there is evidence to suggest that abstract applications of multiculturalism, even in higher education, have little effect on anti-Muslim prejudice (Ari & Laron, 2014). Thus, some have suggested that a veneer of multiculturalism is not sufficient in reducing prejudice; rather, a more comprehensive curriculum, embedded within college programs of study, is needed to ameliorate the collateral consequences of heterogeneous societies (Ari & Laron, 2014).

Multiculturalism models peaceful coexistence among different cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. Some have used the multicultural paradigm as a conflict-resolution tool (Pedreny & Radazzo, 2012), a way to enhance academic achievement of underrepresented groups (Hanley, 2012), to challenge racism through antiracist education (Naseem, 2011), and to increase pluralism through higher education policies (Henderson-King & Kaleta, 2000). Historically, research on multiculturalism has focused on race and ethnicity, especially in the United States. In Europe, however, multiculturalism scholarship has included religious differences. The European experiment derives from closer geographical ties with different racial and religious groups. Multicultural societies experience intergroup conflict at a rate higher than homogeneous societies (Akbarzadeh & Roose, 2011; Coenders & Scheepers, 2003; Yazdih, 2014; Sidanius, Bobo, & Pratto, 1996).

Since the attacks of 9/11, American Muslims have been largely singled-out as the new “other” in the United States (Akbarzadeh & Roose, 2011; Jung, 2012). The singling out and mistreatment of American Muslims has taken on several forms, from overt acts of discrimination; to covert institutionalized homeland security policies that overwhelmingly target Muslims. Both of these types of discrimination are considered new manifestations of xenophobic attitudes in the multicultural landscape. Indeed, scholars have coined the term “Islamophobia” in reference to this new fear of Islam and Muslims. Unlike classical forms of prejudice, Islamophobia is different because it is based largely—if not solely—on religion. Indeed, the American Muslim population is not a monolithic group. Adherents to the Islamic faith are represented in nearly all countries around the globe, including native-born Americans. This study is intended to fill the gap in the literature on the relationship between multicultural programs on college campuses and anti-Muslim attitudes by testing for differences in attitudes between students engaged in diversity programs and those from the general student body.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study was grounded in two theoretical frameworks: framing theory and integrated threat theory. Framing theory suggests that the social world consists of purposeful attempts at defining reality (Goffman, 1974). That is, reality is a social construct, an abstraction which is malleable and apt to change with time. Moreover, framing theory suggests that humans interpret the world through a “primary frame”, whereby they recognize particular events. This primary frame is divided into natural and social frames. The former refers to a naturally occurring event (e.g. sunset) from which the observer derives no hidden meaning or implication. The latter, however, is a socially constructed frame; that is guided by intentional, purposeful actors or agents. The media’s use of social frames in its coverage of Muslims may be seen as the mechanism of perpetuating misinformation about a social group (Morey & Yaqin, 2011), which in turn aggravated anti-Muslim

attitudes (Ogan, Willnat, Pennington, & Bashir, 2013; Simut, 2016). Due to the subtle messages presented in the media, anti-Muslim attitudes may be implicit and thus require priming in order to become apparent.

Framing theory can be used to explain aversion to members of the out-group, in this case Muslims, because they are framed as distinctly different from members of the in-group. Media framing is used to construct issues for an audience in certain ways. Since students are now more “connected” than ever to the 24-hour media cycle, they are likely to be the group most exposed to the imagery of Muslims. Media coverage of Muslims has been historically inaccurate and misleading; this group has often been portrayed as incongruent with Western democratic society, even more so immediately following the attacks of 9/11.

Muslims and Muslim related crimes are rarely portrayed through an objective lens. According to Rane and Ewart (2012) the “media coverage of terrorism in the United States...feeds Orientalism and a culture of fear of Islam, while heightening the United States as a good Christian nation” (p. 105). Iyengar (1991) suggested that acts of violence perpetrated by Muslims are not treated in the same way as acts of violence perpetrated by non-Muslims; furthermore, coverage of terrorism is often episodic rather than thematic. According to Iyengar (1991) episodic frames are used to depict issues as singular incidents, not connected to a historical timeline; whereas thematic frames are those that are grounded in context. In this fashion, viewers of violence perpetrated by Muslims fail to understand historical events which lead to acts. In contrast to the continued framing of Muslims and Islam in the United States as the perpetrators of terror, Ewart and Rane (2013) found that the coverage of the tenth anniversary of 9/11 in Australia across five television channels did not conflate Islam and terrorism, nor was the religion or its adherents blamed for the event; instead, religion was referred to as the mechanism of social reconciliation and positive force for moving forward.

This study also relied upon intergroup threat theory—originally called integrated threat theory (ITT, Stephan & Stephan, 2000) which suggests that two types of threats lead to prejudice toward out-group members: (a) symbolic threat, and (b) realistic threat. In this study, the two types of threats proposed by ITT were used as antecedents to attitudes about Islam and Muslims. That is their existence; predicted the direction of the respondents' attitude toward Islam and Muslims. The first version of ITT-- integrated threat theory; was used to explain perceptions of White exclusion (Plaut et al., 2011), the effect of education on ethnic exclusionism, as well as studies of intergroup attitudes, including attitudes towards Moroccan immigrants in Spain and Russian and Ethiopian immigrants in Israel.

Because Muslims are a racially heterogeneous group (Meer, 2008), consisting largely of first-generation immigrants and immigrants may be seen to pose a threat to in-group values and culture, ITT will be used to understand American students' attitudes toward the group. Further, ITT was used because of the negative portrayal of Muslims in the media (negative stereotypes), and because the terrorists who carried out the attacks of 9/11 and San Bernardino, California were Muslims (realistic threats), as well as the lack of interaction between in-group members and American Muslims (intergroup contacts). Lastly, Muslim Americans are often visibly different than members of the in-group (e.g., bearded men in religious garments or women who wear the headscarf) and may therefore pose a threat to the dominant culture or values (symbolic threat).

### **Multicultural Education**

A cursory historical analysis of MEPs reveals stark differences in their adoption in colleges. Initially, MEPs were promoted as a way of assimilating students of color into the economic mainstream of American society. The proponents of such programs today envision a different purpose. They conceive of a society that is tolerant, respectful of difference, and overall pluralistic in nature. Such a position views diversity as a strength to be used for social enhancement. Conservative critics

of MEPs cite the need to protect Western values; they readily argue that emphasis on foreign cultures, religions, and customs detracts from Western ideals upon which America (and other Western nations—e.g. England, Canada, Australia, etc.) were founded. Indeed, conservatives view multiculturalism through the prism of assimilation, preferring to promote such programs as means to an end—melting pots where differences give way to absolute assimilation over time.

In sharp contrast, leftist critics of MEPs argue that such programs do not go far enough in challenging structural problems that exist in capitalist societies, preferring instead to focus on individual differences as a means of maintaining the status quo. Further, those on the left criticize the application of MEPs in largely all-White institutions, as well as institutions that are more authoritarian; and, to resolve such inequities, leftists argue that institutional change is required if MEPs are to be effective. Namely, leftists argue for an egalitarian approach to MEPs and one that promotes democratic values. Proponents of multicultural education, however, believe that such programs enhance the students' learning by contextualizing Western civilization as being driven by cultural and scientific contributions of other societies (Stephen & Stephen, 2001).

### **Multicultural Education Programs in Postsecondary Education**

Since the landmark Supreme Court case of *Brown v. Board of Education Topeka* (1954), emphasis was placed on improving intergroup relations. Anecdotally, multiculturalism was considered the new social paradigm to reduce the ethnic tensions that became manifest during the social upheaval of the 1960's civil rights movement. However, the implementation of multiculturalism required structural changes to take place, and one way of doing so was the promotion of educational programs as the panacea for America's divided society. One way to implement more equitable social programs was to adopt MEPs in schools and colleges. By doing so, it was assumed that as students left the schools and entered the workforce, they would carry with them the benefits of these multicultural programs. However,

research into the effectiveness of MEPs has been scarce until the 1990's, when systematic program evaluations began to appear in the literature, documenting both positive and negative outcomes (Stephen & Stephen, 2001). Today, there is a burgeoning body of literature which examines MEPs efficacy, with mixed but largely positive results.

Multicultural education studies may be divided into two categories, short-term and long-term. The former consists of brief exposure to multicultural programs in college settings, typically ranging from several hours to a few weeks; whereas the latter refer to studies ranging from one semester to a year. A myriad of approaches to multicultural education have been utilized since their inception. Some programs focused on the exposure of students to other cultures by introducing them to different perspectives via literature, and the arts. Other programs emphasize contact between groups as a means of reducing prejudice and enhancing relationships. Strategies vary within each program with some preferring to use exemplars such as workshops and required coursework to address issues of diversity and racism. Other programs focus on pedagogical approaches such as didactic instruction or experiential learning and facilitated workshops. The MSA that was studied for the current project utilized a multifaceted approach to multiculturalism. Students attend events, participate in discussions, as well as participate in peer mentoring programs aimed at increasing retention and success of ethnic and religious minority students.

### **Multicultural Course Interventions**

In his systematic review of studies examining multicultural course interventions (4 quantitative, 1 qualitative, and 2 mixed-methods) to improve intergroup relations; Engberg (2004) revealed positive results for those quantitative studies (N=2) using pre-posttest designs. Two studies used a modified Solomon four-group design and found no significant effect for the multicultural course interventions. In the latter studies, however, a convenience sample of 103 students from 12 different courses

were selected for the experiment, and while no significance was reported, those students enrolled in women's studies courses showed slightly more positive results in prejudice reduction than others, which suggests that discipline-specific factors may account for some of the benefits of the multiculturalism courses.

Other studies relying on longitudinal data found discrepant results, however they were carried out in one institution. Further, these studies assessed the efficacy of non-required diversity courses (i.e., courses that were taken voluntarily by students). Of the five studies reviewed by Engberg (2004), four studies found positive results (Inkelas, 1998; Smith, 1993; Lopez, 1993; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002). Inkelas (1998) found that Asian Americans were more supportive of affirmative action policies after attending a class in their curriculum which focused on issues of race and gender. The Smith (1993) study examined only the attitudes of White students and found gender differences in prejudice reduction. Lastly, Gurin et al. (2002) and Lopez (1993) both examined the effects of diversity courses on White, Asian, and Black students. Their findings were slightly different; Lopez reported positive effects only for White students, while Gurin et al. (2002) found positive results for all three racial groups.

### **Diversity Workshop and Training Interventions**

Diversity workshops and training interventions are often conducted by faculty members or students active within diversity initiatives on campus. Engberg (2004) reviewed 11 studies that examined diversity workshops and training interventions. Of the 11 studies reviewed, 8 quantitative studies demonstrated positive results in reducing student prejudice (Antony, 1993; Astin, 1993; Gurin et al., 2002; Hyun, 1994; Milem, 1994; Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn, & Terenzini, 1996; Springer, Palmer, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996; Whitt, Edison, Pascarella, Terenzini, & Nora, 2001). These studies relied on large national databases for information (Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) and the National Study for Student Learning). Results were varied with some findings suggesting



that women had more positive results than their male counterparts (Milem et al., 1996); others cite stronger effects in prejudice reduction for White and African American students than their peers (Hyun, 1994). Still others cite different factors that influence the impact of the workshops on students, such as socioeconomic status (SES), and levels of liberalism or conservatism (Springer et al., 1996). However, because these studies didn't rely on survey data, there are some issues with sampling and measurement errors, as well as confounding effects.

### **Peer-facilitated Training**

Peer-facilitated training programs are often conducted by students who simply engage with other students in open discussions concerning issues of racism, exclusion, as well as class differences. A study conducted by Nelson, Johnson, Boyd, and Scott (1994) found very good results using a 2 x 2 design. Participants in the experimental group “were more optimistic about intergroup understanding, more comfortable interacting with minority students, and less likely to perceive minority students as unqualified to be at the university” (Edgberg, 2004, p. 492). However, the findings of this study should be considered cautiously because of the limited sample size, the research design, and the lack of consideration for other potential factors that may have influenced the students (i.e. their background).

### **Service-based Interventions**

Lastly, Engberg (2004, p. 498) reviewed multiple studies that examined service-based interventions. These interventions do not explicitly address racial prejudice or bias; they do, however allow for increased interaction between in-group members and those from the out-group—often disenfranchised members in society. These types of events are important because they resemble the type of interaction examined in the current study. The two studies using CIRP data identified four service experiences that were highly correlated to the promotion of cultural and racial understanding: education, human needs, public safety, and the environment. However, these studies failed to consider racial differences in participants, nor did

they account for differences in program types, rather, the researchers merely aggregated the service opportunities (Engberg, 2004).

### **Reducing Prejudice**

Increased ethnic diversity may reduce anti-Muslim prejudice. Much credit in prejudice reduction can be linked to Allport's (1954) contact theory. However, it is precisely the inability of the of America's Muslim community—given their small proportion—to make actual contact with members of the non-Muslim American community which limits their ability to reduce anti-Muslim prejudice. The media can also be used to reduce prejudice, however, just as it can be used to inflame it. While the media may play a critical role in reshaping national or global intergroup relations, the current study focused on multicultural diversity programs as a way of ameliorating prejudice. According to Stephen and Stephen (2001), multicultural diversity programs suffer from a lack of generalizability, and their effectiveness is therefore inconclusive, though many of the 30 or so studies that exist show positive effects for reducing prejudice, and few show no or negative effects; their flaw still remains in their inability to draw from large, representative samples. However, MEPs do create atmosphere's on college and university campuses that enable greater contact between members of the in-group and those of the out-group, and this has been shown to significantly reduce prejudice, if the resulting contact between members is meaningful (i.e., if friendships, collaborative projects, and long-term contact is created and sustained).

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

This study sought to answer the following overarching research question: How effective is the multicultural student association at reducing anti-Muslim prejudice? To properly answer this question, the following sub-questions were addressed:

1. Are there significant differences between the MSA and non-MSA groups in anti-Muslim prejudice?

2. Does the type of news about Muslims and Islam impact a student's attitude toward Muslims; and does the participation in the MSA mitigate anti-Muslim prejudice?
3. Does a student's declared major affect his or her attitudes toward Muslims?
4. Does participation in the MSA significantly affect students' attitudes toward Muslims?

Several hypotheses were assessed in this research. First, I hypothesized that participation in the MSA would lead to reduced levels of anti-Muslim attitudes ( $H_1$ ). There is an abundance of literature which supports the hypothesis that exposure to people of different racial backgrounds significantly reduces prejudice (Rattan & Ambady, 2014; Triandis & Trafimow, 2001; Zebrowitz, White, & Wieneke, 2008). Second, I hypothesized that exposure to negative images of Muslims in the media increases anti-Muslim attitudes in college students ( $H_2$ ). However, I also hypothesized that anti-Muslim prejudice would be mitigated by participation in the MSA. Third, I hypothesized that respondents who majored in a natural science would display significantly more anti-Muslim attitudes than students enrolled in the social sciences ( $H_3$ ). Previous research suggested that college students enrolled as natural science or business majors showed no significant reduction in prejudice; while students in the social sciences did show significant reduction in prejudice. Lastly, I hypothesized that participation in the MSA will significantly reduce participants' Islamophobic beliefs ( $H_4$ ).

### **Methods**

Participants were drawn from two populations from a large research university in North Carolina. The first sample—experimental group—will be drawn from an organization on campus which represents the following ethnic groups: Black, Hispanic/Latino, and Native Americans. The second sample—control group—will be drawn from the general student body, which consists of nearly 34,000 students.

Convenience sampling at MSA events as well as multiple campus visits to survey students from the general student body. Demographic information will be collected from the participants and includes information about age, gender, household income, current academic standing (i.e. freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior, or graduate student), and religious affiliation. Further, the declared discipline of study will also be solicited. Any participants that were not enrolled in the university as students will be excluded from the sample. Also, any participant who declares that they are Muslim or have family members who are Muslim will be eliminated due to the potential for bias in the results. While many MEPs focus on the attitudes of white students toward minority groups; this study does not exclude non-White students from the control group in an effort to closely match participants to the experimental group.

To determine the number of participants, I utilized GPower3.1 software to conduct the necessary power analysis. Using a difference between two independent means statistical test, I selected an alpha level of .05. Further, prior literature suggests that  $d = .51$  is a large effect size and a  $d = .31$  considered moderate for measures of effectiveness of multicultural education on student attitudes and prejudice reduction. Using a power of .80 and large effect size of  $d = .5$  to generate a total sample size of  $N = 102$ ; each of my groups should contain a minimum of 52 respondents.

### **Materials and Data Collection**

I relied on multiple software tools to collect and analyze the data. First, I used Microsoft Word to create and then disseminate the survey instrument. Once received, respondents completed the necessary demographic information as discussed previously. Respondents were told not to include any identifying information (e.g., names) to ensure anonymity. Thereafter, respondents completed the remaining survey questions, composed of several scales that assessed their attitudes toward Muslims and Islam. At the end of the survey, respondents saw a

debriefing paragraph which explains the purpose of the research; included in this explanation is a message about the social change implications of the findings, namely, the reduction of anti-Muslim prejudice in college, and subsequently in the workplace.

The analysis of collected data was carried out using SPSS 19.0 (Statistical Package for Social Science). The analysis included descriptive statistics, as well as *t* tests to understand the mean differences between groups on measures of the dependent variable (i.e., anti-Muslim prejudice). Further, a Pearson correlation test was conducted to understand the relationship between the type of media consumed by the respondents and their level of anti-Muslim prejudice; the same Pearson correlation was used to understand the correlation between students' declared majors and anti-Muslim sentiment. Lastly, I used linear regression to predict the effect of the enrollment in the MEP on anti-Muslim prejudice.

### **Survey Instrument**

For the current research, I used the three existing scales which measure realistic threat, and symbolic threat, as well as Islamophobia. Responses for all three scales consist of a 10-point Likert scale which ranged from 1 = (*strongly disagree*) to 10 = (*strongly agree*). The symbolic threat scale uses 7 items which include, among others, perceived threats to in-group values and culture, for example "The values and beliefs of Muslim immigrants regarding moral and religious issues are not compatible with the beliefs and values of most Americans." The realistic threat scale consists of 8 items which include measures of threat to the in-group's economic well-being, for example "Muslim immigration has increased the tax burden on Americans." In previous research using these two scales of intergroup threat, the Cronbach's alpha levels remained consistently high—ranging from .68 to .82—which suggests a reliable measure of realistic and symbolic threat.

The Islamophobia scale (IS) includes 16 items to measure anti-Muslim prejudice. The first 8-items are measures of behavioral prejudice while the second 8-items measure cognitive prejudice (Lee et al., 2009). The Islamophobia scale includes responses on a 10-point Likert scale with 1 = (*strongly disagree*) and 10 = (*strongly agree*). The IS was created by compiling “a large number of items...based on theories of fear and the literature on Islamophobic sentiments” (Lee et al., 2009, p. 93). The IS was subjected to multiple statistical tests to determine validity and reliability of the measures, including factor analysis. Of the initial 41 items tested, the remaining 16 (used in this study) showed strong internal consistency .92 for the first 8-items and .94 for the second 8-items. There was no multicollinearity between item measures—with “squared multiple correlations ranging from .48-.84” (Lee et al., 2009, p. 97).

Along with basic demographic information—shown to be related to prejudice— (e.g. race, political orientation, gender, and religious affiliation; See, for example: Lee et al., 2009); I will collect information about media sources and types (i.e. political leaning of the media sources). The latter is also used to infer political orientation, especially for respondents who do not complete the political orientation question in the demographics section.

## **Results**

### **Descriptive Statistics**

The total sample included 127 participants drawn from a large research university in the Southeastern portion of the United States. The groups were split between respondents who participated in the MSA (N = 74, 59.2%) and those who did not participate (N= 51, 40.8%). The respondents were relatively young with an average age of 19.49 years (SD = 2.91). The sample consisted of the following racial makeup: 38.4% White, 34.4% Black, 5.6% American Indian/Alaska native, .8% Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, 14.4% Hispanic or Latino, and 6.4% identified as other. Most of the sample identified, as left-leaning/liberal/Democrats

38.4%, right-leaning/conservative/Republicans constituted 14.4% of the sample, 16.8% were independent, 19.2% unaffiliated, .8% libertarian, and 4% were moderate. A large segment of the sample reported household incomes of more than \$60,000 (40.8%). Over half of respondents were Christian (69.6%), while 28% reported no religious affiliation. Two respondents self-reported as Muslims and were subsequently removed from the sample. The majority of respondents were female (63.2%) and the remaining were males (36.8%). The majority of respondents were full time students (45.6%). The final analysis was conducted on the remaining 125 respondents. Respondents completed a 46-item survey instrument and I analyze the results in the statistical analysis section.

The survey consisted of five sections as follows (see Appendix A): section one was used to collect demographic information about each respondent as well as their involvement in the MSA—this was later used to identify and assign respondents to either the control group or the experimental group (see table 1). Sections 2 and 3 consisted of a 6-item scale used to measure symbolic threat ( $\alpha = .60$ ) and an 8-item scale to measure realistic threat respectively ( $\alpha = .81$ ). Section 4 utilized a 16-item Islamophobia scale ( $\alpha = .92$ ). Lastly, I included two items to solicit information about media consumption and political affiliation of media in the fifth section of the questionnaire. All items were 10-point Likert Scales where (1= strongly disagree) and (10= strongly agree). Items were re-coded to compress the responses as follows: 1 through 2 were coded as 1, strongly disagree; 3 through 4 were coded as 2, agree; 5 through 6 were coded as 3, neither; 7 through 8 were coded as 4, agree; and 9 through 10 were coded as 5, strongly agree. For all items in the Islamophobia Scale, higher scores denote more prejudice. Reverse coding was carried out for items, 16, 18, 21, 23, 24, 26, and 27 to indicate that higher scores describe attitudes that are more prejudiced; these items were negative statements and therefore were reverse coded.

Table 1

*Frequency and Percent of Participants in the Control and Experimental Groups*

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Participate in the MSA?	yes	74	59.2
	no	51	40.8
	Total	125	100.0

### Statistical Analysis

An independent group-posttest design was used to assess the mean differences between groups with relation to the outcome variable, anti-Muslim prejudice. The statistical test used to examine the groups for significant differences concerning Islamophobia was the independent samples *t* test. What follows is the analysis conducted concerning symbolic threat, realistic threat, Islamophobia scales, as well the differences in anti-Muslim prejudice as related to media political leaning. To determine if mean differences between groups exist; and whether such differences may lead to reduced anti-Muslim prejudice in the experimental group, I used an independent samples *t* test to compare the control and experimental groups on each of the three scales used in the survey (i.e., symbolic threat, realistic threat, and the Islamophobia scale respectively).

### *Hypothesis 1*

**Symbolic threat.** Participation in the MSA leads to decreased anti-Muslim prejudice. Results of the analysis for symbolic threat (See Table 2) indicate that there is no significant difference between the experimental and control group regarding the level of perceived symbolic threat. It is important to note that the Levene's test for the equality of variances was significant ( $P < .05$ ), thereby failing the assumption of homogeneity of variance. An examination of the results in Table



2 also demonstrates that no significant relationship exists for  $t$ -statistics even when equal variances are not assumed.

Table 2

*Symbolic Threat: Assessing Experimental and Control Group Mean Differences*

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Differenc e	Std. Error Differen ce	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Muslim immigrants should learn to conform to the rules and norms of American society as soon as they arrive	Equal variances assumed	5.838	.017	-1.267	123	.208	-20.510	16.19	-52.56	11.54
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.050	50.002	.299	-20.510	19.54	-59.75	18.73
Immigration from Muslim countries is undermining American culture	Equal variances assumed	5.904	.017	-1.235	123	.219	-20.015	16.20	-52.09	12.06
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.024	50.002	.311	-20.015	19.55	-59.29	19.26
The values and beliefs of Muslim immigrants regarding work are basically quite similar to those of most Americans	Equal variances assumed	2.636	.107	.347	121	.729	.071	.203	-.332	.473
	Equal variances not assumed			.363	116.308	.718	.071	.195	-.315	.456
The values and beliefs of Muslim immigrants regarding moral and religious issues are not compatible with the beliefs and values of most Americans	Equal variances assumed	5.811	.017	-1.219	123	.225	-19.745	16.20	-51.81	12.32
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.010	50.004	.317	-19.745	19.55	-59.00	19.51
The values and beliefs of Muslim immigrants regarding family issues and socializing children are basically quite similar to those of most Americans	Equal variances assumed	1.946	.166	-.115	122	.908	-.022	.192	-.402	.358
	Equal variances not assumed			-.119	115.417	.905	-.022	.186	-.391	.346
The values and beliefs of Muslim immigrants regarding social relations are not compatible with the beliefs and values of most Americans	Equal variances assumed	5.686	.019	-1.199	122	.233	-19.559	16.31	-51.84	12.73
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.001	50.005	.322	-19.559	19.55	-58.82	19.70

**Realistic threat.** Analysis of realistic threat differences between the two groups suggests a significant difference between means on the following items: “Muslim immigrants are *not* displacing American workers from their jobs’ as well as ‘Muslim immigrants should be eligible to same health-care as Americans’. Both items were reverse coded such that a higher mean assumes an increase in the perception of realistic threat. Results of the  $t$  test revealed a significant difference between responses to the statements; the experimental group scored lower ( $M = 1.70$ ,  $SD .982$ ) than the control group ( $M = 2.27$ ,  $SD 1.20$ ),  $t(88.6) = -2.74$ ,  $p < .05$ . Further, on the “Muslim immigrants should be eligible for

the same health-care benefits received by Americans” item, the experimental group scored lower ( $M= 1.38$ ,  $SD .656$ ) than the control group ( $M =1.73$ ,  $SD 1.11$ ),  $t(73.8) = -1.99$ ,  $p < .05$ . These findings suggest that the control group perceived a greater realistic threat than the experimental group on the aforementioned items.

**Islamophobia scale.** There were significant differences between the experimental and control groups in nine of the items included in the Islamophobia scale (See Table 3). Table 4 shows that the means for those in the control group were higher in all nine items, suggesting more anti-Muslim prejudice than the experimental group.

Table 3

*Independent Samples Test for Islamophobia Scale: Assessing Experimental and Control*

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% CI of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
If I could, I would live in a place where there were no Muslims	equal variances assumed	16.451	.000	-2.28	123	.024	-.206	.090	-.384	-.027
				-2.16	85.384	.034	-.206	.095	-.395	-.016
Islam is dangerous religion	equal variances assumed	40.106	.000	-3.94	123	.000	-.596	.151	-.896	-.297
				-3.43	60.501	.001	-.596	.174	-.944	-.249
Religion of Islam supports acts of violence	equal variances assumed	60.219	.000	-4.07	123	.000	-.603	.148	-.895	-.310
				-3.54	59.963	.001	-.603	.170	-.943	-.262
Islam supports terrorist acts	equal variances assumed	28.956	.000	-2.77	123	.006	-.329	.119	-.565	-.094
				-2.47	67.110	.016	-.329	.133	-.595	-.064
Islam is anti-American	equal variances assumed	46.009	.000	-3.55	123	.001	-.467	.132	-.727	-.206
				-3.18	68.341	.002	-.467	.147	-.759	-.174
Islam is evil religion	equal variances assumed	35.332	.000	-3.02	123	.003	-.325	.107	-.537	-.112
				-2.65	62.078	.010	-.325	.122	-.569	-.080
Islam is religion of hate	equal variances assumed	38.661	.000	-3.10	123	.002	-.325	.105	-.532	-.117
				-2.72	62.828	.008	-.325	.119	-.563	-.086
I believe that Muslims support the killings of all non-Muslims	equal variances assumed	40.415	.000	-3.15	123	.002	-.279	.089	-.455	-.104
				-2.82	67.338	.006	-.279	.099	-.477	-.082
Muslims want to take over the world	equal variances assumed	33.895	.000	-3.10	123	.002	-.364	.117	-.596	-.131
				-2.69	59.703	.009	-.364	.135	-.634	-.093

Table 4

*Group Statistics for Islamophobia Scale*

	Participated in the MSA?	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
If I could, I would live in a place where there were no Muslims	YES	74	1.11	.424	.049
	NO	51	1.31	.583	.082
Islam is dangerous religion	YES	74	1.15	.459	.053
	NO	51	1.75	1.181	.165
Religion of Islam supports acts of violence	YES	74	1.16	.439	.051
	NO	51	1.76	1.159	.162
Islam supports terrorist acts	YES	74	1.12	.436	.051
	NO	51	1.45	.879	.123
Islam is anti-American	YES	74	1.12	.495	.058
	NO	51	1.59	.963	.135
Islam is evil religion	YES	74	1.07	.344	.040
	NO	51	1.39	.827	.116
Islam is religion of hate	YES	74	1.07	.344	.040
	NO	51	1.39	.802	.112
I believe that Muslims support the killings of all non-Muslims	YES	74	1.05	.327	.038
	NO	51	1.33	.653	.091
Muslims want to take over the world	YES	74	1.07	.344	.040
	NO	51	1.43	.922	.129

Concerning the symbolic threat scale, there is insufficient significance in the difference between the two groups to reject the null hypothesis. There is a significant difference however, between the two groups on the realistic and Islamophobia scales. Specifically, respondents in the control group seem to hold more Islamophobic views and seem to perceive more realistic threat than those in the experimental group. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis seems to be accurate and I can reject the null hypothesis.

I conducted an independent sample test on the mean differences between the two groups and their responses to the question “Do you have Muslim friends?” Results indicate no significant relationship; the experimental group had a lower mean ( $M = 1.30$ ,  $SD .460$ ) than the control group ( $M = 1.47$ ,  $SD .504$ ),  $t(101.08) = -1.95$ ,  $p > .05$ .

### *Hypothesis 2*

Exposure to negative images of Muslims in the media increases anti-Muslim attitudes in college students. However, anti-Muslim prejudice will be mitigated by participation in the MSA. Respondents were asked about their perception of the portrayal of Muslims in the media through the item 'Muslims are portrayed fairly in mainstream media'. The control group mean was higher ( $M = 1.69$ ,  $SD .969$ ) than the experimental group ( $M = 1.19$ ,  $SD .515$ ),  $t(69.5) = -3.35$ ,  $p < .05$ . The presence of a higher mean suggests stronger agreement with the statement. Given that much of the portrayal of Muslims in the media is negative, a higher mean is assumed to demonstrate greater acceptance of the negative portrayal of Muslims in the media, and is therefore understood as more prejudiced. Table 5 shows that respondents from the control group were more likely to classify their political affiliation as right-leaning, conservative, or republican; these labels were aggregated for ease of data collection and entry. In contrast, members of the experimental group were more likely to consider themselves leftists, liberal, and/or democratic. Table 6 shows the political affiliation of media consumed by members of the control and experimental groups. Participants in the control group were more likely to identify their media political affiliation as moderate/center. Comparatively, participants in the experimental group were more likely to report that the political affiliation of their media is liberal/left-leaning.

Table 5

*Political Affiliation for the Control and Experimental Groups*

Count		Political Affiliation								Total
		Moderate	Right/Conservative/Republican	Left/Liberal/Democrat	Unaffiliated	Independent	Libertarian	NA	Missing	
Participated in the MSA?	yes	2	3	42	15	7	0	0	5	74
	no	3	15	6	9	14	1	2	1	51
Total		5	18	48	24	21	1	2	6	125

Table 6

*Media Political Affiliation for the Control and Experimental Group*

Count		political leaning of media consumed				Total
		liberal/left-leaning	moderate/center	conservative/right-leaning	Missing	
Participated in the MSA?	yes	31	28	10	5	74
	no	21	23	7	0	51
Total		52	51	17	5	125

**Symbolic threat and the media.** There was a slight significance between the political affiliation of media and symbolic threat. Specifically, respondents who answered the following item, ‘immigration from Muslim countries is undermining American culture’ and who identified their media affiliation as moderate/center were more likely to experience symbolic threat attitudes ( $M = 1.69$ ,  $SD .927$ ) than those whose media consumption was liberal/left-leaning ( $M = 1.35$ ,  $SD .789$ ),  $t(101) = -2.00$ ,  $p < .05$ .

**Realistic threat and the media.** For the realistic threat scale, one item showed a significant difference between the two groups: ‘Muslim immigrants are

as entitled to subsidized utilities (water, sewage, electricity) as poor Americans are'. The moderate/center media group had a higher score on this reverse-coded item ( $M = 2.32$ ,  $SD 1.285$ ) than the liberal/left-leaning media group ( $M = 1.73$ ,  $SD 1.069$ ),  $t(100) = -2.52$ ,  $p < .05$ .

**Islamophobia Scale.** As for the Islamophobia scale, respondents whose media were moderate/center had higher mean scores on three items respectively than those whose media are considered liberal/left-leaning. Items with significant mean differences are as follows: 'I would support any policy that would stop the building of new mosques (Muslim place of worship) in the US'. The liberal/left-leaning group had a lower mean score ( $M = 1.17$ ,  $SD .585$ ) compared to the moderate/center group ( $M = 1.55$ ,  $SD .856$ ),  $t(88.1) = -2.59$ ,  $p < .05$ . The second item, 'If I could, I would live in a place where there were no Muslims' was also significant; members of the liberal/left-leaning group had a lower mean score ( $M = 1.04$ ,  $SD .194$ ) than members of the moderate/center group ( $M = 1.29$ ,  $SD .610$ ),  $t(59.8) = -2.85$ ,  $p < .05$ . Lastly, respondents to the following item 'Islam is anti-American' who were from the liberal/left-leaning group had a lower mean score ( $M = 1.10$ ,  $SD .409$ ); while the moderate/center group mean score was higher ( $M = 1.39$ ,  $SD .850$ ),  $t(71.6) = -2.24$ ,  $p < .05$ . These results are sufficient to reject the null hypothesis.

### ***Hypothesis 3***

**Symbolic threat.** Respondents who major in a natural science will display significantly more anti-Muslim attitudes than students enrolled in the social sciences. For the symbolic threat scale, no items were significant (see table 7). This suggests that there is no difference between students who are enrolled in social sciences and those enrolled in natural sciences regarding their perception of symbolic threat from American Muslims.

Table 7

*College Major and Symbolic Threat: An Analysis of Mean Differences Using Independent Samples Test*

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% CI of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Muslim immigrants should learn to conform to the rules and norms of American society as soon as they arrive	Equal variances assumed	.705	.403	-.448	89	.655	-13.675	30.502	-74.282	46.931
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.056	76.037	.294	-13.675	12.948	-39.464	12.113
Immigration from Muslim countries is undermining American culture	Equal variances assumed	.726	.397	-.440	89	.661	-13.442	30.517	-74.079	47.196
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.038	76.009	.303	-13.442	12.954	-39.241	12.358
The values and beliefs of Muslim immigrants regarding work are basically quite similar to those of most Americans	Equal variances assumed	.000	.999	.265	87	.792	.088	.331	-.570	.745
	Equal variances not assumed			.252	17.492	.804	.088	.347	-.643	.818
The values and beliefs of Muslim immigrants regarding moral and religious issues are not compatible with the beliefs and values of most Americans	Equal variances assumed	.698	.406	-.444	89	.658	-13.545	30.501	-74.151	47.060
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.046	76.047	.299	-13.545	12.948	-39.334	12.243
The values and beliefs of Muslim immigrants regarding family issues and socializing children are basically quite similar to those of most Americans	Equal variances assumed	5.043	.027	.499	88	.619	.150	.301	-.448	.749
	Equal variances not assumed			.727	30.665	.473	.150	.207	-.272	.572
The values and beliefs of Muslim immigrants regarding social relations are not compatible with the beliefs and values of most Americans	Equal variances assumed	.698	.406	-.451	89	.653	-13.766	30.495	-74.359	46.827
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.063	76.047	.291	-13.766	12.946	-39.549	12.017

**Realistic threat.** Two items reported significant results for the realistic threat scale, “The children of Muslim immigrants should have the same right to attend public schools in the United States as Americans do.” Respondents who self-identified as natural science majors had a lower mean score ( $M = 1.07$ ,  $SD .267$ ) than those from the social sciences ( $M = 1.43$ ,  $SD .957$ ),  $t(74.6) = -2.77$ ,  $p < .05$ . The second item which reported a significant difference is “Muslim immigrants should be eligible for the same health-care benefits received by Americans.” Again, the natural science respondents had lower means ( $M = 1.14$ ,  $SD .363$ ) than the social science respondents ( $M = 1.58$ ,  $SD .951$ )  $t(51.8) = -3.03$ ,  $p < .05$ . These items were reverse coded and therefore a higher mean score denotes increased perception of realistic threat. Therefore, for the two significant items presented, those in the

social sciences perceived more realistic threat from Muslim immigrants and Muslim Americans than their peers in from the natural sciences.

**Islamophobia scale.** Respondents who self-identified as majoring in a social science were compared with those who identified as natural science majors. The independent samples *t* test was again used to compute sample means. On the Islamophobia scale, thirteen of the sixteen items were determined to be significant (see table 8). Calculated means for respondents majoring in the social sciences were higher than those from the natural sciences. While there was a significant difference between the groups, results indicate that social science respondents were more Islamophobic than their peers in the natural sciences. Therefore, I cannot reject the null-hypothesis.



Table 8

*Declared Major and Islamophobia: An Analysis of Mean Differences Using the Islamophobia Scale between Social and Natural Science Respondents.*

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% CI of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
If possible, I would avoid going to places where Muslims would be	equal variance assumed	22.101	.000	-1.897	89	.061	-.299	.157	-.612	.014
	equal variance not assumed			-4.470	76.000	.000	-.299	.067	-.432	-.166
I would become extremely uncomfortable speaking with a Muslim	equal variance assumed	12.494	.001	-1.562	89	.122	-.247	.158	-.561	.067
	equal variance not assumed			-3.680	76.000	.000	-.247	.067	-.380	-.113
Just to be safe, it is important to stay away from places where Muslims could be	equal variance assumed	11.587	.001	-1.484	89	.141	-.208	.140	-.486	.070
	equal variance not assumed			-3.496	76.000	.001	-.208	.059	-.326	-.089
I dread the thought of having a professor that is Muslim	equal variance assumed	10.395	.002	-1.440	89	.153	-.234	.162	-.556	.089
	equal variance not assumed			-3.392	76.000	.001	-.234	.069	-.371	-.097
If I could, I would avoid contact with Muslims	equal variance assumed	8.046	.006	-1.275	89	.206	-.182	.143	-.465	.102
	equal variance not assumed			-3.003	76.000	.004	-.182	.061	-.302	-.061
If I could, I would live in a place where there were no Muslims	equal variance assumed	13.088	.000	-1.556	89	.123	-.234	.150	-.532	.065
	equal variance not assumed			-3.666	76.000	.000	-.234	.064	-.361	-.107
Islam is dangerous religion	equal variance assumed	14.757	.000	-1.800	89	.075	-.494	.274	-1.038	.051
	equal variance not assumed			-4.241	76.000	.000	-.494	.116	-.725	-.262
Religion of Islam supports acts of violence	equal variance assumed	19.077	.000	-1.976	89	.051	-.506	.256	-1.016	.003
	equal variance not assumed			-4.656	76.000	.000	-.506	.109	-.723	-.290
Islam supports terrorist acts	equal variance assumed	15.242	.000	-1.668	89	.099	-.338	.202	-.740	.065
	equal variance not assumed			-3.929	76.000	.000	-.338	.086	-.509	-.166
Islam is evil religion	equal variance assumed	11.231	.001	-1.494	89	.139	-.299	.200	-.696	.098
	equal variance not assumed			-3.520	76.000	.001	-.299	.085	-.468	-.130
Islam is religion of hate	equal variance assumed	11.255	.001	-1.472	89	.145	-.286	.194	-.671	.100
	equal variance not assumed			-3.468	76.000	.001	-.286	.082	-.450	-.122
I believe that Muslims support the killings of all non-Muslims	equal variance assumed	12.241	.001	-1.506	89	.136	-.247	.164	-.572	.079
	equal variance not assumed			-3.548	76.000	.001	-.247	.070	-.385	-.108
Muslims want to take over the world	equal variance assumed	9.483	.003	-1.424	89	.158	-.312	.219	-.747	.123
	equal variance not assumed			-3.355	76.000	.001	-.312	.093	-.497	-.127

#### **Hypothesis 4**

A simple linear regression was calculated to predict the level of Islamophobia based on participation in the MSA. All 16-items of the Islamophobia scale were turned into a composite score with equal weight. The composite score called 'Islamophobia' was used as a dependent variable. The independent variable was the item 'have you participated in the MSA?' Given that the independent variable was coded as 1 = participating and 2 = not participating in the MSA, a positive correlation coefficient suggests that not participating in the MSA predicts increased Islamophobic sentiments. Results indicate a significant regression equation was found ( $F(1, 123) = 11.246, p < .001$ , with an  $R^2$  of .084. Participants predicted score is equal to  $.874 + .263$  (MSA score). Participants' level of Islamophobia increased .263 for each unit of the MSA score. This finding leads me to reject the null hypotheses ( $H_4$ ) and conclude that failure to participate in the MSA increases one's Islamophobic sentiments. This provides further evidence of the efficacy of multicultural student clubs at universities.

#### **Discussion and Recommendations**

The implementation of specific programs in postsecondary education focusing on the reduction of anti-Muslim prejudice is recommended for educators and policy makers. Similar to strategies used for other racial and religious groups (e.g. African Americans and people of Jewish faith), education policy can be effective if instituted properly. The institution of such policies and programs requires a multifaceted approach, which includes but is not limited to training and certification of educators through professional development opportunities. Increased scholarly interest and inquiry in these issues is necessary for the testing of these programs to ensure more reliable and generalizable results. Other recommendations include student orientations for all incoming freshmen on the effects of prejudice, specifically addressing anti-Muslim prejudice along with other forms of exclusion. The implementation of cultural sensitivity programs as options for students wishing

to earn some incentive toward the completion of their academic goals is also recommended.

The preceding recommendations are largely one-sided. Other recommendations are directed at the American Muslim community. It is in the interest of the American Muslim community to engage more broadly in civic discourse, to participate in local government, and to organize alongside other marginalized groups in an effort to bring awareness to the struggles they face in an increasingly intolerant social climate. They must learn from those groups who have preceded them, such as the Japanese, Catholics, and Jews, and must work to develop institutions that bring awareness to the American public about their plight and that of other marginalized groups. This research acts only as a starting point; a conversation about these issues must become public. This research attempted to understand merely one aspect of the problem or prejudice, it sought to problematize these contentious social issues and to advance the existing knowledge about prejudice, Islamophobia, and ways to ameliorate both.

### **Limitations**

Clear limitations exist in this study. First, this was an exploratory study given the non-existence of literature examining the efficacy of multicultural education programs in reducing anti-Muslim prejudice. Second, the sample size of 125, while larger than that recommended by a power analysis, is considerably small and therefore not representative of the target population from which it was drawn.

The selection method was carried out through convenience sampling and was not randomized, which limits the generalizability of the results. Specifically, sampling took place in two locations of a large research university. The experimental sample was collected during two nights at a peer-mentor meeting; this was done for convenience, but may have altered the findings. The MSA sponsors different events, which appeal to different groups throughout the university. The control group sample was largely collected from source, a student event held on the

main campus; and most of those who responded were participating in students clubs or organizations. Further limitations include the demographic composition of the groups.

A significant limitation of this research was the research design. The independent group posttest design is insufficient to determine the effect of an intervention. While statistical significance was observed in some of the findings, it is difficult to pinpoint the causes of this significance. The design limitations include the possibility of confounding variables (i.e. antecedents) which are not controlled for, and thereby may be responsible for the effect. Worse yet, a spurious relationship may exist due to the presence of uncontrolled antecedents or intervening variables. Further, external validity may be compromised with this research design due to factors such as the “interaction of selection and X” or “reactive arrangements” (Campbell & Stanley, 1963, p. 8). Indeed, the presence of the researcher, who appears ethnically Arab, may have contributed to the reactivity of respondents and thereby altered the findings.

### **Conclusion**

I found some evidence supporting the first and second alternative hypotheses; H<sub>1</sub>, participation in the MSA leads to decreased anti-Muslim prejudice, and H<sub>2</sub>, exposure to negative images of Muslims in the media increases anti-Muslim attitudes in college students. However, anti-Muslim prejudice will be mitigated by participation in the MSA. There was strong evidence for my failure to reject the null hypothesis H<sub>03</sub>; respondents who major in a natural science will display significantly more anti-Muslim attitudes than students enrolled in the social sciences. Overall results confirm that multicultural education programs on a college campus are worthwhile endeavors at ameliorating prejudice. However, understanding the causal mechanisms of prejudice require more sophisticated analyses than those provided here.

Future research requires a better understanding of the relationships between variables. A consideration of the findings of the third hypothesis suggests that mere enrollment in an academic major may not be sufficient to reduce prejudice; there are intervening variables which must be considered. For the purpose of this research, I merely expounded upon the finding that more of the social science majors were also members of the control group. This suggests that something about the control group may increase anti-Muslim prejudice, but this relationship is not explored here.

Additionally, it is important to consider other theoretical frameworks in future empirical assessments, beyond the theories which guide this project. Dixon (2006) suggests that theories of intergroup threat and contact theories of prejudice can be used to better inform the process of prejudice; these integrated threats go beyond ad hoc explanations of prejudice and have stronger causal mechanisms with increased explanatory power.

This research began with a personal experience of loss, a family member, his wife and his sister-in-law were gunned down in an act of sheer brutality—all of the victims and the assailant were college students. Islamophobia suddenly became manifest in its most animalistic sense. I became curious as to the lack of substantive literature on ways of reducing this irrational fear of Muslims, and that curiosity gave rise to this project. Islamophobia has become institutionalized and mainstream in the media. Political pundits and politicians use anti-Muslim prejudice to score points and appeal to their constituents; the politics of fear have become a mainstay in American socio-political discourse. Therefore, there is no better time to try to understand and deconstruct this new hate of the other. To challenge institutionalized racism and prejudice of any kind, it is best to do so by institutionalizing solutions in higher education; to educate a generation about the collateral consequences of hate and prejudice.

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