Experiences of Discrimination by Muslim Australians and Protective Factors for Integration

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Little social-psychological research has been conducted with respect to experiences of discrimination of Muslim Australians. The present study makes an important contribution to the emerging literature in the current political climate in terms of the experiences of discrimination of Muslim Australians, and how this impacts on their feelings of integration. Results indicated that reported experiences of discrimination were relatively low; however, being Middle Eastern and being visibly Muslim in particular resulted in more discrimination. When examining what predicted positive integration using relevant socio-demographic, identity and inter-personal factors, three variables were significant. Specifically, being a non-visible Muslim, having more contact with other Australians, as well as positive quality of that contact, were significant factors. A thematic analysis of qualitative data indicated three major themes: the existence of prejudice, the role of the media in prejudice, and issues within the Muslim community. To conclude, while Muslim Australians still face discrimination, especially those who do not look explicitly "white Christian", there are protective factors which often override these experiences in terms of affecting feelings of integration.

Muslims in Australia have a long and varied history that is thought to pre-date European settlement (Yasmeen, 2008). Despite this long history of Muslims in Australian society, Muslims have been marginalised by the media and national policies since the 19th century, and frequently misrepresented as undesirable immigrants who are morally inferior (Sanitosis, 2004). This notion of Islam and Muslims as a threat to Australian, or more broadly Western social and cultural values, gained popularity during the 1990s due to local and global events (Aly, 2007). While anti-Muslim sentiment had previously existed, the extreme terrorist act of September 11 in 2001 and the subsequent 'war against terrorism' once again threw the spotlight on Islam and Muslims – in the popular media, political debates, and the general public consciousness (Sirin, Bikmen, Mir, Fine, Zaal & Katsiaficas, 2008).

People of Middle Eastern backgrounds, often presumed to be Muslims, also tend to experience negativity (Poynting & Noble, 2004). This is despite the fact that Islam is not a monolithic religion which is only limited to a particular race or ethnicity, and Muslims are made up of people from culturally and geographically diverse backgrounds (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission [HREOC], 2004). In a recent study by Pedersen, Dunn, Forrest and McGarty (2011; Study One), a national sample of Middle Eastern Australians were asked about their experiences of discrimination in everyday situations. Middle Eastern Australians reported more discrimination than other Australians including experiences at work, in education, housing, dealings with police, when out shopping, and in sports, as well as instances of being disrespected, treated with distrust, and called names because of their perceived ethnicity.

However, Australians are not as explicitly prejudiced against Muslim

Australians as others in Europe (Pew Research Center, 2008). Prejudice and discrimination are linked to real world effects such as racist violence and various forms of unfair treatment (Abu-Rayya & White, 2010) which are in turn associated with a host of concerns. For example, racism has detrimental effects on general health and well-being, contributing to depression, psychological distress, unhealthy behaviours such as substance misuse, and poor quality of life for minority ethnic groups in Australia (Paradies, Forrest, Dunn, Pedersen, & Webster, 2009). As these authors note, it is especially damaging to young people since such experiences may affect identity formation and reduce access to education and employment at a critical stage of life. This has important implications for the largely young Muslim community in Australia.

Integration of Muslim Australians

The increase of discrimination against Muslims could lead to the undermining of the ability of a segment of the Muslim community to feel 'at home' and therefore less integrated in the dominant society (Guimond, de Oliveira, Kamiesjki & Sidanius, 2010). Although used interchangeably in everyday language, *integration* involves the incorporation of the dominant society's way of life but without relinquishing one's familial culture, or culture of origin, whereas *assimilation* involves relinquishing one's culture of origin, in favour of a full incorporation into the new or dominant society (Abu-Rayya & White, 2010). Feelings of *integration* would thus refer to the degree to which an individual from the minority group interacts with the larger society, and the ability to negotiate multiple identities and cultural norms without feeling any psychological conflict (Ozyurt, 2009). It is important to identify any protective factors which might be able to contribute to the level of integration among Muslims in Australia.

The research outlined above suggests that social-psychological variables present in individuals may relate to their feelings of integration. These factors can be broadly

placed in three categories. The first is socio-demographics which may include gender, ethnicity and visibility of being Muslim. The second is personal identity factors such as self-esteem and ingroup evaluation. The third is interpersonal factors such as intergroup contact (both amount and quality) and experiences of discrimination.

Socio-demographic Factors

We describe these three socio-demographic factors which may be relevant to integration issues with respect to Muslim Australians.

Gender. Pedersen et al. (2011; Study One) found that Australian males of Middle Eastern background reported significantly more discrimination than their female counterparts with respect to dealings with police, public levels of disrespect, distrust and name calling. Pedersen and Hartley (2011) found that Muslim males faced more prejudice than Muslim females. This is consistent with research which refers to Muslim women as the 'oppressed', and Muslim men as the 'oppressors' (Aly, 2007). However, other research has found that reported abuse and attacks were experienced more by Muslim females, especially among those who wear the hijab; in addition, Muslim females tended to report feeling more vulnerable to discrimination (HREOC, 2004) which could then lead to them feeling less integrated than their male counterparts. So the jury is still out on the point of gender; especially in relation to integration which is a question that has not been asked or answered.

Ethnicity. Pedersen et al. (2011; Study One) found that Middle Eastern Australians had significantly more experiences of discrimination in *all* nine areas of potential discrimination compared with non-Middle Eastern Australians. Increased reports of discrimination by Middle Eastern Australians compared to non-Middle Eastern Australians have been found in other research (Poynting & Noble, 2004). It remains to be seen whether any ethnicity effects may impact of

feelings of integration.

Visibility. As a response to prejudice against Islam, many Australian Muslims have taken to publicly identifying with their faith to demonstrate their pride in it (Nader, 2005). However, this public identification of their faith could also serve to reinforce the stereotype that Muslim and Western values are incompatible. Eighty-three percent of Australians believe that this is the case, adding on to the distress from identity conflicts for the majority of Australian Muslims of dual-identities (Issues Deliberation Australia [IDA], 2007). This could possibly lead to more prejudice and discrimination from the outgroup, and subsequently to reduced feelings of integration among Muslim Australians.

Identity Factors

Self-esteem. Psychological well-being is well associated with high self-esteem (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). This association between having a high evaluation of own worth and good psychological functioning and well-being has especially been found among minority youths (Verkuyten, 1995). Minority individuals such as Muslims in Western societies are often confronted with conflicting values and demands from both ingroup and outgroup which might affect their psychological well-being (Verkuyten, 2007). Thus, having good and stable self-esteem may deflect these negative effects, allowing them to participate better in society and feel more integrated.

Ingroup evaluation. This is also linked to a minority individual's self-esteem (Verkuyten, 1995). Verkuyten's work involves how positively or negatively an individual thinks about his or her own social group based on eight general attributes used to describe members of a social group. Positive ingroup evaluation can have a positive effect on an individual's self-esteem and can influence the social behaviours that could contribute to feelings of integration (Verkuyten, 1995).

Interpersonal factors. Another category of interest which may affect feelings of integration is interpersonal factors. There is a lot of research on the prejudice-reducing effects of intergroup contact (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). However, there are only a handful of studies which specifically look at the association of feelings of integration with intergroup contact (e.g., Ata, Bastian & Lusher, 2009).

Contact: Both Quantity and Quality

Having positive experiences and contact with the mainstream outgroup may help individuals from the minority group to feel more integrated as it would help in minimising the negative attitudes from the outgroup. This may then lead to a cycle of more positive interactions between the minority group and the dominant group. In their meta-analysis of empirical studies on the effects of intergroup contact, Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) found that in 94% of studies, intergroup contact was significantly associated with lower intergroup prejudice. In addition, a recent review of Australian contact data that separated results based on the type of contact being measured (quantity or quality) found that quality of contact was the strongest predictor of prejudice (Pedersen, 2009). Based on these findings, if more contact, in terms of both quantity and quality, can reduce prejudice towards minority groups, this could then possibly lead to reduced feelings of 'otherness' or social exclusion as experienced by the minority group and to increased feelings of integration.

Discrimination. While the contact variables might contribute to positive feelings of integration, experiences of discrimination is likely to have the opposite effect by contributing to reduced feelings of integration.

Overview of the Present Study

Much of the literature on how anti-Muslim sentiment has affected the Muslim community is either based in the United States or in Britain. In our study, we aimed to

contribute to the emerging literature on Muslims and Islam in Australia. But first we would like to be upfront with our values which informed the present research (see Prilleltensky, 2001, on the issues of community psychology and values). Author 1 is a Muslim woman from a Singaporean background. Author 2 is an anti-prejudice activist who works primarily with asylum seekers some of which are Muslim. We are both opposed to any form of prejudice and discrimination. While we do not pretend to be value-free, we do try to be as objective as possible throughout the paper.

First, we investigated whether the constructs used in the Pedersen et al. (2011; Study One) study on Middle Eastern Australians would also be useful in terms of understanding the experiences of Muslim Australians (and subsequently, their feelings of integration). More specifically, we investigated whether there were any differences in the experiences of discrimination between genders, as well as between people from a Middle Eastern background and people of other ethnicities. Based on the findings by Pedersen et al. (2011), it was expected that if any gender differences occurred, they would involve male Muslim Australians experiencing more discrimination. It was also expected that Muslim Australians from a Middle Eastern background would face significantly more discrimination as compared to Muslim Australians of other ethnicities. In addition, the present study looked at any differences in the experiences of discrimination between those who reported being visible Muslims and those who did not. It was expected that visible Muslims would face significantly more discrimination than non-visible Muslims.

A second aim of the present study was to examine the protective factors for Muslim Australians to feel integrated in Australian society. We were particularly interested in the socio-demographics, the personal identity and

inter-group variables outlined previously. Given the lack of social-psychological research in this area, we made no specific predictions in this regard.

The third aim involved qualitatively exploring the issues and concerns among Muslims in Australia. As all methods have their own individual strengths and weaknesses, it was hoped that using both quantitative and qualitative data would enable a fuller understanding of the experiences of Muslims living in Australia. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods in research have been found to be beneficial, especially when looking at cultural or social issues (Cohen, 2007).

Method

A questionnaire was posted online in early December 2009 until the end of March 2010; 110 responses were collected overall. Invitations to participate, including a link to the questionnaire and a request to send it on to other individuals and groups, were emailed to various Muslim organisations in Australia (as noted, Author 1 is Muslim and had contacts with these organisations). Only Muslims above 18 years of age and who were Australian citizens were eligible to participate. The questionnaire consisted of six sections in the following order: quantitative measures for socio-demographics, self esteem, ingroup evaluation, integration, contact, experiences of discrimination. There was then a single open-ended qualitative question.

Socio-demographics

Participants were asked to state their age in years, sex (1 = male, 2 = female), their political orientation (1 = strongly left to 5 = strongly right) and education level (1 = did not complete secondary school to 6 = postgraduate degree). They also indicated if they were born in Australia, or if they came as refugees or migrants to Australia, as well as responded to questions relating to their ethnic or cultural background. In addition, participants were also asked to indicate if

they considered themselves as visible or identifiable Muslims in terms of their everyday appearance and to provide details of such if they responded 'yes'.

Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale

This was used to rate participants' level of personal self-esteem. Items were responded to using a 7-point Likert scale. Harborg (1993) found this scale to have good validity and reliability (.79). Higher scores indicated higher personal self-esteem.

Ingroup Evaluation

Participants were asked to indicate the extent of their agreement with eight general attributes which may be used to generally describe members of a social group. For our study, participants were instructed to specifically refer to members of the Islamic faith. Items were responded to on a 7-point Likert scale. Islam and Hewstone (1993) found the scale had an adequate reliability (.67). Higher scores indicated a more positive evaluation of the ingroup.

Muslim Cultural Integration Scale (MCIS)

This was developed by Ozyurt (2009) to measure the participants' attitudes towards the dominant society and culture. He found it to have an adequate reliability (.73). Items were responded to on a 7-point Likert scale. For the present study, references to America have been changed to Australia. Also, two questions were added to make the scale more balanced as it appeared biased towards negativity. After appropriate recoding, higher scores indicated a higher level of integration.

Contact with Outgroup

Participants were asked to indicate the *amount* (0 = None, 6 = A lot) and *quality* (0 = Negative, 3 = Both positive and negative, 6 = Positive) of contact with non-Muslim Australians.

Experience of Discrimination

Participants were asked how often they experienced discrimination and felt that they are treated negatively because of their perceived religion in everyday situations (1 = Very rarely to 5 = All the time). The nine

everyday situations were: discrimination at the workplace, in education, housing, policing, shops/restaurants, public places, generally treated with disrespect, distrust, and called names (Study One of Pedersen et al., 2011; The Challenging Racism Project, 2011).

Qualitative Question

There was an open-ended question at the end of the questionnaire where participants could give their thoughts on their experiences living in Australia, explain their answers, or give more specific examples to any of the questions in the questionnaire. Fifty-two participants (47%) responded to this question.

Results

Demographic Information

The sample of 110 Australian Muslims were predominantly from Western Australia (88%), had an average age of 30 years (range 18-70), most of which were female (66%). Most participants were highly educated with 76% of the sample holding a degree or postgraduate qualification. The political preference of the majority of the sample was neither strongly left nor strongly right (39%), 25% leaning towards left-wing, and 16% were somewhat right-wing. Twenty percent of the sample indicated not having any political preference.

Slightly more than half of the participants were migrants (55%), there were two participants who were refugees (2%), and the rest were born in Australia (43%). The participants came from diverse ethnic backgrounds, the most common being Asian (33%), followed by Middle Eastern (17%), European (16%), from the Indian subcontinent (16%) and African (4%). There were also 15 participants who described themselves as having with dual ethnicities (14%). About half of the participants considered themselves as visible or identifiable Muslims (51%) in terms of their everyday appearance and clothing. Of this group, they tend to be females wearing the

hijab (81%; with 3% wearing the *niqab*, or full face veil).

Scale Descriptives

Table 1 presents the descriptive characteristics for each scale, setting out the scale means and standard deviations, the range of scores, the number of items in each scale, and the scale *α* coefficients. As can be seen, all scales had satisfactory reliability. As previously noted, two questions were added to the MCIS; the addition of the two questions increased the MCIS reliability from .67 to .75.

The level of integration of the sample of Muslim Australians was just above the midpoint. Participants tended to have a favourable evaluation of their ingroup. The amount of contact with non-Muslims was above average, with the quality of contact likely to be quite positive. The frequency of discrimination scores indicated that participants generally did not encounter discrimination; the negative encounters that did occur were more likely to happen in shops or restaurants, while the least discrimination occurred in policing situations.

Aim 1: Experiences of Discrimination among Muslims in Australia

By gender. A 2 x 9 MANOVA was used to examine if there were gender differences in the frequencies of discrimination. Univariate analyses identified one significant difference which was in housing situations $F(1,66) = 7.15$; $p = .009$ where males ($M = 2.13$; $SD = 1.22$) reported more discrimination than females ($M = 1.49$; $SD = 0.76$).

By ethnicity (Middle Eastern vs. Others). A second MANOVA was conducted

Table 1
Descriptive characteristics of scales

Scales	M	SD	Range	*k*	*α*
Integration	4.01	(.85)	1-7	9	.75
Self-esteem	5.60	(.88)	1-7	10	.84
Ingroup evaluation	5.43	(.98)	1-7	8	.86
Contact – quantity	4.95	(1.47)	0-6	-	-
Contact – quality	4.30	(1.19)	0-6	-	-
Frequency of discrimination					
1. Workplace	2.12	(.90)	1-5	-	-
2. Education	1.96	(.98)	1-5	-	-
3. Housing	1.81	(1.08)	1-5	-	-
4. Policing	1.71	(.97)	1-5	-	-
5. Shops/restaurant	2.57	(1.03)	1-5	-	-
6. Public places	2.35	(1.00)	1-5	-	-
7. Disrespect	2.51	(.81)	1-5	-	-
8. Distrust	2.29	(.91)	1-5	-	-
9. Name calling	2.27	(.97)	1-5	-	-
Discrimination scale	2.21	(.67)	1-5	9	.83

to examine any differences in experiences of discrimination in terms of ethnicity, more specifically, between Middle Eastern (ME) and non-ME Australian Muslims. Univariate analyses identified four significant differences between the two groups. With respect to housing, ME Australians reported more discrimination ($M = 2.67$; $SD = 1.41$) than other participants ($M = 1.56$; $SD = 0.82$) $F(1,66) = 11.59$; $p = .001$. With respect to dealings with the police, ME Australians reported more discrimination ($M = 2.33$; $SD = 1.23$) than other participants ($M = 1.59$; $SD = .93$) $F(1,66) = 4.54$; $p = .037$. With respect to shopping, ME Australians reported more discrimination ($M = 3.44$; $SD = 1.01$) than the other participants ($M = 2.39$; $SD = .95$) $F(1,66) = 9.51$; $p = .003$. With respect to discrimination in general public places, ME Australians reported more discrimination ($M = 3.00$; $SD = 0.71$) compared with other participants ($M = 2.15$; $SD = .94$) $F(1,66) = 6.65$; $p = .012$.

By visibility. Another MANOVA was conducted based on participants' reported visibility as a Muslim. Univariate analyses identified two significant differences. With respect to shopping, visible Muslims (M=2.74; SD=0.99) reported more discrimination than non-visible Muslims (M=2.23; SD=1.00) (F(1,62) = 4.02; p = .049). With respect to disrespectful treatment, visible Muslims (M=2.71; SD=0.58) reported more discrimination than non-visible Muslims (M=2.27; SD=.87) (F(1,62) = 5.79; p = .019).

Overall, males reported more discrimination in one setting, Middle Eastern Muslims reported more discrimination in four settings, and visible Muslims reported more discrimination in two settings.

Aim 2: Identification of Protective Factors for Integration among Muslims in Australia

As can be seen from Table 2, there were significant correlations between integration scores and four variables: participants who reported being visible Muslims, and those who had a higher evaluation of their ingroup, had lower integration scores. In addition, participants who had higher amount of contact, or more positive contact with the outgroup, had higher integration scores.

Using these correlated variables, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to establish which of them could account for a significant proportion of the variance in integration scores (see Table 3). Visibility, as a socio-demographic factor, was entered as a predictor on step one. The significant personality variable (ingroup evaluation) and interpersonal variables (amount and quality of contact) variables were entered on step two.

The one socio-demographic variable included (visibility) predicted integration scores on step one. At the end of step 2, visibility and both contact variables significantly predicted integration. More specifically, the higher the integration, the more likely it was that the participants reported being a non-visible Muslim and the more quantity and quality of contact with non-Muslims. In combination, the predictor variables accounted for 33% of the variance in integration scores.

Aim 3: Current Issues and Concerns among Muslim Australians

The percentages noted for each theme in Table 4 are based on the total qualitative data (the number of participants who made comments and not on total sample). Thematic analysis was conducted on the qualitative responses. Themes, which are simply particular characteristics or patterns found in the data, were generated inductively, using a form of open coding as suggested by Corbin and Strauss (1990). An independent rater coded the data as well to ensure the validity of the coding. Inter-rater reliability was determined according to the guidelines of Landis ands Koch (1977) on the measurement of categorical data (kappa analyses). As most of the responses were

Table 2
Correlation matrix

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1.Integration	1											
2.Age	0.83	1										
3. Gender	.050	-.284**	1									
4. Political position	.088	-.209	.040	1								
5.Education	.030	.193*	-.032	-.122	1							
6. Ethnicity	.104	.139	-.130	-.029	.050	1						
7. Visibility	-.228*	-.205*	.341**	.196	.001	-.194	1					
8. Self-esteem	.122	.189	.148	.101	.090	-.005	.206*	1				
9. Ingroup evaluation	-.247*	-.026	.219*	.140	.071	.028	.240*	.227*	1			
10. Contact (quantity)	.364**	-.140	.095	-.108	.194	.095	0.38	.202*	-.063	1		
11. Contact (quality)	.339**	-.025	.195	-.094	.161	-.021	.101	.143	-.062	.139	1	
12. Discrimination scale	-.146	-.056	.017	.048	-.004	-.260*	.276**	-.161	-.007	-.124	-.141	1

Table 3
Hierarchical Multiple Regression of Integration and Predictor Variables

Variables entered	r	β^{a}	β^{b}	R^2 change	Total R^2
Step 1					
Visibility	-.228*	-.221*	-.233*	.049*	
Step 2					
Ingroup evaluation	-.247*		-.145		
Contact (quality)	364**		.358**		
Contact (quality)	.339**		.313***	.281***	.330***

Note. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$ (2-tailed).

only a few sentences long, the unit of analysis was each response taken as a whole. This also allowed the same comment to be coded for different themes.

Three major themes were identified – existence of prejudice, issues within the Muslim community, and the role of the media in prejudice. Of the three variables, as per Landis and Koch (1977), one had an almost perfect match (0.81 – 1.00), and two had a substantial match (0.61 – 0.80).

Existence of prejudice. Among the responses which mentioned prejudice, participants either commented on their experiences of discrimination or did not feel it was a big issue in Australia (coded 1 = Did not mention prejudice, 2 = Experiences of discrimination, 3 = Did not think it was a big issue). Inter-rater reliability was substantial, k = .69 (p < .001).

Issues within the Muslim community. Two issues were apparent in the data. First, respondents pointed out certain behaviours of some Muslims which may contribute to the prejudice towards themselves. Second, some respondents mentioned ingroup discrimination which often arose out of

cultural differences and practices within the ingroup (coded 1 = Did not mention, 2 = Muslim behaviours contributing to prejudice, 3 = Ingroup discrimination). Inter-rater reliability was substantial, k = .73 (p < .001).

Role of media. Some participants also acknowledged the role of the media in espousing prejudice towards Muslims (coded 1 = Did not mention media, 2 = Mentioned media). Inter-rater reliability was almost perfect, k = .88 (p < .001).

Discussion

The broad purpose of the present study was to provide an avenue to achieve a greater understanding about Muslims and Islam in the Australian context. The quantitative aspect of the present study looked at experiences of discrimination, and predictors of integration; the qualitative to give a fuller understanding of the experiences of Muslim Australians.

Aim 1: Experiences of Discrimination among Muslims in Australia

Our results only partially supported the findings of Pedersen et al. (2011; Study One) regarding gender differences. In our study, only one significant difference was found with males reporting more discrimination in

Table 4
Themes and Sub-themes from Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Responses

Themes and subthemes	% within the theme	% overall
Existence of prejudice		40.7
Experiences of discrimination	22.2	
Didn't see prejudice as big issue	18.5	
Issues within Muslim community		29.6
Muslim behaviours contributing to prejudice	22.2	
Ingroup discrimination	7.4	
Role of media		20.4

housing (there were four differences in the previous study). Differing results may be due to the different ethnicity of the present sample as well as location. In the Pedersen et al. study, participants came from across Australia, while most of the participants in the present study were primarily based in Western Australia. Context matters (Dunn Forrest, Burnley, & McDonald, 2004).

In terms of ethnicity, we found significant differences in four out of nine areas where Middle Eastern Muslims reported significantly more discrimination – in housing situations, dealings with police, in shops and restaurants, and in general public places. While Pedersen et al. (2011; Study One) found significant differences with all nine measures, they were comparing with a wider population than in our study which investigated Muslim experiences. While there is an interchangeability of 'Muslims' and 'Middle Eastern' in the public discourse (Fozdar, Wilding & Hawkins, 2009), our study indicates that discrimination is experienced more by Muslims of Middle Eastern background indicating the presence of racism in public attitudes. Other Australian research finds that Middle-Eastern and Asian children report relatively high levels of discrimination (Runions, Priest, & Dandy, 2011). Such findings are of continued concern

as prejudice and experiences of discrimination have been found to have negative effects on health and psychological well-being (Paradies et al., 2009) as well as to contribute to social problems (Abu-Rayya & White, 2010). Coupled with previous research regarding Middle-Eastern children, our findings are worrying.

In terms of visibility, our study found that participants who reported being visible Muslims experienced significantly more discrimination in two out of nine areas as compared to those who were not visible Muslims – being treated with disrespect and called names in the public sphere (shops/ restaurants and public places). This finding supports anecdotal evidence of such discrimination in previous research for Muslim women who wear the hijab which was the main covering for participants in our study (Browning, Jakubowicz & Gold, 2004; Poynting & Noble, 2004). Such findings are a cause of concern since as previously mentioned, many young Muslims in Australia and elsewhere have taken to publicly identify with their faith as a response to the escalating anti-Muslim sentiment (Nader, 2005).

Aim 2: Identification of Protective Factors for Integration among Muslims in Australia

Results from the correlations and regression indicate that protective factors

override simple experiences of discrimination in terms of affecting feelings of integration among Muslims in Australia. From the correlations, it was found that participants who reported being visible Muslims, and those who had a more positive evaluation of their ingroup, had lower integration scores. While we envisaged that being a visible Muslim could negatively affect integration, we did not anticipate that being positive about being Muslim would negatively affect integration. This unexpected result, however, could simply be because of society's expectations of assimilation. In addition, participants who had higher amount of contact, or more positive contact with the outgroup, had higher integration scores. This supports past related research as previously outlined; in particular Pettigrew and Tropp (2006). No relationship was found with self-esteem and integration; this stresses the need to emphasise group processes over individual ones when looking at cultural issues (Pedersen, Attwell & Heveli, 2005).

The regression indicated that out of the four correlated factors, three (one socio-demographic and two interpersonal factors) had a significant effect on feelings of integration among Muslims in Australia. More specifically, Muslims who were less visible, and had higher amount and more positive intergroup contact, were more likely to feel more integrated. To the best of our knowledge, there are no studies in the existing literature on protective factors for integration using all of the variables used in the present study. However, the findings from the present study, especially with regards to the contact variables, support previous research on the role of contact in intergroup relations, specifically in reducing prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Since intergroup contact often leads to reduced prejudice by the dominant group, it could also work the other way by increasing feelings of integration for the minority group (Ata et al., 2009). The contributions of contact in

reducing prejudice have been found elsewhere (IDA, 2007; Mavor, Kanra, Thomas, Blink & O'Brien, 2009). Regarding the finding that high visibility impeded feelings of integration, we then come back to the two way street of integration as argued by Hollands (2001) – this involves not only Muslim Australians but the actions of the host country. Previous research also notes the ambivalence some Australians feel about the hijab (Dunn 2009; Pedersen & Hartley, 2011; Yasmeen, 2008).

Aim 3: Exploring the Current Issues and Concerns among Muslims in Australia

In order to understand the full picture of the experiences of Muslims in Australia, it was important to get an idea of their concerns regarding integration. This was done through the qualitative aspect of the present study. The three relevant themes identified from the sample were the existence of prejudice, the role of the media in prejudice, and issues within the Muslim community.

Existence of prejudice. This first theme is relevant to the first quantitative aim of the present study, which is the exploration of the experiences of discrimination by Muslims in Australia. Among participants who did refer to prejudice and discrimination, they referred to their personal experiences mostly in the public sphere, in the workplace and general insensitivities towards Muslims. For example, "I usually find that after certain events like terrorist bombings, 9/11, Bali bombing etc, public opinion was worse. I found that strangers in shopping centres always made derogatory comments or give us evil looks." These qualitative data support the quantitative findings of the present study where the participants mostly reported experiences of discrimination in terms of treatment in public spheres. Regarding workplace discrimination, one participant noted: "After wearing a hijab I was treated much differently by my colleagues and supervisors where they did not think I was good enough to do the same job anymore ..."

Other research also finds discriminatory practices on the basis of culture; for example, what employers call 'organisational fit' (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2006, p. 211).

An example of general insensitivities towards Muslims is:

> Cultural awareness is an official policy of all government workplace, yet very few, if at all, understand what it means, including those who advocate it, such as DIAC. ... A racist environment is endemic and all white Australians grow up conditioned to it. ...they don't even understand that many of their friendly attitudes and behaviour are lined with racism though not outwardly so. Ignoring you or not to notice your presence is the worst form of racist attitude Australians comfortably pass on.

Conversely, over half of the participants did not mention prejudice or did not feel it a big problem within Australia; for example:

> If a Muslim applies for a job for which they are qualified and are pleasant throughout the interview, but calmly and clearly explained their requirements such as wearing hijab or time to pray, I believe that most Australian employers would be happy to oblige.

These responses reflect the diversity of opinions and experiences of Australians, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, as well as findings that the majority of non-Muslim Australians are not *explicitly* prejudiced especially in comparison to European countries (Griffiths & Pedersen, 2009; Pew Research Center, 2008).

Role of media. The second theme also relates to the first quantitative aim of the present study in terms of its contributions to experiences of discrimination. About a quarter of the participants acknowledged the role of the media in espousing prejudice towards Muslims. For example, "I think the media is playing almost the biggest role in structuring an image of Muslims in people's heads. It's not only giving bad impressions to non-Muslims, but also to Muslims between each other."

This is consistent with previous research on the negative construction of Islam and Muslims in the public discourse and how it contributes to prejudice (e.g., Al-Natour, 2010; Aly, 2007; Ata, 2010; Dunn et al., 2007; IDA, 2007; Kabir, 2007; Pedersen & Hartley, 2011). Relatedly, with regard to print coverage of the Cronulla Riots, Quayle and Sonn (2009) found that discourse of 'White Australia' dominated over discourse from a Muslim (or Lebanese) viewpoint.

Issues within the Muslim community. Instead of just focussing on prejudice from non-Muslims, slightly less than a third of participants also recognised that there were problems within the Muslim community itself. Two issues were apparent from these data. Among those who mentioned Muslim issues, about two-thirds of the participants pointed out certain behaviours of some Muslims which may contribute to the prejudice. For example:

> ... [in] my experience as a Muslim so far a lot of Muslims choose to seclude themselves and not integrate into society, however I feel the option is there for them to become contributing members of society and I think as time goes on the general public are becoming more aware and more accepting of Muslims.

This particular behaviour of secluding themselves and engaging in cultural huddles not only has a direct effect on feelings of integration, it could also potentially lead to the dominant group having the misconception that Muslims are not accepting of Australian

values and are refusing to integrate (these were common themes of non-Muslim Australians as found by Pedersen & Hartley, (2011). This could then potentially lead to increased prejudice (which then in a cycle, contributes to reduced feelings of integration).

Secondly, about a third of the participants who mentioned Muslim issues specifically mentioned ingroup discrimination which often arose out of cultural differences and practices within the ingroup. For example:

> *Sometimes I feel more judged/ stereotyped by other Muslims than non-Muslims. From my experience in both non-Muslim and Muslim communities I think identifying with a particular cultural background can bring more negative experiences than identifying with a faith.*

These responses imply that cultural-specific ideas of Islam and Muslim practices continue exist and be reaffirmed by some Muslims (Yasmeen, 2008). It also indicates the Muslim community's acknowledgement that prejudice is a dynamic concept, which is neither unidirectional, nor limited to outgroup experiences (Yasmeen, 2008).

Conclusions

The present study makes an important contribution to the emerging literature on the status of Australian Muslims in the current political climate in terms of their experiences of discrimination and how this affects feelings of integration. Our findings suggest that Muslim Australians still face discrimination in significant areas of their everyday lives based on their religion. However, a more important finding from the present study is that there are protective factors, especially intergroup contact (both quantity and quality) which override these simple experiences of discrimination in terms of affecting feelings of integration among Muslims in Australia. It might then be more beneficial for future research to move away from exploring the relationships between the individual

psychological variables, and more towards using inter-group variables in studies specific to feelings of integration.

What is clear from past and present studies is that an individual's level of integration in society is not something clear-cut; there are many overlapping identity and interpersonal factors unique to each individual which affects their experiences of living as a Muslim in Australia (Ata et al., 2009). The qualitative data suggests that at least some segments of the Muslim community recognise that prejudice is not a single, unidirectional concept and that they have to take an active role in feeling integrated in society. This does not take away from the fact that prejudice and discrimination exist against Muslim Australians (also see Griffiths & Pedersen, 2009), and it is the responsibility of mainstream Australia to take action against this.

Positive integration is possible, and the data suggest that in spite of the everyday discrimination still faced by the Muslim community, Muslims recognise that they do not have to let it affect their sense of belonging and limit their participation in society. They also recognise that they have to take on a more active role in integrating in Australian society, by reducing prejudice both from outside and within their community. Such increased positive engagement with the wider society could only naturally lead to increased feelings of integration. It is hoped that future studies would expand on the findings from the present study in order to understand Muslims in Australia better, and possibly contribute in the generation of basic non-discriminatory social policies which are integral to a nation's development.

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