

THE INTERSECTION OF RELIGIOUS AND AMERICAN IDENTITIES AND
IMMIGRANTS' ADJUSTMENT: PERCEIVED
HARMONY AS A MODERATOR

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ABSTRACT

Individual differences in the perception of harmony between religious and American identity may moderate how these identities jointly relate to adjustment and may explain mixed findings on religious identity and adjustment for immigrants. Christian, Jewish, and Muslim immigrants ($N = 232$) living in the U.S. completed online surveys in English via Amazon Mechanical Turk. Religious-American identity predicted increased symptoms of anxiety and decreased satisfaction with life when immigrants perceived their religious and American identities to be neutral or conflictual, but not when they perceived those identities to be harmonious. Moreover, results revealed that Muslims are more likely than Christians and Jewish individuals to perceive low harmony between their religious and American identities. These findings are important in terms of expanding the results of previous research with perceived harmony between ethnic and host cultures to harmony between religion and host (American) culture and how these identities relate to adjustment.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Individuals often belong to various social groups and define themselves in terms of multiple collective categories such as gender, religiosity, and culture. These categories, which constitute an important part of self-concept, do not exist in isolation, rather, they depend on one another for meaning and shape one's identity through their unique interactions (Cole, 2009). Research in social psychology has extensively examined how individual social identities impact mental health. Yet, only a small number of studies have considered the way social categorizations are combined to jointly affect psychological outcomes (Betancourt & Lopez, 1993). This project questions the accuracy of examining social identities independently (Warner, 2008) and takes an *intersectionality* perspective (Collins, 1998; Crenshaw, 1991) by focusing on the interrelationships between two key social group memberships: religion and culture, and how they are associated with psychological adjustment.

One of the populations most visibly exposed to the effects of intersecting multiple group identities are immigrants as they face the challenge of integrating numerous existing subgroup identities with new evolving identities associated with their host culture (Dommelen, Schmid, Newstone, Gonsalkorale, & Brewer, 2015). The way individuals manage these multiple and sometimes conflicting identities often entails important implications for their adjustment. In this regard, past research has mostly

focused on the way immigrants integrate host and heritage cultural identities (e.g., Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005; Berry, 1980; Ward & Rana-Deuba, 1999) and the effects of such integration on adjustment. Less attention, however, has been given to the psychosocial consequences of a social identity stemming from religion (Tarakeshwar, Stanton & Pargament, 2003). This is counterintuitive because religion is one the most important buttresses of identity (Ysseldyk, Matheson, & Anisman, 2010).

One reason for such negligence may be that past studies often view immigrants' religion as merely a part of the culture associated with their country of origin (e.g., Chan & Leong, 1994; Gordon, 1973). However, religions often promote their unique set of beliefs, values, and practices (Cohen, 2009), which may or may not be consistent with heritage cultural teachings. For example, Christianity, the dominant religion in the U.S., endorses ultimate forgiveness towards others' misdemeanors. Conversely, American culture promotes assertiveness and standing for one's own rights in the face of bullies. Nevertheless, Christian and American identities are both consistent in promoting honesty/truthfulness as their core value (Kohls, 1984). Also, religion often goes beyond cultural borders (marked by geographical boundaries) and cannot be relegated to one specific culture. For example, Christian values and practices are shared by many cultural groups/nations, and so are Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and a number of other religions. Hence, religion may be overlapping with culture, and it may even contribute to the definition of cultural entities, such as Islam for Arabs, and Judaism for Israelis (Saroglou & Cohen, 2011). However, the definition of religion should not be reduced to and considered as equivalent to any individual culture.

For immigrant individuals, cultural and religious identities are particularly important in determining psychosocial adjustment. A strong sense of belonging to the host culture often enhances psychosocial adjustment, whereas alienation from the host society is often associated with greater depression and anxiety (Dason, Berry, & Sartorius, 1988; Nguyen & Benet-Martinez, 2013). All the same, it is important to note that a strong sense of belonging to one's heritage culture is also beneficial to adjustment (Berry, 2005). However, considering that first-generation migrants generally exhibit high identification with their heritage identity, it has been suggested that identifying with the host culture is more consequential for the psychosocial adjustment of immigrants (Tsai, Ying, & Lee, 2000).

Similarly, a strong religious identity implies important consequences for immigrant adjustment (e.g., Friedman & Saroglou, 2010; Gungor, Fleischmann, & Phalet, 2011; Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2007; Yang & Ebaugh, 2001). However, it is not yet clear how the conjunction of religious and host cultural identities may affect adjustment differently. For example, would a strong sense of host cultural identity combined with a strong sense of belonging to a religion predict enhanced or poorer adjustment? What factors moderate the direction and strength of this relationship? The goal of this study is to address these questions and examine the joint influences of two social identities, religious identity and host cultural identity, on the adjustment of immigrants.

Social Identity

An important part of an individual's self-concept is shaped based on the knowledge and emotional value attributed to membership in various social groups (Tajfel, 1981), such as religion, ethnicity, and culture. *Social Identity Theory* (Tajfel &

Turner, 1979) explains the relation between self-concept and social group membership. The fundamental concept in this theory is that psychological processes are dependent on social context. A social group/category consists of individuals who classify themselves as members based on common characteristics or beliefs. Defining and evaluating oneself in terms of shared attributes with a social group (for example as a Muslim, or as an American) forms one's social identity (Wetherell & Mohanty, 2010).

Through *categorization* (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), individuals divide the social environment into in-groups (groups that an individual identifies with) and out-groups (groups in which individual does not hold membership), based on their similarities and differences (Turner et al., 1987). To enhance and maintain self-consistency and self-esteem, the individual is motivated to act in accordance with what most clearly represents the group (*prototype*) (Turner et al., 1987). In doing so, individuals exaggerate the differences between in-group and out-groups in ways that improve the evaluation of the in-group compared to the out-group, and subsequently, to improve their own self-evaluation as group members (Turner et al., 1987). These processes make the maintenance and enhancement of self-esteem reliant on group membership (Burke & Stets, 1999). As a result, it is clear that social identity is more than just a label for grouping individuals based on common features; instead, it is an important cognitive categorization that affects feelings, behaviors and mental health of both the individual and the groups involved. While people are typically a part of numerous social categories, some group memberships are often more meaningful for the individual than others in shaping the self-concept (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004). The more central a social identity is to one's self-concept, the more attached the individual's

sense of esteem will be to that group membership (Stryker & Serpe, 1982). Belonging to a social group such as a particular religion, or culture is often an important source of identity and reinforcement to self-esteem.

Religious identity is a specific type of identity formation and one of the most frequently mentioned identities when individuals are asked to describe themselves (Ysseldyk et al., 2010). Religious identity refers to the sense of belonging to a specific religion and the significance of this membership as it affects one's definition of self. The term "religious identity" is often confused with religiosity or religiousness. However, although the terms share some commonalities, they are not the same. Religiousness and religiosity refer to the value of religious group membership for the individual, as well as one's level of participation in religious events. Religious identity, however, refers to the sense of belonging to a religious group and the value it holds in defining the self-concept, regardless of religious participation or activity (Ysseldyk et al., 2010).

Although numerous studies have demonstrated a general positive relation between religious identity and physical and mental health (e.g., George, Larson, Koenig, & McCullough, 2000; Paloutzian & Park, 2005; Spilka, Hood, Hunsberger, & Gorsuch, 2003), studies with immigrant populations have yet to reach a consensus on the effects of religious identity on adjustment. Religious identity seems to play a controversial role in determining the adjustment of immigrants: For many immigrants, religious identity serves as an important source of self-worth, social support, and cultural continuity (Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2002), whereas for others, it acts as a sharp boundary that sets them apart from the mainstream and impedes their adjustment (Friedman & Saroglou, 2010).

While discrimination against certain religious groups and stigmatization account for part of the variability in results, these factors do not completely explain the outcomes. For example, Sirin, Bikmen, and Katsiaficas (2008), in their study of stigmatized adolescent Muslim immigrants in the U.S., concluded that most Muslims found ways to conflate their Muslim and American identities, and only a small percentage experienced identity conflict. Conversely, Friedman and Saroglou (2010) examined this issue with stigmatized Muslim and non-stigmatized Christian immigrants in the highly secularized, society of Belgium. They observed that, for both religious groups, religious identity predicted higher perceived distance between the secular culture of the host society and religious identity and decreased identification with the host culture. These contradictory results suggest that the religion-adjustment link, in the case of immigrants, is more complicated than previously assumed, and more research is needed to identify the moderating variables that influence this relationship. This study addresses this issue and suggests that these contradicting outcomes may be in part due to the unique effects of the intersection of religious and host cultural identities for immigrants.

Despite the apparent need for more investigation in this area, most studies on immigrant religious identity in the U.S. have typically focused on Christian immigrants who share their religious identity with the mainstream society (Gungor et al., 2011). Less is known about religious identity and adjustment among immigrants whose religious worldviews may be in contrast with the mainstream. This study also tries to address this gap by surveying immigrants from different religious backgrounds and comparing whether religious identity predicts adjustment differently among these groups.

For many people, culture is a central element of self-definition and becomes an important source of social identity (Hall & Gay, 1996). Culture refers to the set of beliefs, values, norms and practices that are shared by a group of people often marked by geographical/national boundaries (Matsumoto, 1996). Cultural identity is the feeling of belonging to a particular cultural group and the importance of such membership in defining the self (Hall & Gay, 1996). The dominant culture in a society refers to the established language, behavior, values, rituals, and social customs. For immigrant individuals, the country of origin often represents a different cultural context (i.e., heritage culture) than the culture of the society in which they resettle (i.e., host culture) (Padilla & Perez, 2003). While maintaining one's heritage culture, developing a strong sense of belonging to the host culture (which is possible through integration strategy of acculturation; see Berry, 1980, for a review) has important psychological benefits for immigrants. A strong host cultural identity is associated with enhanced psychological adjustment (e.g., lower depression levels) and less sociocultural adjustment difficulties (Ward & Kennedy, 1994; Yoon, Chang, & Gomez, 2013).

Belonging to a social group, such as religion or culture, often entails positive implications for mental health by providing the individual with a stable sense of meaning and direction (Haslam, Jetten, Postmes, & Haslam, 2009). However, what would happen if an individual belongs to multiple and sometimes clashing social categories? How do people simultaneously relate to two seemingly conflicting religious and cultural norms? How do the prototypes of diverse social groups integrate in shaping one's feelings and behaviors, and what are the unique implications of such integrations for mental health? These questions are the subject of intersectionality research.

Intersectionality Theory: Intersection of Religion and Host Culture

Modern societies provide the chance for individuals to shape their social self by combining a variety of social group memberships in different ways (Dommelen et al. 2015). Intersectionality refers to the integral associations among different group memberships and posits that when various social identities such as social class, culture, and gender unite, they work together to shape meaningfully different experiences (Collins, 1998; Crenshaw, 1991). This conceptualization is different from viewing social identities as independent entities that simply add up to shape experience. This is because experiencing these identities simultaneously often results in “a unique combination of stressors and adaptations related to the simultaneous development and expression of both identities” (Crawford, Allison, Zamboni, & Soto, 2002). These experiences and their psychological implications may not be possibly captured when examining each identity independently. Therefore, it is important for research in psychology to increasingly focus on the interactions between relevant and salient social identities and their joint influences. However, if all possible intersections of identities needed to be examined at all times, the concept of intersectionality would be problematic for research. Nevertheless, it is suggested that there are often few vital identity categories that are adequately strong to interact with other identities, and that researchers should identify and pay careful attention to the joint influences of such key identities. Many studies of intersectionality, for instance, have focused on the integration of race and gender, arguing that gender often carries different meanings for members of different races (e.g., being a Black woman versus a White woman). Also, race/ethnicity may carry different connotations for each gender (e.g., being a Black woman versus a Black man) (Deaux, 2001).

When diverse religious and ethnic groups come together in a society, inter-group conflict may arise as a result of opposing goals, dissimilarities of values and practices, and disagreements about the utilization of resources among these groups (Fiol, Pratt, & O’Conner, 2009; Lau & Murnighan, 1998). Similarly, when an individual feels a sense of belonging to multiple social groups, the feelings, beliefs, values, and actions associated with each of these groups may be perceived as in conflict or harmony with the other. When multiple social identities are viewed as incompatible, it becomes difficult for the individual to identify and act in accordance with both identities simultaneously. Such intra-individual identity conflict tends to require some adjustment on the part of the individual because, at least temporarily, it leads to a psychological imbalance (Haslam et al., 2009). While social psychology pays careful attention to intergroup conflict as an influential source of shaping group and individual behavior, less attention has been given to the intra-individual conflicts that may be experienced as a result of holding multiple social memberships.

Although research on intersectionality in psychology is young and in its early stages (e.g., Cole, 2009), a recent theory of *bicultural identity integration* (BII; Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005) provides a promising basis for further exploration of an intersectional approach. Within the BII framework, *bicultural identity harmony* (*versus conflict*) (Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005) outlines differences in the way individuals affectively manage two cultural identities. It relates to one’s feelings and attitudes toward one’s dual cultures, and refers to the extent to which compatibility versus tension is perceived between the two (e.g., conflict: “I feel like you have to choose one or the other”). Past studies demonstrated that bicultural harmony is valuable in predicting

adjustment. Across various studies, greater cultural harmony predicted greater life satisfaction, enhanced sociocultural adjustment, greater perceived permeability of cultural group boundaries, reduced anxiety, and less depression for bicultural individuals (Cheng, Lee, Benet-Martinez, & Huynh, 2014; Huynh, Nguyen, & Benet-Martinez, 2011; Ward, 2008).

Although BII theory examines individual differences in integrating multiple *cultural* identities, this study attempts to extend the principles of dual cultural identity harmony and test its application to the integration of religious and cultural identities. I based this conceptualization on the assertion that religion could be viewed as a form of culture, as it encompasses a unique system of beliefs, norms and values (Cohen, 2009; Cohen & Hill, 2007). As a distinct culture, religious beliefs, values, and practices may interact with those of the host culture to jointly affect behaviors, feelings, and perceptions (Saroglou & Cohen, 2011) emerging from the conjunction of both religious and cultural identities.

In other words, the rules that apply to the integration of two cultural identities are likely to be applicable to the intersection of religious and cultural identities. By extending BII theory to religion and culture, this study will also examine whether the same predictions for adjustment may be applied to the intersection of religious and cultural identities. I propose that the extent to which the intersection of religious and host cultural identities predicts the adjustment of immigrants depends on individual differences in the perception of tension versus compatibility between these two identities. Specifically, if one's religious identity is perceived as compatible with one's sense of belonging to the host culture, religious-host identity should positively relate to enhanced adjustment.

However, if religious and host culture present two incompatible and conflicting values, beliefs, and practices for the individual, the intersection of these two identities should negatively relate to adjustment. For instance, if a Christian American focused on the joint Christian and American value of honesty, her identification as both Christian and American would predict positive adjustment. However, if this Christian American were to focus on the conflicting values of “turn the other cheek” (Christian) vs. “an eye for an eye” (American), her simultaneous identification as Christian and American would predict negative adjustment.

Past studies have demonstrated that perceived discrimination and lower levels of perceived harmony between dual cultures are negatively related to adjustment in immigrants (Huynh et al., 2011; Kiang, Witkow Thompson, 2016; Liebkind, Jasinskaja-Lahti, Solheim, 2004). Also, ethnic and racial differences have been identified as a possible moderator in the relation between religious identity and mental health (Cokley, Garcia, Hall-Clark, Tran, & Rangel, 2010). This means that different ethnic/racial groups may vary in how religious identity relates to their mental health. For example, mental health for African American and Latino American individuals were found to be influenced more negatively by increases in religious struggle, and more positively by increases in religious engagement compared to their Asian American and European American peers (Cokley et al., 2010). Therefore, in this study, the effects of perceived discrimination, bicultural identity harmony between host and heritage cultures, and ethnicity will be (statistically) controlled for, and I will examine whether the perception of harmony between religious and host cultural identities moderate the relationship between religious-host identity intersection and adjustment controlling for these

previously identified factors. Thus, I would be able to examine the validity of previous research as well as build on its findings. This study examines the American culture as the host culture, hence the terms host culture and American culture are used interchangeably.

The Current Sociopolitical Context of U.S.

Moreover, in this study I will consider immigrants from different religious backgrounds. In doing so, my goal is to examine whether certain religious groups are more likely to perceive more harmony between their religious and American (host) cultural identities. Among different religious groups, currently the sociopolitical atmosphere of the American society is least favorable towards Muslims (Read, 2008). Growing conflicts in the Middle East in the past two decades have empowered Islamic extremism. Terror attacks by Islamic extremist groups, in Western countries including the U.S., has led Muslims to often be negatively portrayed and commonly stereotyped by media as a threatening out-group (Allen, & Nielsen, 2002). Such negative classification has been aggravated in the past few years, and it became most evident in the rhetoric of the recent 2016 presidential election, in which anti-Muslim policies, such as implementing a ban on Muslim immigrations and keeping a registry of all Muslim Americans were put forward (Diamond, 2015).

Conversely, Jews and Christians have historically enjoyed vast popularity in the U.S. This may be explained by the influence of Judeo-Christian values in the formation of traditional American culture, and the impact of a Protestant understanding of scripture in designing the U.S. constitution (Stephens, 2009). These statements do not aim to undermine the fact that Jews have been subject to discrimination and anti-Semitic rhetoric by White supremacy groups in the U.S., such as the Neo-Nazis and the Ku Klux

Klan. For example, in 1978, a Nazi group demonstrated in Skokie, Illinois, intentionally selecting an area heavily populated by Holocaust survivors (Winkler, 2013). Also, more recently, in August of 2017, anti-Semitic ideology resurfaced in the Charlottesville demonstration while marchers defending the legacy of confederacy chanted anti-Jewish slogans and displayed swastikas on banners (Rosenberg, 2017). However, despite anti-Jewish movements, a study by the Pew Research Center (2014) reiterated the immense public endorsement towards Judaism and Christianity, revealing these two religions as the most highly approved faiths for Americans. On the other hand, Islam was found at the bottom of the popularity ladder in the U.S. as the least socially accepted religion, with all other groups, including Buddhists, Hindus, Mormons, and atheists ranking higher than Muslims (Wormald, 2014).

The apparent inter-group conflict between *Muslim* and *American* social classifications is likely to make it more difficult for individuals to find harmony between their dual identities. Whereas in comparison, for religious groups with more societal support, it should be easier to harmonize their religious and host cultural identity. Therefore, my prediction is that for Muslim Americans, inter-group conflicts are likely to contribute to intra-individual conflict, so that it should be more conflicting for Muslim Americans to actively identify and behave in accordance with both Muslim and American identities, than for Jews, Christians, and members of other religious groups who rank higher in public approval and popularity in the U.S. (Wormald, 2014). Therefore, Muslims should be more likely to perceive lower harmony between their religious and American identities (at least compared to other religious groups). If this hypothesis is

supported, it implies that social and inter-group conflict may contribute to increased intra-individual conflict. In summary, this study will involve two hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1. Perceived harmony (versus conflict) between religious identity and host cultural identity moderates the joint effects of these identities on adjustment, beyond the effects of ethnicity, perceived religious and ethnic discrimination, and perceived bicultural identity harmony, such that:

When religious-host harmony is high, the intersection of religious and host identities positively predicts adjustment, but when religious-host harmony is low (i.e., high perceived conflict), the intersection of these two identities is negatively associated with adjustment.

Hypothesis 2. Muslims are more likely to perceive lower harmony between religious and host cultural identities compared to other religious groups, especially Christians and Jews.

CHAPTER 2

METHOD

Participants

Participants were recruited based on several criteria: immigrants currently living in the U.S. for at least five years, who reported high levels of English fluency, and identified with one of these three religious groups: Muslim, Christian, or Jewish. I collected data from 245 participants, from which 13 individuals did not meet one or more of the aforementioned criteria and had to be excluded. The remaining 232 participants were included in the analyses. From these participants, 97 were Christian, 73 were Jewish, and 62 were Muslim (see Table 1 for descriptive statistics for age, gender, and country of birth by religion). In terms of ethnicity, 76 participants identified as White/European, 64 as Middle Eastern, 35 as Asian/Pacific Islander, 15 as African American, and 18 identified as “other”. The sample was 57.32% male with ages ranging from 19 to 72 years ($M = 30.74$, $SD = 7.96$). Participants had lived an average of 19.08 years ($SD = 10.71$) in the U.S.

Measures

Identity-Related Variables

Intersection of religious and American (host) identities. Participants rated the strength of their identification with religious and American identities by responding to three questions adapted from Benet-Martinez and Haritatos (2005). Responses were

measured on a 5-point scale and ranged from 1 (*very weakly identified*) to 5 (*very highly identified*):

- 1) How much do you identify with mainstream U.S. culture?
- 2) How much do you identify with [name of religion]?
- 3) How much do you identify as a [name of religious identity] American?

In addition, the centrality subscale was utilized from Cameron's (2004) multidimensional conceptualization of social identity to further obtain a psychological assessment of religious and American identities. The centrality subscale measures the amount of time spent thinking about being a group member as an indicator of the importance of a social identity in shaping one's self-image. The centrality subscale consists of seven items such as "Being a Muslim is an important reflection of who I am" and "The fact that I am a Muslim hardly enters my mind" (reversed-coded). Participants responded to the centrality subscale separately for religious identity ($\alpha = .67$), and American identity ($\alpha = .87$), and religious-American identity ($\alpha = .88$). I computed identity scores by calculating the mean of strength and centrality subscales for each identity. I multiplied the religious and American identity scores to create an intersecting identity variable (religious-American identity intersection).

Perceived harmony between religious identity and host cultural identity. The Harmony Subscale of Bicultural Identity Integration Scale-Version 2 (BIIS-2; Huynh, Benet-Martinez, & Nguyen, 2017) ($\alpha = .92$) was adapted to measure the perceived harmony between religious and host cultural identities. Specifically, religious identity replaced ethnic cultural identity (e.g., "I feel caught between Muslim and American cultures"). The adapted scale asked participants to rate 10 statements regarding their

experience of harmony and conflict between religious and American cultures on a 5-point response scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The scale scores were computed by reverse scoring the conflict items and calculating the mean.

Adjustment Variables

Depressive symptoms and anxiety. The participants completed the Patient-Reported Objective Measurement Information System (PROMIS) short-form instruments for anxiety (seven items; e.g., “I felt fearful”; $\alpha = .95$) and depression (28 items; e.g., “I felt worthless”; $\alpha = .98$) (Cella et al., 2010). PROMIS surveys use a seven-day recall period and utilize a 5-point scale (1 = *never*; 2 = *rarely*; 3 = *sometimes*; 4 = *often*; and 5 = *always*). The raw scores for each scale were summed to obtain a total raw score, with higher scores indicating greater severity of anxiety or depression.

Socio-cultural adjustment. The Revised Socio-Cultural Adaptation Scale consisting of 20 items (SCAS-R); ($\alpha = .96$) asks participants about their life in the U.S. and rate their level of competence in a list of behaviors (e.g., “interacting at social events”) with response categories ranging from (1 = *not at all competent*; 5 = *extremely competent*) (Wilson, 2013). The raw scores were summed to obtain a total raw score, with higher scores indicating higher levels of socio-cultural adjustment.

Self-Esteem. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE; $\alpha = .90$) asks participants to rate their level of agreement with 10 statements (e.g., “on the whole, I am satisfied with myself”) on a 5-point response scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) (Rosenberg, 1965). The scale scores were computed by adding all the individual items after reverse-scoring the negatively worded items.

Life satisfaction. The Satisfaction with Life Scale ($\alpha = .92$) consists of five items (e.g., “in most ways my life is close to my ideal”) and it asks the participants to rate their level of agreement with each item on a 5-point response scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). The raw scores were added to obtain a total raw score, with higher scores indicating higher levels of life satisfaction.

Control Variables

Bicultural identity harmony. The Harmony Subscale of BIIS-2 ($\alpha = .91$) consisting of 10 items was used to measure the perceived harmony between heritage and host cultural identities (e.g., “I feel caught between Arab and American cultures”) (Huynh & Benet-Martinez, Nguyen, 2017). Participants rated 10 statements regarding their experience of harmony and conflict between heritage and host (American) cultures on a 5-point response scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The scale scores were computed by reverse scoring the conflict items and calculating the mean.

Perceived ethnic and religious discrimination. The extent of perceived religious and ethnic discrimination was measured using an adaptation of Noh and Kaspar’s (2003) seven-item scale, as utilized by Jasperse, Ward, and Jose (2011) ($\alpha = .93$). The adapted scale consists of eight items (e.g., “you are treated as inferior”). Each item was asked twice (once for race/ethnicity, once for religion), and the responses were coded on a scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*all of the time*). Mean scores on the 8 items were used to measure levels of perceived discrimination, with high scores indicating higher levels of perceived discrimination.

Demographics. The demographics questionnaire asked respondents for basic background information, including gender, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, religious affiliation, country of birth for respondent, respondent's mother, and respondent's father, and years spent in the U.S. and in other countries.

Procedure

Participants meeting study criteria (i.e., immigrants, with high level of English fluency, and members of a religious group) were recruited via an online survey tool, the Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Amazon Mechanical Turk is a cloud-based data platform which connects the people who need to get tasks done (requesters) to the people who are willing to do it (workers). This study was posted as a task on MTurk with a set amount of reward (\$2) and a time limit to complete (40 mins). The workers could review this task, and if they met the required criteria (i.e., U.S. immigrant and member of a religious group), they could volunteer to complete it. Once participants chose to partake in the study, they were led to another website (i.e., Qualtrics) where they could complete the surveys. It took an average of 13.65 minutes ($SD = 8.03$) for participants to complete the survey. Once the work was completed and approved, Amazon released the money from the requester's account into the worker's account.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

As preliminary analysis, I examined bicultural identity harmony, perceived discrimination, ethnicity, years lived in the U.S., and religious group as possible covariates of adjustment. Only perceived discrimination and bicultural identity harmony exhibited significant correlations (Table 2) with adjustment and were entered as control variables in the multiple regression analyses.

I conducted several multiple regression analyses to test the first hypothesis, which proposed the moderating effect of religious-American harmony on the relation between religious-American identity intersection and adjustment. I used religious-American identity intersection as the predictor in these regression models. I examined the moderating effect of religious-American harmony using an interaction term created by centering the predictor and the moderator, and multiplying these centered variables. I conducted a separate regression analysis for each of the adjustment variables (i.e., satisfaction with life, self-esteem, socio-cultural adjustment, depression, and anxiety) through the following steps: I entered the control variables first, followed by the centered predictor variables, followed by the centered moderator variable, and I entered the interaction term in the final step.

Results from correlation and regression analyses demonstrated that religious-American identity intersection had positive relationships with adjustment before

considering the moderation effects of religious-American harmony. In other words, overall, strong identification with both religious and American identities predicted improved adjustment outcomes. Moreover, as partial support for the first hypothesis, I found that religious-American harmony moderated the relationship between religious-American identity and anxiety (Table 3), and satisfaction with life (Table 4), beyond the effects of perceived discrimination and bicultural identity harmony. No significant moderating effect of religious-American harmony was found for depression (Table 5), self-esteem (Table 6), or socio-cultural adjustment (Table 7).

To examine the ways in which religious-American harmony moderates the relationship between religious-American identity intersection and anxiety, and the relationship between religious-American identity intersection and satisfaction with life, simple slope analyses were performed for each of these criterion variables. Contrary to expected, results revealed that at high levels of religious-American harmony, religious-American identity did not significantly predict anxiety [$t(232) = 0.19, p = 0.85$] or satisfaction with life [$t(231) = 1.46, p = 0.15$]. However, at mean levels of religious-American harmony, religious-American identity significantly predicted higher anxiety [$t(232) = -2.55, p = 0.01$] and lower satisfaction with life [$t(231) = 3.99, p = 1 \times 10^{-3}$]. Also, as hypothesized, at low levels of religious-American harmony, religious-American identity significantly predicted higher anxiety [$t(232) = -3.59, p = 1 \times 10^{-3}$] and lower satisfaction with life [$t(231) = 4.19, p = 1 \times 10^{-3}$].

In summary, the results of slope analyses revealed that when a low level of harmony (i.e., conflict) is perceived between religious and American identities, a strong intersecting religious-American identity predicts increased symptoms of anxiety and

decreased levels of satisfaction with life. This correlation also holds for mean levels of religious-American harmony. However, when a high level of harmony is perceived between religious and American identities, religious-American identity intersection did not significantly predict anxiety or satisfaction with life.

To test the second hypothesis, I conducted a contrast analysis to determine whether Muslim Americans are more likely to perceive lower harmony between religious and American cultural identities compared to Christians and Jews (Muslim: $\lambda = -2$, Christian: $\lambda = +1$, and Jewish: $\lambda = +1$). In support of this hypothesis, planned contrasts revealed that Muslims were more likely to perceive lower harmony between religious and American cultural identities ($N = 61$, $M = 3.24$, $SD = 0.91$) compared to Christians ($N = 94$, $M = 3.80$, $SD = 0.90$) and Jews ($N = 70$, $M = 3.65$, $SD = 0.8$), $t(229) = 3.68$, $p = 2.92 \times 10^{-4}$, $r = .22$ (small-to-moderate effect).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Age and Frequency of Gender and Country of Birth Categories for Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Participants

	Christian	Muslim	Jewish
Age			
<i>M</i>	31.06	29.50	31.37
<i>SD</i>	7.40	7.66	8.87
Range	19-55	19-60	20-72
Gender			
Male	57	38	38
Female	40	23	34
Other	0	1	1
Country of Birth			
Afghanistan	3	12	2
Albania	0	2	0
Algeria	0	2	0
Argentina	0	0	1
Armenia	0	0	1
Australia	3	0	2
Austria	0	0	1
Bangladesh	0	2	0
Belarus	0	0	1
Belize	0	1	0
Bosnia and Herzegovina	0	2	1
Canada	7	1	2
China	6	1	0
Colombia	2	0	0
Cuba	1	0	0
Dominican Republic	1	0	0
Egypt	2	3	0
France	0	1	1
Germany	6	1	4
Ghana	0	0	1
Greece	0	0	1
Guyana	2	0	0
Honduras	1	0	0
Hungary	1	0	1
India	3	2	0
Indonesia	1	2	0
Iran	0	2	0
Iraq	0	4	0
Ireland	1	0	0
Israel	1	2	34
Italy	4	0	1
Jamaica	3	0	0
Japan	1	0	0

Table 1, *cont.*

	Christian	Muslim	Jewish
Country of Birth			
Jordan	1	2	0
Kenya	2	0	0
Korea, South	2	0	0
Malaysia	0	1	0
Mexico	11	0	0
Morocco	0	1	0
Nicaragua	1	0	0
Niger	1	0	0
Nigeria	0	1	0
Pakistan	1	2	0
Panama	1	0	0
Peru	0	0	1
Philippines	5	1	0
Poland	0	0	2
Portugal	1	0	0
Romania	1	0	0
Russia	1	0	3
Saudi Arabia	1	3	1
Somalia	0	1	0
South Africa	0	0	1
Spain	1	0	1
Sweden	3	0	1
Switzerland	1	0	1
Syria	1	2	0
Thailand	1	0	0
Turkey	0	2	0
Ukraine	1	0	4
United Arab Emirates	0	1	0
United Kingdom	7	4	4
Venezuela	1	0	0
Vietnam	3	0	0
Yemen	0	1	0

Table 2. Correlation Matrix

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Discrimination	.46	.87									
2. Bicultural Harmony	2.47	.85	0.18**								
3. Religious-American Identity	.00	4.22	0.07	-0.27**							
4. Religious-American Harmony	.00	.91	-0.14*	-0.72**	0.36**						
5. Depression	1.77	.90	0.22**	0.44**	-0.29**	-0.43**					
6. Anxiety	1.86	.94	0.19**	0.36**	-0.22**	-0.36**	0.82**				
7. Self-esteem	3.10	.63	-0.14*	-0.49**	0.29**	0.45**	-0.67**	-0.55**			
8. Life Satisfaction	5.02	1.33	-0.04	-0.24**	0.29**	0.24**	-0.54**	-0.53**	0.46**		
9. Socio-cultural Adjustment	3.93	.72	-0.10	-0.46**	0.31**	0.43**	-0.51**	-0.39**	0.49**	0.33**	
10. Years lived in U.S.	19.98	10.75	-0.02	-0.14*	0.10	0.19**	-0.06	-0.08	0.11	0.01	0.11

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

Table 3. Regression Model Predicting Anxiety

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Model 1: $R^2 = .14$, $F(2, 229) = 19.38$, $p = 1.68 \times 10^{-8}$			
Discrimination	.13	.07	.12*
Bicultural Harmony	.38	.07	.34***
Model 2: $\Delta R^2 = .03$, $F(2, 227) = 4.73$, $p = 0.01$			
Discrimination	.15	.07	.13*
Bicultural Harmony	.21	.10	.19*
Religious-American Identity	-.03	.02	-.13
Religious-American Harmony	-.17	.09	-.16
Model 3: $\Delta R^2 = .03$, $F(1, 226) = 9.37$, $p = 2 \times 10^{-3}$			
Discrimination	.14	.07	.13*
Bicultural Harmony	.21	.10	.19*
Religious-American Identity	-.04	.02	-.17*
Religious-American Harmony	-.19	.09	-.18*
Interaction (Religious-American Identity x Religious-American Harmony)	.04	.02	.19**

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

Table 4. Regression Model Predicting Satisfaction with Life

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Model 1: $R^2 = .06$, $F(2, 228) = 6.98$, $p = 1 \times 10^{-3}$			
Discrimination	.01	.10	.01
Bicultural Harmony	-.38	.10	-.24****
Model 2: $\Delta R^2 = .06$, $F(2, 226) = 7.35$, $p = 1 \times 10^{-3}$			
Discrimination	-.04	.10	-.02
Bicultural Harmony	-.21	.14	-.13
Religious-American Identity	.08	.02	.24**
Religious-American Harmony	.08	.14	.06
Model 3: $\Delta R^2 = .02$, $F(1, 225) = 6.07$, $p = .01$			
Discrimination	-.03	.10	-.02
Bicultural Harmony	-.21	.14	-.13
Religious-American Identity	.09	.02	.27****
Religious-American Harmony	.10	.13	.07
Interaction (Religious-American Identity x Religious-American Harmony)	-.05	.02	-.16*

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

Table 5. Regression Model Predicting Depression

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Model 1: $R^2 = .22$, $F(1, 229) = 31.95$, $p = 5.75 \times 10^{-13}$			
Discrimination	.15	.06	.14*
Bicultural Harmony	.45	.06	.42***
Model 2: $\Delta R^2 = .05$, $F(2, 227) = 7.75$, $p = 5.54 \times 10^{-4}$			
Discrimination	.17	.06	.16**
Bicultural Harmony	.27	.09	.25**
Religious-American Identity	-.04	.01	-.17**
Religious-American Harmony	-.16	.08	-.16
Model 3: $\Delta R^2 = .01$, $F(1, 226) = 3.28$, $p = .07$			
Discrimination	.17	.06	.16**
Bicultural Harmony	.27	.09	.25**
Religious-American Identity	-.04	.01	-.20**
Religious-American Harmony	-.17	.08	-.17*
Interaction (Religious-American Identity x Religious-American Harmony)	.02	.01	.11

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

Table 6. Regression Model Predicting Self-esteem

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Model 1: $R^2 = .25$, $F(2, 229) = 37.43$, $p = 8.62 \times 10^{-15}$			
Discrimination	-.04	.04	-.06
Bicultural Harmony	-.36	.04	-.48***
Model 2: $\Delta R^2 = .04$, $F(2, 227) = 6.08$, $p = 3 \times 10^{-3}$			
Discrimination	-.05	.04	-.07
Bicultural Harmony	-.25	.06	-.34***
Religious-American Identity	.02	.01	.16*
Religious-American Harmony	.09	.06	.14
Model 3: $\Delta R^2 = 5.34 \times 10^{-4}$, $F(1, 226) = .17$, $p = .68$			
Discrimination	-.05	.04	-.07
Bicultural Harmony	-.25	.06	-.34***
Religious-American Identity	.02	.01	.15*
Religious-American Harmony	.09	.06	.13
Interaction (Religious-American Identity x Religious-American Harmony)	.00	.01	.02

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

Table 7. Regression Model Predicting Socio-cultural Adjustment

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Model 1: $R^2 = .21, F(2, 228) = 30.39, p = 1.99 \times 10^{-12}$			
Discrimination	-.02	.05	-.02
Bicultural Harmony	-.39	.05	-.46***
Model 2: $\Delta R^2 = .05, F(2, 226) = 7.33, p = 8.19 \times 10^{-4}$			
Discrimination	-.03	.05	-.04
Bicultural Harmony	-.26	.07	-.30***
Religious-American Identity	.03	.01	.18**
Religious-American Harmony	.11	.07	.14
Model 3: $\Delta R^2 = 4.69 \times 10^{-4}, F(1, 225) = .14, p = .71$			
Discrimination	-.03	.05	-.04
Bicultural Harmony	-.26	.07	-.30***
Religious-American Identity	.03	.01	.18**
Religious-American Harmony	.11	.07	.13
Interaction (Religious-American Identity x Religious-American Harmony)	.00	.01	.02

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

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

In the present study, I investigated the possible moderating effect of perceived religious-American harmony on the relationship between religious-American identity and adjustment in immigrants. I also compared immigrants from three different religious groups (i.e., Muslim, Christian, and Jewish) in terms of their perception of harmony between their religious and American identities. Results revealed positive correlations between intersecting religious-American identities and adjustment, suggesting that overall, strong religious-American identity is associated with enhanced adjustment. Moreover, partially supporting my first hypothesis, religious-American identity predicted increased symptoms of anxiety and decreased satisfaction with life when immigrants perceived their religious and American identities to be neutral or conflictual, but not when they perceived those identities to be harmonious. Furthermore, supporting the second hypothesis, Muslims perceived less harmony between their religious and American cultures compared to Christian and Jewish immigrants. However, Christian and Jewish immigrants were not significantly different in terms of their perceived religious-American harmony.

Moderating Effect of Religious-American Harmony

Based on my findings, there are positive relationships between religious-American identity intersection and adjustment; however, the direction and magnitude of

this relationship depends on the degree of religious-American harmony perceived. When the two identities are perceived as harmonious, adjustment is not predicted by the strength of religious-American identity. However, when the two identities are viewed as in conflict or lacking harmony, adjustment is negatively related to religious-American identity. This outcome may be particularly significant for immigrants who are highly exposed to the challenge of integrating numerous existing subgroup identities with new evolving identities associated with their host culture (Dommelen et al., 2015). Future studies are required to examine the generalizability of this relationship to populations other than immigrants.

These findings build on and expand the findings of past research indicating that perceived *bicultural* harmony predicted greater life satisfaction, enhanced sociocultural adjustment, greater perceived permeability of cultural group boundaries, reduced anxiety, and less depression for bicultural individuals (Cheng et al., 2014; Huynh et al., 2011; Ward, 2008). This study expanded past findings with perceived harmony to religious and host cultural identities, and revealed the important moderating role for this variable on the intersection of religious and host identities and adjustment. Future research should further examine the way perceived harmony may impact the intersection of other social identities and its relation to mental health and sociocultural adjustment.

Moreover, this study can help explain contradicting results from past research regarding the role of religious identity for immigrants' adjustment. Although myriad studies have established a general positive relation between religious identity and physical and mental health (e.g., George et al., 2000; Paloutzian & Park, 2005; Spilka et al., 2003), studies with immigrant populations have indicated a controversial role for

religious identity in predicting adjustment: For many immigrants, religious identity served as an important source of self-worth, social support, and cultural continuity (Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2002), whereas for others, it acted as a sharp boundary that set them apart from the mainstream and impeded their adjustment (Friedman & Saroglou, 2010). This study suggests that these mixed findings may be due to differences in perceived religious-American harmony. It could be that participants in the first set of studies (positive relation) had high religious-American harmony, whereas those in the second set (negative relation) had low religious-American harmony. Past studies concerning religious identity and adjustment have failed to examine religious-American harmony as a possible moderating factor in this equation. Future research on this topic may help clarify past findings by accounting for religious-American harmony. To the best of my knowledge, this study is the first to introduce an individual difference variable (i.e., religious-American harmony) as a moderating factor in the relation between religion and adjustment for immigrants. This is important as a possible explanation for inconsistent findings of past research on this population with regards to religion and well-being.

Differences in Religious-American Harmony by Religion

As for my second hypothesis, this study examined immigrants from three different religious groups (i.e., Muslim, Christian, and Jewish). In doing so, my goal was to examine whether certain religious groups were more likely to perceive more harmony between their religious and American identities. Considering that these religious groups are greatly different in terms of their approval rate and popularity, with Muslims being subject to higher levels of disapproval and discrimination in the current sociopolitical atmosphere of the U.S. (Read, 2008), I predicted that Muslims would be more likely to

perceive lower harmony between their religious and American cultural identities compared to Christians and Jews. Congruent with my hypothesis, Christian and Jews were not significantly different from each other in terms of perceived religious-American harmony, but Muslims perceived less religious-American harmony compared to the other two groups.

A possible explanation for this finding is that the existing inter-group conflicts in society may contribute to intra-individual (i.e., perceived) conflict. In comparison to Christian and Jewish individuals who enjoy a more favorable social status, Muslims who rank lower in public approval and who are subject to more intergroup conflicts in the U.S. (Read, 2008; Wormald, 2014) may find it more difficult to actively identify and behave in accordance with both Muslim and American identities.

Limitations, and Future Directions

This study exclusively examined foreign-born participants, with at least five years of residency in the U.S., who were highly fluent in English. As a result, such a specific sample makes generalization of findings to other populations rather difficult. Nevertheless, due to the homogeneity of my sample, I was able to control for possible confounding factors (country of birth, language fluency). Future studies should try to replicate these findings with other samples differing in country of birth and residence, and with different language fluencies.

Moreover, when comparing different religious groups in terms of religious-American harmony, this study measures religion as a categorical variable (i.e., Christian, Jewish, Muslim) rather than as a continuous variable (e.g., “how Christian are you?”) without recognizing within-group differences (e.g., different Christian denominations,

etc.). Future studies on this subject should examine religion as a continuous variable, or study within-group differences. Nevertheless, this study included Muslims, whereas most past research on the subject has been focused on Christian Americans.

Furthermore, participants were recruited online, via Amazon MTurk. Using MTurk has been the subject of debates in the past: Some studies have questioned the reliability of data collected from this resource (e.g., Rouse, 2015). For example, in this study there were no available protocols to determine whether participants actually belonged to the religious or cultural groups indicated in their answers. There is a possibility that participants may have responded to how they assumed immigrants or Muslims should respond to certain questions. However, this study relies on the myriad of research that have found no significant difference between results obtained from MTurk compared to those obtained from in-person recruiting and other online methods (e.g., Bartneck, Duenser, Moltchanova, & Zawieska, 2015; Mullinix, Leeper, Druckman, Freese, 2015) and have recommended MTurk as a viable and economical option for recruiting participants and for conducting studies. Utilizing MTurk provided this study with an efficient platform for recruiting a large number of participants meeting the study criteria, which could otherwise be very expensive and extremely time-consuming to reach. Future research may examine these findings when data are collected via other methods (in person).

Last but not least, the current study is a correlational one, in which no causal claims can be made about the relationship between the variables. For example, contrary to my explanations, it is possible that enhanced adjustment actually causes a stronger

sense of identification with both religion and host culture (and not the other way around). Future studies should examine causality using experimental research designs.

In summary, individual differences in the perception of harmony between religious and American identity is an important factor in determining how these identities jointly relate to adjustment in immigrants. Intersecting religious-American identities predicted decreased adjustment when these identities were perceived to be in conflict or lacking harmony. When the perception of harmony between two fundamental sources of social identity (i.e., religious and American identity) is at or below average, there is a negative relation between religious-American identity and adjustment (i.e., anxiety and satisfaction with life). This finding is important in terms of expanding the results of previous research with perceived harmony between ethnic and host cultures to harmony between religion and host culture and how these factors relate to adjustment, it also helps explain the mixed findings on religious identity and adjustment in studies with immigrants. Moreover, results revealed that Muslims are more likely than Christians and Jewish individuals to perceive low harmony between their religious and American identities. This bears important implications for the psychosocial adjustment for immigrants.

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