

Race and Religion as Moderators of Perceived Friendliness

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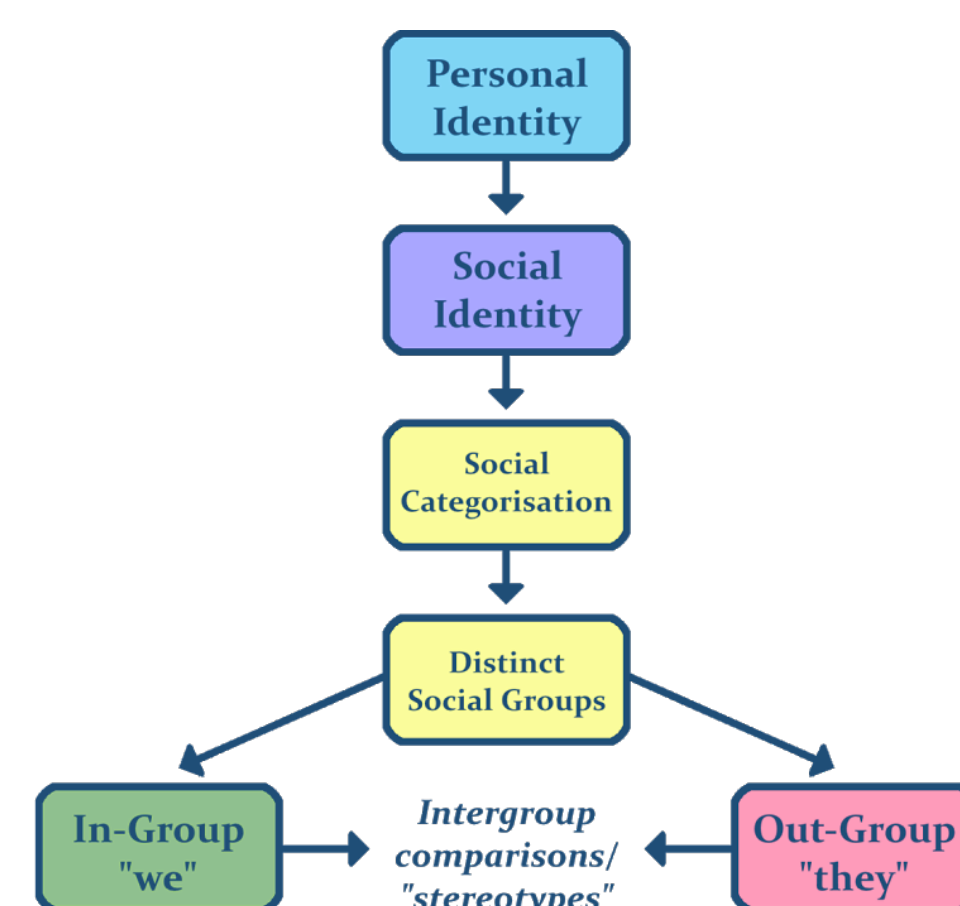
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INTRODUCTION

Islamophobia is the dislike of or prejudice against Muslims or the Islamic faith. To what extent does this sentiment exist at a religiously-affiliated liberal arts institution in Southern California?

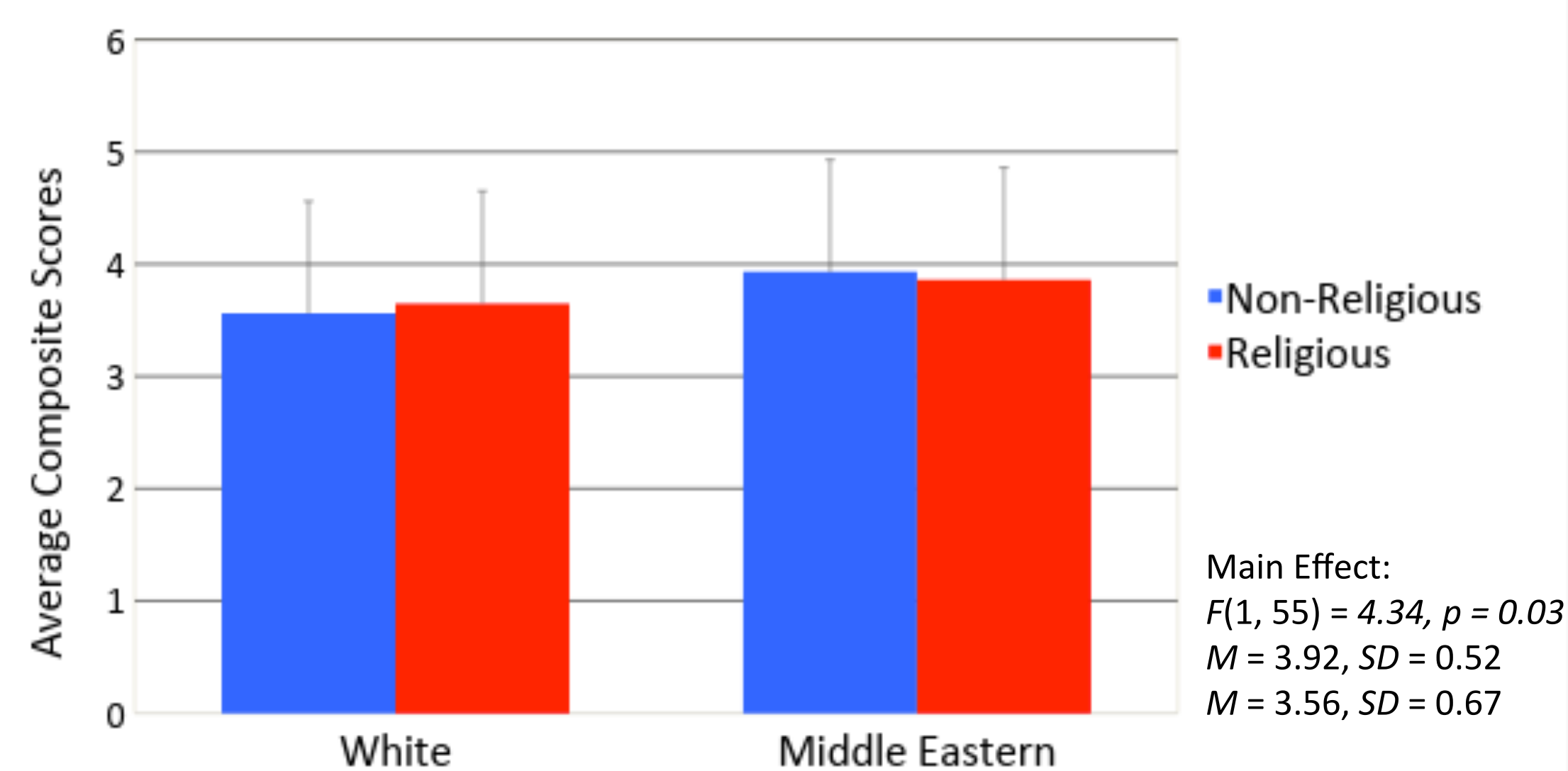
Tajfel's Social Identity Theory (1979)



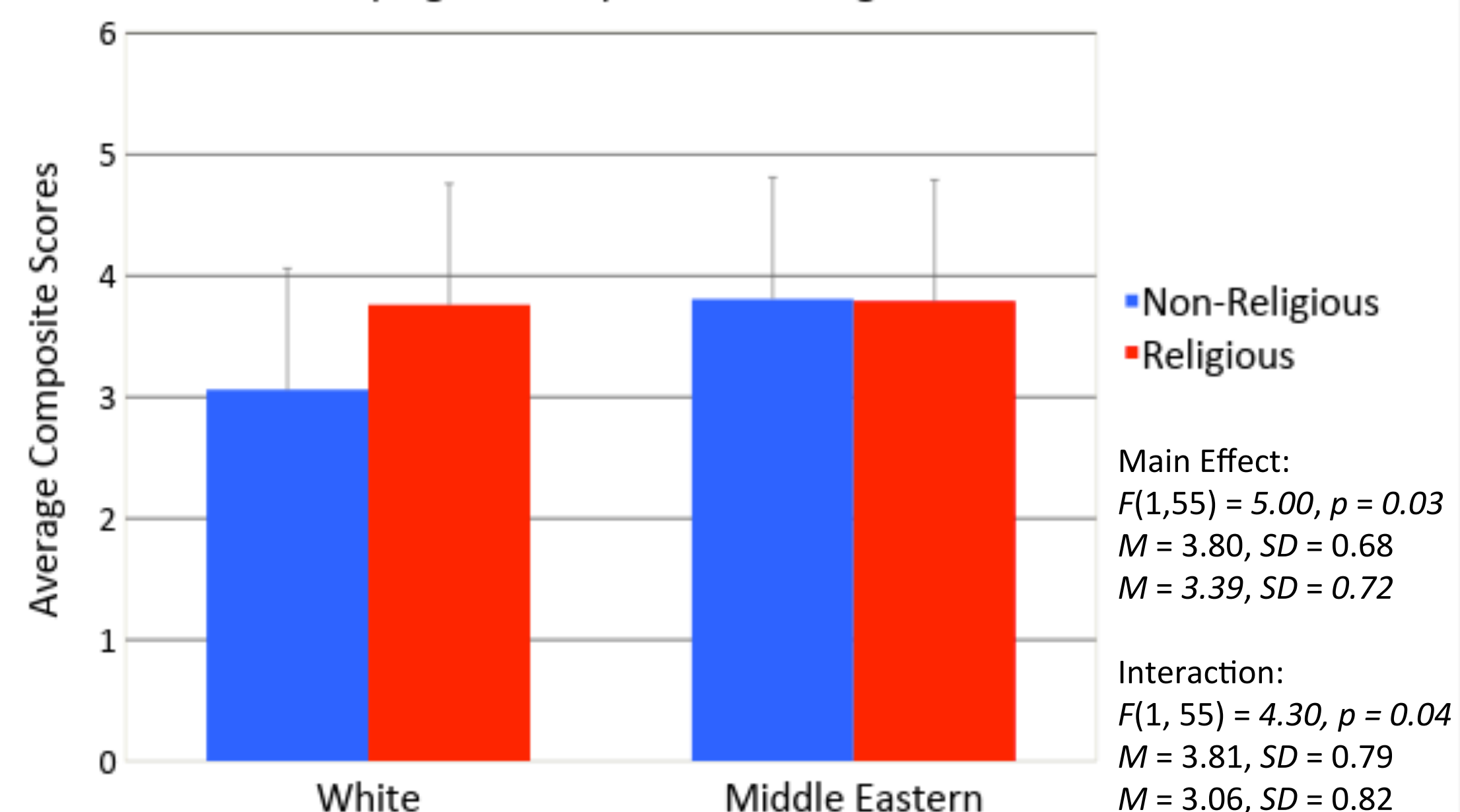
Many studies have shown that racial biases are implicitly pro-white (Richeson & Nussbaum, 2004; Saleem & Anderson, 2013), and research by Negy et al. (2003) demonstrated that the more Whites and Hispanics identified with their in-group, the more negative their views toward the out-group. Research has also shown that many hold positive associations with religion (Leffel, 2011; Cook, Borman, Moore & Kunkel, 2000), but that individuals with high levels of religiosity typically also show high in-group favoritism and high out-group negativity (Johnson, Rowatt, & LaBouff, 2011). Since race and religion often co-occur, the aim of the present study was to determine both the joint and separate effects of these variables on attitudes toward others.

RESULTS

Attitude Scores by Race and Religion



Helping Scores by Race and Religion



CURRENT RESEARCH

USD is a Catholic-affiliated institution, with limited diversity. Therefore, it is possible that social identity processes might reinforce a pro-White and pro-Catholic bias. However, the institutional environment stresses acceptance and tolerance and offers many diversity promoting experiences, which may reduce negative out-group attitudes. The current study will examine the role that race (White, or Middle Eastern) and religious affiliation (religious or not religious) may have on people's perceptions of individuals.

The **primary hypothesis** is that there will be a main effect of race, such that the White individual will be rated more positively than the Middle Eastern individual.

The **secondary hypothesis** is that the participants will rate the White, religious figure most positively on all measures and Middle Eastern, religious figure most negatively on all measures, signifying an interaction between race and religion in shaping perception of individuals.

Because race and religion tend to co-occur, the manipulation of religious affiliation was not fully crossed.

METHOD

Undergraduate students (N=60, 51 female, M=21.5 years) at the University of San Diego participated in this study.

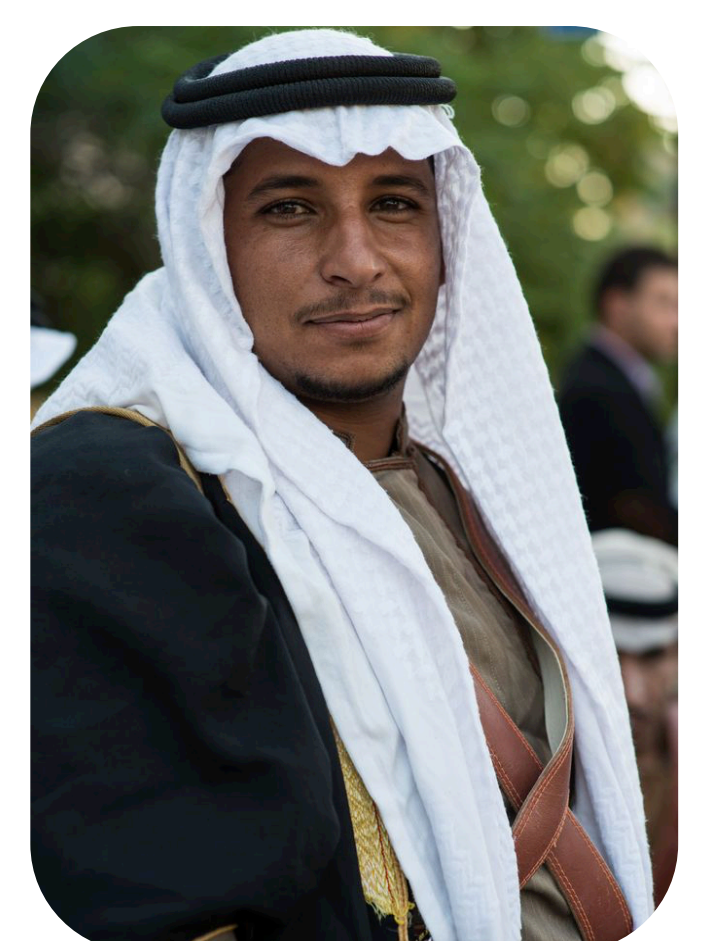
45 participants were White, 6 were Hispanic, 4 were Middle Eastern, 2 were Black, and 2 were Asian.

Procedure. Students were presented with one image and description (see below) and completed the seven-item attitude measure, the Target Attitude Indices Questionnaire (Tormala & Petty, 2001) and a five-item helping measure from Stein (1966).

Stimuli.



Condition 1: This is Jason, a 35-year old man.
Condition 2: This is Jason, a 35-year old Catholic man.



Condition 3: This is Yesoph, a 35-year old man.
Condition 4: This is Yesoph, a 35-year old Muslim man.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings were **inconsistent with the hypotheses** as well as with previous research.

Attitude. The statistical tests revealed that there was no main effect of religious description on attitude ratings but there was a main effect of race, such that the Middle eastern individual had higher overall attitude ratings. There was also a marginally significant interaction such that the non-religious, Middle Eastern man was rated most positively.

Helping. Tests also reveal no significant effects of religious description on helping ratings, but show a significant effect of racial appearance on helping ratings, such that the Middle Eastern individual was rated more positively. There was a significant interaction between racial appearance and religious description where the non-religious Middle Eastern man was rated most positively.

Thus, the individuals in this study showed a pattern of out-group positivity which was unexpected based on past research. While it may be tempting to infer that USD students, perhaps based on self-selection or as a result of being provided with a liberal arts education are able to more positively perceive out-group characteristics, caution in interpretation is warranted based on several confounds.

Limitations and Future Directions. This study used two different men, whose appearance could have impacted the perception of participants in addition to the intended manipulation of race and religion. For example, differences in age, attractiveness, posture or other factors might be confounded with the results. Religion was also confounded with race, making it difficult to interpret the effect of religious affiliation and race separately on ratings. In order to more fully explore this issues, future studies should therefore focus on eliminating these confounds and use a fully crossed design (i.e. White Muslim and Catholic Middle Easterner). Increasing the demographic diversity of the sample would be helpful along with exploring participants' religious affiliation.

Conclusion. Research on the interaction between race and religion remains important, in light of the increasing evidence for mistreatment of Muslims and misunderstandings associated with the Islamic religion. While more research is required, the results from this study are promising and suggest that not all individuals show strong negative attitudes toward Muslim, Middle Eastern individuals.

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