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Arab American College Students: What Predicts Their Engagement with the Israeli/Palestinian Conflict?

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Abstract

Arab and Jewish U.S. college students are impacted by the Israeli/Palestinian (I/P) conflict and heated interactions among students have erupted across campuses. There is a dearth of research on Arab American student perspectives on this conflict and on their interactions with Jewish students in higher education settings. This study seeks to further our understanding of these topics by reporting on a quantitative survey of Arab American college students (n=66). We examined dependent variables of Arab students seeking education on the I/P conflict, and interest in collaborating with Jewish students for peace. Independent variables were gender, religion, having Jewish friends, learning about Jewish history of oppression, growing up in Arab schools and communities, and parents' and own views about Palestine. Multiple regression analysis indicates being male, believing Palestine is important, learning about Jewish history of oppression, and having parents with pro-Palestinian and anti-Israel attitudes predicted students' seeking out education about the conflict. Being male, Christian, having friends who are Jewish and wanting opportunities to talk with Jews about the conflict predicted higher interest in Arab students' wanting to collaborate with Jewish students for peace. Implications for working with these two groups on college campuses given both the tensions in the Middle East and experiences of Arab American college students are discussed and future recommendations are made for educational settings.

Keywords: *Arab American; college; Palestinian; Israeli; collaboration*

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Adrienne Dessel, PhD, LMSW (RIP) was the Associate Director of the Program on Intergroup Relations (IGR) at the University of Michigan. She had 20 years of experience providing clinical and community based services to diverse client populations and organizations. Adrienne taught courses on intergroup dialogue, intergroup relations, global conflict and coexistence, and conducted research on intergroup dialogue processes and outcomes, most recently on topics of religion, Arab/Jewish conflict, and sexual/relational orientation. Her publications on intergroup relations and dialogue, and more information about IGR, can be found at http://www.igr.umich.edu. May her memory be a motivator for all the people who knew her. She believed most of all in humanity and in working for peace.

Noor Ali is a consultant who specializes in facilitator trainings and workshops on social identity, group dynamics, multipartiality, and intersectionality. Noor previously served as the Assistant Director for Social Justice Education at Northwestern University, and as Program Manager in the Program on Intergroup Relations at the University of Michigan. Noor's research focuses on Arab-Jewish dialogue and its impact on student experiences. She has published 5 articles and has done a number of national presentations on the topic. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology from Loyola University in Chicago and a Masters in Social Work from the University of Michigan's School of Social Work.

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The Israeli/Palestinian (I/P) conflict remains unresolved, and this political tension affects Arab young adults not only in Israel and Palestine but in the United States as well (Hahn Tapper, 2011). Arab college students in the U.S. are historically connected to this conflict in several different ways, through the binary system perpetuated by the conflict for those who are of Muslim or Christian descent, as well as for those who may be Arab Jews. Many Palestinians immigrated to the United States due to the difficulty of living in Israel, the West Bank, or Gaza (Abu El-Haj, 2007; Nassar-McMillan, Ajrouch, & Hakim-Larson, 2013; Suleiman, 1999). Expulsion of Palestinians from Israel, as well as persecution, brought refugees to the U.S. (Alfaro-Velkamp, 2011; Naber, 2008; Seikaly, 1999) and many youths continue to go back and forth between Palestine and the U.S. while growing up, maintaining strong connections to their homeland and aspirations for a national state (Abu El-Haj, 2007, 2010). Large numbers of Lebanese (including Palestinian Lebanese) also immigrated to the U.S. following the civil war and Israeli invasion of Lebanon (Ajrouch, 2000).

Arab Americans in the U.S. are diverse in ethnicity and religion (Bureau of the Census, 2003), yet have formed community ties around their transnational ethnic identity (Nassar-McMillan, Ajrouch, & Hakim-Larson, 2013; Suleiman, 1999). Salaita (2005) pointed out that the Israeli/Palestinian conflict is of great concern to many Arab Americans, and third wave immigrants (post-1965) feel a strong Arab political identity (David & Ayouby, 2002). Palestinian American youth particularly struggle with dual allegiances to their Palestinian homeland and their U.S. citizenship privileges (Abu El-Haj, 2007). One study found that for the Arab diaspora community in the U.S., the greater their attachment to their community, the more they are involved in political action (Wald, 2009). While there may be no consensus about the conflict, and there are also Arabs who are uninvolved in the political issues related to the conflict, Abdelhady (2013) noted that "the establishment of the nation of Israel in 1948 is considered a critical moment in the history of Arab American communities" (p. 23).

Arab American parents have a strong influence on their children's integration into U.S. culture (Henry, Stiles, Biran, & Hinkle, 2008). Many Arab American communities are extremely

tightly-knit, and family and ethnic ties are strong (Abudabbeh & Aseel, 1999; Ajrouch, 2000). Political events in the U.S. over the past years have directly influenced how Arab American parents advise their children about involvement in politics in general, and specifically, politics in college life. The attacks on September 11th created a great deal of anti-Arab and anti-Muslim bias and persecution of Arabs in schools and community settings (Hagopian, 2004; Katz, 2015; Shammas, 2009). Hence, parents of Arab American college students may caution them not to get involved in political discussions or events such as those related to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict because of their student's interest in social achievement and status (Youssef, 1985). Yet, the current generation of Arab Americans may be more acculturated to U.S. life than their parents and have a different view about international politics (Goforth, Pham, & Oka, 2015). Gender may also play a role in Arab American young adults' political engagement (Read, 2007).

Higher education is an experience that exposes students to diversity (Zuniga, William, & Berger, 2005). In this context, many Arab students may encounter Jewish students. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has created tensions on U.S. college campuses between Arab and Jewish students (Gross & Williams, 2009; Schworm, 2009; Shibley, 2014). There are Arab and Jewish students who are highly engaged with Palestinian human rights, or Jewish students who are strong supporters of Israel (Dessel & Ali, 2012b; Khuri, 2004; Ruttenberg, Zea, & Sigelman, 1996). Arab students' interactions with Jewish students in a college setting can be varied, both positive and negative (Khuri, 2004; Dessel & Ali, 2012b). While these relationships have been studied in Israel (Maoz, Steinberg, Bar-On, & Fakhereldeen, 2002; Maoz, 2011), little has been learnt on American campuses (Hahn Tapper, 2011, 2013; Wayne, 2008). Arab American college students' experiences have been largely unexamined in the higher education literature (Alreshoud & Koeske, 1997; Henry, Stiles, Biran, & Hinkle, 2008; Ruttenberg, Zea, & Sigelman, 1996; Shammas, 2009), and very few studies have assessed their experiences related to the I/P conflict. This paper seeks to address that gap in the literature.

We followed Astin's (1984) model to analyze our data regarding Arab college student experiences and their interactions with Jewish students on a college campus. Astin's Inputs, Environments, and Outcomes (IEO) model conceptualizes what inputs (demographics such as gender, religion, previous experiences in Arabic communities, parents and own attitudes about Palestine, and learning about Jewish oppression) students bring into their educational setting, what experiences they have during college (having Jewish friends, wanting opportunities to talk

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with Jewish students), and what outcomes they may have as a result of their college experience (seeking out education on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict or interest in collaboration with Jewish students). This study discussed a survey completed by Arab students in a public university on a large Midwestern campus. We report on the results and discuss future recommendations for faculty and administrators in higher education settings.

Literature Review

The Israeli/Palestinian (I/P) Conflict

In 1948, Israel occupied Palestine evicting about two million Palestinians who fled to the West Bank and neighboring Arab Countries, and more than 77 percent of the Palestinian territories' residents became refugees (Sa'di & Abu Lughod, 2007). In 1967, Israel further occupied the West Bank, Gaza, and the Golan Heights. This war influenced the political, economic, and social transformations of Palestinians in Israel (Schulze, 2016). Consequently, the tensions between the two people have increased around the globe, and intense disputes are evident on U.S. college campuses (Gross & Williams, 2009; Lopez, 2003; Schworm, 2009; Shibley, 2014). The power asymmetry and imbalance represented in the relationship between Palestinians and Israelis is replicated on college campuses (Dessel & Ali, 2012b), and according to Hubbard (1999), the cultural differences between both groups play a major factor on the success of the conflict resolution exercises. As a result, both sides are negating the other side's narrative (Ben Hagai, Zurbriggen, Hammack, & Ziman, 2013b, Kelman, 1999).

Gender

Gender has always played a central role in the accumulative research regarding geopolitical conflict. Most research that has studied the relationship between males and females in relation to peace work has found that there are differences that point to the significance for females (Boyer et al., 2009; Caprioli, 2000; de la Rey & McKay, 2006; Fite, Genest, & Wilcox 1990; Moller & Tenenbaum, 2011; Al Wekhian, 2015). Females have been found to contribute positively to peace especially in diverse regions of strife, such as: Afghanistan (Collett, 1998), East Timor (Mason, 2005), former Yugoslavia (Korac, 2006), Northern Ireland (Cockburn, 1998), Bosnia-Herzegovina (Cockburn, 1998), Sri Lanka (Giles, Alwis, Klein, & Silva, 2003), and the Middle East (Cockburn, 1998; Sharoni, 2012; Yablon, 2009). Additionally, international organizations urge women's involvement in peace building activities (Anderlini, 2000).

Researchers who study Arab Jewish intergroup conflict and peace work have also examined the role of gender (Brenick & Killen, 2013; Boyer et al., 2009; Gurin, Gurin, Dey, & Hurtado, 2002; Sahliyeh & Deng, 2003; Sharoni, 2012; Tessler, Nachtway, & Grant, 1999; Tessler & Warriner, 1997; Yablon, 2009). In his study examining gender differences in the willingness to participate in peace-intervention programs, to enhance positive relations between Jews and Arabs in Israel, Yablon (2009) found that the Arab and Jewish female youths were generally more positive than Arab and Jewish male youths toward members of the other group. Female youth also felt they gained more than the males from participating in the peace program. Sharoni (2012) also found that most females, as compared to males, believed that through dialogue, they could find ways to transcend cultural, historical, and political differences.

On the other hand, Tessler and Warriner's study (1997) in the Middle East among Israeli, Egyptian, Palestinian, and Kuwaiti males and females, did not find differences between genders in their views on possible solutions to the Israeli-Arab conflict. Furthermore, there are mixed findings for gender when males are in the ethnic minority (Brenick & Killen, 2013; Killen, Lee-Kim, McGlothlin, & Stangor, 2002), but Brenick & Killen (2013) claimed that these findings can also vary as a function of the context, such as whether the context has to do with friendship, groups, or institutional settings. Hence, the gender issue is complex and further research is needed to determine the extent of attitudinal differences between females and males related to intergroup conflict (Maoz, Steinberg, Bar-On, & Fakhereldeen, 2002; Sahliyeh & Deng, 2003; Tessler, 1999; Yablon, 2009).

Religion

Religion is another demographic factor that plays an integral role and should be considered when studying Arab-Jewish encounters on college campuses. Some researchers have studied Muslim-Christian (Baston & Barris, 1994; Ruttenberg, Zea, & Sigelman, 1996) or Muslim-Jewish dialogues (Bretton-Granatoor & Weiss, 1993; Shaffer, 2007) while others have examined Arab-Jewish dialogues (Dessel & Ali, 2012a, 2012b; Ben Hagai, Hammack, Pilecki, & Aresta, 2013a). Gopin (2000) viewed religion as a peacemaking tool that promotes "pro-social values" and peaceful communities. Randeree (2008) also argued that most Muslims utilize Islamic values to resolve their conflicts. Abu-Nimer (2001), as well, stated that religious identity is one of the most powerful bases in determining attitudes and actions in conflict zones.

In another research study, Hahn Tapper (2011) found that the I/P conflict plays out in American Jewish and American Muslim college student relations. Particularly, Muslims were less likely to want to dialogue than Jewish students, since it led to a discussion about power inequalities, whereas Jewish students were more likely to engage in social than political actions to avoid talking about power. Arab Muslims, more than Arab Christians, have reported the I/P conflict to be salient for them, and that their Muslim identity led to a more ethnic approach to American politics (Wald, 2009).

Student Beliefs about Palestine and Political Action

Although not all people originating in Arab countries consider themselves Arab (Ajrouch & Jamal, 2007), an Arab American community and identity are constantly constructed and deconstructed (Haddad, 2004). Ajrouch (1999) stated that the Arab American community in Detroit is not monolithic and that there are two contrasted Arab American cultures; one is traditional while the other is modern and industrial. Naber (2012) also discussed the internal communal differences between the Arab American, based on origin and religion. On the other hand, Abdelhady (2013) discussed a pan-ethnic Arab American identity, which started in the early 1970s and caused a rise in political consciousness among people of Arab origin. Seikaly (1999) claimed that the Palestinian Americans in Detroit area have a very strong political identity. In their study, Ben Hagai and Zurbriggen (2017) asserted that ethnic young adults who leave their families to come to colleges experience an awakening of their ethnic identity in college.

In his study, Wald (2009) found that there is a range of Arab American politicized ethnic identity regarding Middle East topics, such that they do not all express concern about their community back home. In the U.S., a Palestine activism method—the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanction movement (BDS)—has been increasingly used across universities and college campuses (Gross & Williams, 2009; Lopez, 2003; Schworm, 2009; Shibley, 2014). The movement provides a practical means for students to express solidarity with the Palestinian people. Boycotting Israeli products and institutions that fund the oppression of Palestinians has been a way for Arab Americans who supports human rights in Palestine to engage in peaceful resistance and political action (Arab American News, 2014; Maoz, 2011). These students may be less inclined to engage in intergroup efforts with Jewish students due to beliefs that these groups are not effective, related to power asymmetry and inequality (Abu-Nimer, 1995, 2004; Ben

Hagai et al., 2013a; Kuttab, 1988; Maoz, 2000; Sharoni, 1995; Suleiman, 2004). However, one quantitative study found that exposure to higher education reduced politicized identity, perhaps because of the younger generations' assimilation (Wald, 2009). It seems clear that either way, student beliefs about Palestine may affect their engagement around the conflict in their college settings.

Arab Community and Parent Views of Israel and Palestine

Arab American students' experiences with both family and community may have a strong impact on their interest in learning about the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, or their interest in collaborating with Jewish students. Arabs as defined in this study are a member of the people who originated from the Arab Peninsula and who live in the Middle East or northern Africa. This family, and community influence, is tied to their integration and assimilation into U.S. culture (Henry, Biran, & Stiles, 2006). Since the U.S. census does not include a box for first generation Americans of Arab descent (an issue that has been promised to be addressed for the first time in the 2020 Census (Karoub, 2015), it is very difficult to know how integrated Arab youth are into schools and communities in the U.S. There are a few areas of the country, such as Dearborn, Michigan, and Chicago, Illinois, with a large community of Arab Americans who strive to develop their own curricula and have developed Arabic-language programs (Shryock & Abraham, 2000). The Greater Detroit area has the largest concentration of Arab Americans in the U.S. and has been a center for social and political activism (Naber, 2008).

When Arab American students reside in schools where they are a significantly small minority, they are subject to discrimination and may suffer from low self- esteem (Judeh, 2014; Shryock & Abraham, 2000; Tabbah, Halsell, & Wheaton, 2012). Consequently, some Arab students may attend Arab-identified private schools or public school where they have Arab friends and community. These circumstances may not enable them to interact with Jewish students. Thus, for some Arab students, living in an Arab community and attending Arabic schools may have a strong impact on their engagement in the I/P conflict.

First generation Arab Americans' pride in their heritage and connection to their ethnic community was found to promote a more politicized ethnic identity (Wald, 2009). It is thus possible that Arab American parents' political views may influence their college student children's views, based on the strong connection that students have to their families and native Arab culture (Ajrouch, 1999; Henry, Stiles, Biran, & Hinkle, 2008).

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Experiences with Jewish College Students

  Arab American college student experiences include developing friendships among people from different groups, which has been shown to hold an important role in improving intergroup conflict. Research has shown that friendships with outgroup members, that is, those from a different racial, ethnic, or religious social identity group, can reduce prejudice (McClelland & Linnander, 2006; Paolini, Hewstone, & Carins, 2007) and improve intergroup relations (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008; Turner, Tam, Hewstone, Kenworthy, & Cairns, 2013). Studies of Protestant and Catholic youth in Northern Ireland (Hewstone, Cairns, Voci, Hamberger, & Niens, 2006), White and Black students in South Africa (Swart, Hewstone, Christ, & Voci, 2010). African Americans and Latinos (Aberson, Shoemaker, & Tomolillo, 2004) and Latino and White youth (Page-Gould & Mendoza-Denton, 2008) in the U.S. all confirm the significant effects of cross groups friendships in reducing bias and improving interactions.

  Pettigrew (1998) cited the condition of the potential for friendship as an important fifth component of Allport's (1954) original contact theory. Accordingly, friendship would seem to be an important component of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict (Maoz, Steinberg, Bar-On, & Fakhereldeen, 2002). One study found that participation in an intergroup dialogue course led to the development of friendships between Arab and Jewish college students (Dessel & Ali, 2012a, 2012b). In this context, Arab students may learn about the history of Jewish oppression. Increased contact between these two groups may lead to improved intergroup relations (Gaunt, 2011; Maoz, 2011, in Dessel, Ali & Mishkin, 2014). However, there has been little research conducted on the role of friendships in Jewish/Arab relations in the U.S.

Seeking Education and Collaborating with Jewish Students

  There appears to be a dearth of research on Arab American college students' educational interest in the Israeli Palestinian conflict or their interest in engaging with Jewish students to collaborate for peace. We could not locate any articles that directly examined Arab American college students seeking education about the I/P conflict.

  Regarding collaboration among Jewish students, there is a large body of work in Israel, but very limited research conducted in the United States. Hammack and Pilecki (2015) examined the issue of power relations in a dialogue program between Israeli and Palestinian youth. There have been several endeavors in the American college/university settings to bring together Arab

and Jewish students. The Arab- Jewish intergroup dialogue course offered as part of the Intergroup Dialogue (IGD) program at University of Michigan is one good example of a social justice program that primarily deals with the power imbalance among the two groups (Dessel & Ali, 2012a, 2012b; Dessel, Ali, & Mishkin, 2014). This study found that some Arab students mistrusted Jewish students, while others differentiated Jewish from Zionist identities. Arab students overall experienced very positive outcomes from participating in these dialogues with Jewish students. On another campus, Khuri (2004) taught a seven-week campus dialogue that included one Palestinian and three Jewish students. This psychologically informed educational case study included suggested methods for facilitating dialogue between these groups.

During the last three decades, there have been numerous one-time planned, or multiple encounters, to bring Arab and Jews at different ages together in Israel. Planned encounters to conduct dialogues between Israeli Arabs and Jews have been held in school settings (Abu-Nimer, 1999; Glazier, 2003; Halabi, 2000; Handelman, 2010; Maoz, 2001; Mollov & Lavie, 2001). On the college level, Yazbak Abu Ahmad and Yahav (2013) have been teaching, for eight years, a required course entitled "Dealing with Diversity in the Classroom" that brings together Arab and Jewish student English teachers in two different academic teacher colleges in Israel. In Canada, Shaffer (2007) studied three different Arab-Jewish and Muslim-Jewish dialogue groups. Each of these encounters showed that strong ties evolved between the members of the different groups.

Methods

Research Questions and Hypotheses

We sought, through this study, to answer the following research questions:

1) What variables predict Arab college students' quest for education about the Israeli/Palestinian conflict?

2) What variables predict Arab college students' interest in collaborating with Jewish students for peace?

We did not have hypotheses for the first research question, and our analyses were exploratory. For the second research question, however, we hypothesized that gender would be a predictor of Arab students' willingness to collaborate for peace, with females more than males being willing to work with Jewish students in this endeavor. We predicted that parents' attitudes would have a negative relationship with the dependent variable of interest in collaboration for

peace with Jewish students, such that the more parents were Palestinian activists and critical of Israel, the less students would be interested. We also predicted that having Jewish friends would positively predict an interest in collaboration with Jewish students.

Participants

The target population for this survey was Arab undergraduate and graduate students at a large Midwestern university. Many students come from a nearby homogeneous Arab community. The University IRB approved the study. Several factors influenced our sampling method, including the sensitive nature of the study topic and the current political climate for Arab students, the fact that Arab students experience prejudice and bias (Katz, 2015; Shammas, 2009; Hagopian, 2004), and that their relationships with Jewish students on college campuses may be strained (Dessel & Ali, 2012b). We used a snowball sampling method by sending out the survey to various Arab student groups and list serves on campus, using the connections found within our research group (Fricker, 2008). Thus, participants who took this online survey were a convenience non-probability sample of Arab students. To our knowledge the attitudes of this population about the topic had not been previously studied, and we recognized that this was an exploratory sampling of this group of students. Students were asked if they identified as Arab (yes/no). Those who replied *yes* were included in the final participant sample of 66.

Data and Measures

A team of both Arab and Jewish researchers and student research assistants developed the original survey. The items were constructed through a search of the literature, consultation with Arab staff and students, and were reviewed by the research team for content validity. Gender was measured with an item that gave three choices (male, female, transgender) and was recoded into 0= male, 1= female as there were no transgender respondents. Religion was measured with an item that gave choices of Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Other, and "I do not identify with a religion (Agnostic/Atheist)." Since we were interested in exploring the attitudes of Arab students who were not Jewish, only cases that were either Christian or Muslim were selected, and this variable was then dummy coded as Christian/Other and Muslim/Other. Having Jewish friends was measured with the statement: "I have friends that are Jewish," and responses were 0=none (0), 1=a few (1-2), 2=some (3-5), 3=a lot (5 or more). Students were asked if they attended Arabic school (yes/no), and if they grew up in an Arabic community (yes/no). We did not include race,

as there were several White cases (*n*=26) that intersected with the category of Middle Eastern/Arab (*n*=60), thereby introducing multicollinearity.

Additional items that measured variables of interest were: "I would like to have more structured opportunities to talk to Jews about the conflict" (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree), "How important is Palestine to you?" (1= very unimportant, 7= very important), and "In school I learned about the history of Jewish people being oppressed" (1= not at all, 2= a little, 3=somewhat, 4= a lot).

Parent attitudes were measured with two items, "One or both of my parents are pro-Palestine" (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree), and "My parents are anti- Israel" (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree). These items refer to parents who are supportive of Palestinian human rights and activism, and critical of Israeli treatment of Palestinians or of the occupation of Palestinian land by Israelis.

Our dependent variables were measured with two items: "I am interested in collaborating with Jews to work for peace" (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree), and "Have you sought out education on the Palestine/Israel conflict since being at college?" (i.e., courses or other educational events—1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree).

Analysis and Findings

To answer our research questions, we first conducted a descriptive analysis (Table 1, Appendix) and report on demographic information for our sample. The sample was 58 percent female, 42 percent male, 81 percent Muslim, 11 percent Christian, and 8 percent Other. Seventy-four percent of the sample reported having three or more Jewish friends, and 47 percent attended Arabic school and grew up in an Arabic community.

We calculated means for the continuous variables (Table 1, Appendix), and correlations (Table 2, Appendix), to examine the interrelationships among the variables of interest. Bivariate correlations for the first dependent variable, *seeking education about the conflict*, indicated significant positive relationships among variables of attending Arabic school, learning about Jewish oppression, and beliefs about the importance of Palestine. Bivariate correlations for the second dependent variable, *collaborating for peace*, indicated a significant negative relationship with gender, and significant positive relationships with having Jewish friends and wanting structured opportunities for interactions with Jewish students.

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The data were examined to insure all assumptions were met, and linear regressions were conducted, with the strongest models reported here. Model 1 (Table 3, Appendix) predicted 48 percent of the variance in the dependent variable of seeking education about the conflict (F = 7.12, R^2 = .48, p= .00). Gender, importance of Palestine, learning about Jewish oppression, and having parents who are pro-Palestine and anti-Israel, predicted students seeking education. The negative gender coefficient (-.23) indicated that males were more likely than females to seek out education. Importance of Palestine and parents being pro-Palestine had positive coefficients, such that the more students believe in the importance of Palestine and had pro-Palestinian parents, the more they sought out education. A student who had Jewish friends was more likely to have sought out education. Finally, the less a student's parents were anti-Israel (or the less negative parents were about Israel), the more students sought out education.

Model II explained 33 percent of the variance in the dependent variable of interest of collaborating with Jews for peace (F = 4.94, R^2 = .33, p= .00). Gender again was significant, predicting student interest in collaborating with Jews for peace—with males having more interest than females. Christian students were significantly more likely than Muslim students to be interested in collaboration. Having Jewish friends, and an interest in structured opportunities to talk with Jewish students, also significantly predicted interest in collaborating with Jews for peace.

Discussion

We examined the relationships among predictors of Arab students' seeking out knowledge about the Israeli/Palestinian conflict in their educational settings, and their interest in collaborating with Jewish students for peace on their college campus. We were specifically interested in the predictive power of students' gender, religion, whether they had Jewish friends and learned about the history of Jewish oppression, their interest in having structured opportunities to talk with Jewish students, students' beliefs about the importance of Palestine, their experience growing up in Arabic communities and schools, and their parents' beliefs. Since the tensions around the Israeli/Palestinian conflict on college campuses and the post 9/11 targeting of Arab Americans have increased over the last years, it is important to understand Arab American college students' views to promote a positive campus climate and intergroup collaboration in educational environments.

The finding that Arab American male students were significantly more likely than Arab American female students to seek out education on the conflict is both interesting and challenging. This may be due to the fact that in the U.S., as Arab males are more involved than Arab females in discussing politics in multiple domains of life, and Arab families transmit strong cultural norms, this influences college-age men in wanting to be more involved than college-age women in educating themselves about the conflict (Read, 2007; Sabbag, 2005).

We found, in support of our hypotheses, that both students' own beliefs and their parents' beliefs about Palestine influenced them in seeking out more education on the conflict. This is related to Wald's (2009) findings that connection to one's Arab American community promotes more politicized involvement. Wald (2009) found that age predicted the relationship between the salience of the conflict and political attitudes and behavior, such that the conflict was less of a predictor for younger people who may be breaking away from their traditional community, expressing their individuality, and assimilating. Our results indicated that parents' attitudes still significantly influence their children's attitudes toward political engagement. Considering Wald's findings, we may infer that although Arab American students are influenced by their parents' political views, their level of political engagement is lower than their parents.

It was interesting that learning about the history of Jewish oppression also influenced Arab students' seeking education about the conflict. Learning about oppression may be related to having Jewish friends, since almost three-fourths of our sample reported having more than three Jewish friends. Regarding these variables and this connection, as we could not locate any studies that have examined Arab American students' knowledge about Jewish oppression, there is a gap in the literature regarding this topic. There is a strong connection in this nearby homogenous community to both wanting to learn more about Jewish students and being fearful of the kind of Jewish privilege that exists in this large Jewish community on campus (Hahn Tapper, 2011, 2013; Ruttenberg, Zea, & Sigelman, 1996). Jewish students have a great deal of white, Jewish privilege that exists in their campus connections, and it often interlinks them with the connection to history of Jewish oppression (Hahn Tapper, 2011, 2013).

Our findings, regarding Arab student interest in collaborating with Jewish students for peace, indicate that gender played a significant role in the opposite direction than we expected, with men being more interested than females in collaborating for peace with Jewish students. This is one of the most interesting and unusual findings. As the literature shows, there are mixed

findings with regard to gender predicting engagement in peace work (Brenick & Killen, 2013; Sharoni, 2012; Sahliyeh & Deng, 2003; Tessler & Warriner, 1997). It is possible that for our student sample, the males may have felt more pressure than females to find success in career advancement and, therefore, have more interest in collaborating because of their professional networking needs (Read, 2014). Related, Arab students may view Jewish students by considering their white upper social class assimilated status (Ajrouch, 2000; Brodkin, 1998) and therefore see them as potential professional connections. There may be less pressure on Arab American females to be wage earners, and therefore they may have less concern about assimilation and their own career advancement (Ajrouch, 1999; Read, 2007). Arab American women may also be more cautious than men in their political involvement, given what they have learned from their parents.

Arab males may have more flexibility, more freedom, and less restrictions than females regarding political involvement (Ajrouch, 1999). Arab females, on the other hand, have more social restrictions than men related to protecting women's sexual honor, which has been attributed to geographical displacement, Orientalism, and the desire for status (Naber, 2012) or fear for women's safety (Ajrouch, 1999). However, these findings contrast with Naber's work, which has identified Arab American women as strong political activists (Naber, 2012).
The finding of Christian American students having more interest than other students in collaborating with Jewish students may be explained by the fact that Christian American students are more assimilated and integrated into U.S. culture than Muslim students, due to Christianity being the majority U.S. religion (Pew, 2015). Christian Arab students may pass as white (Ajrouch & Jamal, 2007), just as Jewish students who are often highly assimilated into U.S. culture (Brodkin, 1998), and this gives them a connection that Muslim Arab students do not share. Muslim Arabs may try to preserve their religious identity within this Christian dominated culture (Khshaiboon, 2013) and are viewed less warmly than Christians and Jews by the U.S. public (Pew, 2014). This may make them less likely than Christian American students to engage with Jewish American students. Christian and Jewish American students collaborate more together since they may also share the same experience of Islamophobia (Gottschalk & Greenberg, 2008). Fink (2014) described the Christian Zionist leaders' apprehension of Muslims in general, and Palestinian Muslims in particular, and how they connect Islam categorically with violence.

It was not surprising that Arab students who have Jewish friends, and who want more structured opportunities to talk with Jews about the conflict, were also more interested in collaborating with Jews for peace. There has been a significant amount of research indicating that friendships strongly predict positive intergroup contact outcomes (McClelland & Linnander, 2006; Pettigrew, 1998; 2008; Turner et al., 2013). Allport's (1954) contact theory also supports the notion that positive contact can lead to improved relationships between groups in conflict.

Limitations and Recommendations

This study has several limitations to be noted. The first is the small sample size, and the convenience sample, which limits the ability to generalize beyond the students who completed this survey. As previously discussed, the sensitive nature of the survey content may have influenced students' low response rate. Related, social desirability bias may have affected the responses (Goforth, Pham, & Oka, 2015). A larger sample size would better represent the population of interest. Additionally, the measures used were single items, and a larger survey with the use of scales might be better able to capture some of the constructs of interest.

Future research should focus on Arab American young adults and college students regarding the role of gender and political involvement, to examine differences or similarities among genders. Future research could also examine the difference between formal and informal course activities that may draw upon more activist engagement. Additionally, educators should support female Arab college students in seeking education about political conflicts and recognize the strong influence that family culture may have on their students. Future research should also examine Arab college students learning about the history of Jewish oppression, to better understand how learning about this history may improve relations among the two groups (Barakat, 2014). While much interfaith work in the U.S. does focus on Muslim-Jewish relations (Hahn Tapper, 2011, 2013), it rarely addresses the associated tensions concerning the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Thus, intergroup dialogue encounters can also create this knowledge for Arab students (Dessel & Ali, 2012a; Yazbak Abu Ahmad & Yahav, 2013) and should be implemented on college campuses.

Furthermore, given the finding about Muslim and Christian Arab students, more structured opportunities need to be available for Arab Christian, Arab Muslim, and Jewish college students to work together. Additionally, Jewish students need support for working on relationships with Muslim students. Religious differences can be a source of tension on college

campuses (Nash, 2001). It is important for faculty and administrators across higher education institutions in the U.S to provide students opportunities for productive campus intergroup encounters (Dessel & Ali, 2012b; Zuniga, William, & Berger, 2005). All these recommendations address the aforementioned concerns on college campuses and may lead to more collaborative work for peace between Arab and Jewish college students. This collaboration can only be achieved through structured dialogue courses where American Muslim and Christian Arab students and American Jewish students understand each other's perspectives and join forces together for peace.

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Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for Sample Demographics and Independent Variables

Variable (Total)	N*	%		M	SD
Gender					
Female	32	58.3			
Male	40	41.7			
Religion					
Muslim	58	80.6			
Christian	8	11.1			
Other	6	8.3			
Have friends who are Jewish					
None (0)	3	4.6			
A few (1-2)	14	21.5			
Some (3-5)	13	20.0			
A lot (5+)	35	53.8			
Attended Arabic school					
Yes	34	47.2			
No	38	52.8			
Grew up in Arabic Community					
Yes	34	47.2			
No	38	52.8			
Would like structured opportunities [a]				4.95	1.49
Beliefs about importance of Palestine [b]				5.88	.95
Learned history of Jewish oppression [c]				3.08	.98
Parents pro-Palestine [a]				6.25	1.33
Parents anti-Israel [a]				5.30	1.80

Notes: [a] Theoretical range 1-7, higher score indicates strongly agree. [b] Theoretical range 1-7, higher score indicates stronger belief about the importance of Palestine. [c] Theoretical range 1-4, higher score indicates more learning about Jewish oppression.

Table 2

Arab student survey correlation table for variables of interest

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Gender	-	.03	-.06	-.01	.10	-.10	.16	-.26*	-.24	.07	-.05	-.12	-.31*
2. Christian	-	-	-.72*	.25**	.16	.02	.08	-.27*	.04	.16	.11	.15	.19
3. Muslim	-	-	-	-.32**	-.18	-.01	-.16	.41**	.19	.03	.01	-.20	-.03
4. Attended Arabic school	-	-	-	-	.16	.05	.16	-.05	-.19	.13	.20	.28*	.07
5. Grew up Arab community	-	-	-	-	-	.19	.34**	.11	-.19	.03	-.07	.08	-.08
6. Have Jewish friends	-	-	-	-	-	-	.12	.08	-.23	-.10	.11	.21	.32*
7. Learned about Jewish oppression	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-.02	.06	.21	-.04	.32*	.09
8. Parents pro-Palestine	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.40**	.32**	.01	.17	.13
9. Parents anti-Israel	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.50**	-.17	-.19	.01

10. Beliefs importance Palestine	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-.01	.31*	.06
11. Want structured opportunities	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.24	.32**
12. Have sought out education	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.09
13. Interested collaborating peace	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

*correlation is significant at the .05 level

** correlation is significant at the .01 level

Regressions

Model 1:

Table 3
Multiple regression of the effects of predictors on seeking out education on the Palestine/Israel conflict (n=66)

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficient (B)	Standardized Coefficient (β/ Beta)	Significance (p-value)
Gender	-.68	-.23	.03*
Religion			
Christian	-.34	-.07	.63
Muslim	-1.05	-.29	.08
Importance Palestine	.72	.46	.00*
Learned Jewish oppression	.41	.28	.01*
Parents pro Palestine	.36	.33	.01*
Parents anti-Israel	-.47	-.58	.00*

Dependent variable: SoughtOutEducation
*p < .05
$F = 7.12$, $R^2 = .48$, p= .00

Model II:

Table 4
Multiple regression of the effects of predictors on interest in collaborating with Jews to work for peace (n=66)

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficient (B)	Standardized Coefficient (β/ Beta)	Significance (p-value)
Gender	-.80	-.27	.009*
Religion			
Christian	1.14	.30	.04*
Muslim	.64	.20	.19
Have Jewish friends	.35	.23	.03*
Arabic school	.02	.01	.97
Arab community	-.33	-.11	.31
Structured opportunities	.30	.31	.00*

Dependent variable: InterestCollaboratingJewsPeace
*p < .05
$F = 4.94$, $R^2 = .33$, p= .00