

1-18-2019

# The Issues and Perceptions of Muslims Concerning Religious Accommodation in the Workplace

Daniel W. White  
*Walden University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/symposium2019>

---

## Recommended Citation

White, Daniel W., "The Issues and Perceptions of Muslims Concerning Religious Accommodation in the Workplace" (2019). *2019 Program & Posters*. 10.  
<https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/symposium2019/10>

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Research Symposium at ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in 2019 Program & Posters by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [ScholarWorks@waldenu.edu](mailto:ScholarWorks@waldenu.edu).

# The Issues and Perceptions of Muslims Concerning Religious Accommodation in the Workplace

Daniel W. White Jr., PhD

## Problem

What are the perceptions of Muslims concerning religious accommodation in the workplace. Since 9/11 there has been an increase of religious discrimination suits by Muslims in the workplace for not being able to practice their religion when it comes to prayer and religious dress in the workplace. Along with very little research on religious accommodation in the U.S. Additionally this research was conducted in order to uncover gaps in the literature on religious accommodation.

## Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate the perceptions of Muslims concerning religious accommodation in the workplace.

## Significance

That policy makers and leaders will be able to make sound decisions that will positively impact those who are not being accommodated in the workplace. This may also help leaders in their strategic planning to create and maintain an environment that is free of discrimination based on religion.

## Social Change Implications

The implications for scholars, practitioners, and leaders are that the findings offered insight on the importance of good management and communication within an organization to ensure religious accommodation. Muslims and those of other religions should be able to freely exercise their religion without restrictions and discrimination within a democratic society.

## Theory or Framework

**Pluralism** (Dahl, 2003) is a political theory that recognizes competing interest groups and the distribution of power among nongovernment actors.

**Religious pluralism** (Hutchinson, 2003) is further defined as people of differing religions working together as equals for the common good of society.

## Relevant Scholarship

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the United States has an estimated 1,500 legally recognized religions with 80 organized religions that have a minimum of 60,000. Additionally, the number of religious discrimination suits doubled within the time period between 2000 and 2010. According to scholars, the lines of separation between religion and work had been kept in place from 1900-1965 based on the fact that not all U.S. workers shared the same beliefs.

Therefore an invisible wall was necessary for maintaining religious separation in the employment arena. When employees are not allowed to practice their faith during working hours, it can lead to conflicts in the workplace. Additionally, a number of academic scholars have been reluctant to conduct research about religion and employment because they do not want to be associated with controversial activists in the political and religious arenas (Cunningham et al., 2011). The number of religion-based cases has steadily increased within the last 10 years. In 2005, there were 2,340 reported cases of religious discrimination; that number increased to 3,502 cases in 2015.

## Research Question

**What are the perceptions of Muslims concerning religious accommodation in the workplace?**

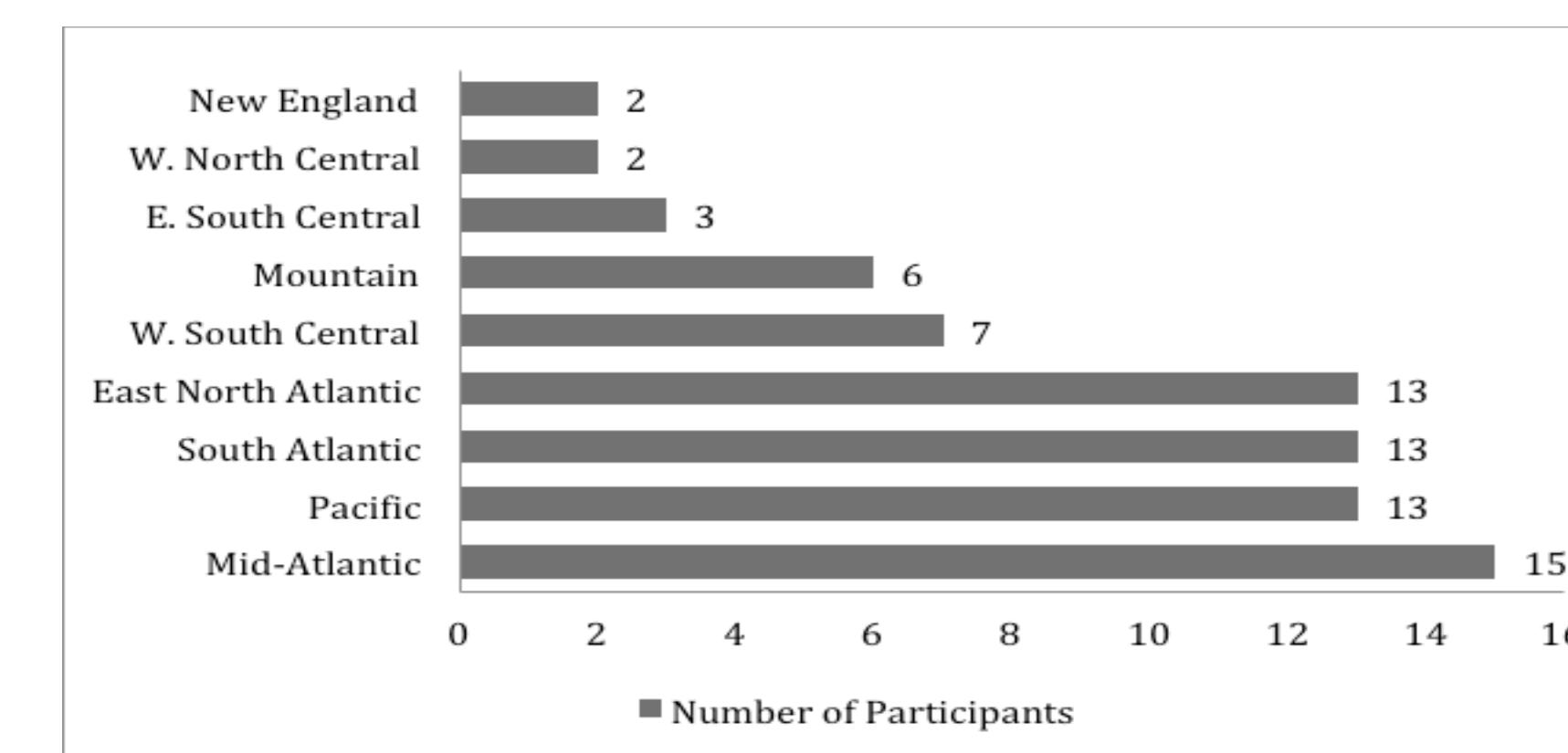
1. In what ways does your company provide religious accommodation to their employees?
2. How does your company communicate its religious accommodation policy to employees?
3. What actions have your company taken that promotes religious accommodation?
4. In what ways do you think that Muslims should express their religion while at work?

## Participants

The participants in this study were working Muslim men and women who worked in different regions throughout the U.S. Initially 25 served as the primary source of data. Due to a lack of participation in the Washington DC, Maryland and Virginia areas. The participation was extended to 84 Muslims living in nine demographic regions throughout the United States.

## Procedures

I conducted an anonymous online survey of 82 Muslims who lived throughout the United States. The participants served as the primary source of data in the research investigation, two respondents did not answer all of the survey questions. The survey was modeled on peer-reviewed existing studies conducted by Cunningham et al. (2011) and Mutjaba and Cavico (2012). Open-ended questions were chosen to give study participants the freedom to convey their thoughts and perspectives regarding the topic being investigated.



## Analysis

Analysis  
Phenomenological analysis was used to analyze the survey responses.

## Findings

1. The ability to pray in the workplace was important?
2. Diversity i.e., those of other races and religions was important to Muslim employees.
3. Study revealed that some employers were not providing religious accommodation.
4. Management failed to communicate their religious accommodation policies to their Muslim employees.

## Interpretation

Of the two theoretical frameworks used in this study, pluralism dominated the results. The need to recognize Muslims as nongovernmental actors in a democratic society. The expectations of employers and employees must be managed when it comes to conflict, as there is a contractual agreement when the employee agrees to work for the business organization. It is important for both parties to be able to communicate clearly with each other so a mutual understanding can be reached, especially when it comes to a topic as religion.

Holistically, religious manifestations in the workplace reflect how employees should express their religious practices. The participants in this study believed prayer, religious dress, and communication with other Muslims, and personal preferences were appropriate religious manifestations at work.

## Limitations

The usage of the survey did not allow for face to face contact or group interaction with the participants.

## Recommendations

### For companies

- Ensure that they are following the rules of Title VII. Communicate more often with Muslim employees concerning their religion and perception of treatment in the workplace.

### For future research

- make use of the phone interview and focus groups.
- use both spiritual and emotional intelligence as a theoretical framework.

## Acknowledgements

Chair: **Jacqueline Thomas**, Committee Member: **Gary Kelsey**, URR: **Anne J. Hacker**, and Program Director: **Jim Castleberry**