

## SELF-CONCEPT IN ARAB AMERICAN ADOLESCENTS: IMPLICATIONS OF SOCIAL SUPPORT AND EXPERIENCES IN THE SCHOOLS

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The purpose of this study was to investigate three domains (Scholastic Competence, Social Acceptance, and Global Self-Worth) of self-concept in Arab American adolescents in relation to their school experiences, including discrimination, self-perceived teacher social support, and self-perceived classmate social support. Half of the sample either experienced some form of discrimination or knew someone who had. An experience of discrimination was significantly related to students' Scholastic Competence. Self-perceived classmate support was significantly related to all domains of self-concept; however, self-perceived teacher support was not significantly related to any of the self-concept domains. Implications of these results are discussed, as well as strategies for how to provide positive relationships for Arab American students and their families. © 2012 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

The student population in the United States includes a significantly large population of Arab American students (Suleiman, 2001); however, limited research exists on their school experiences, learning styles, and academic achievement (Nieto, 2000). Banks (2009) reported that Arab Americans achieve higher academically than most ethnic groups. Because they generally do not face failure in school, Arab American students have not been targeted in research (Nieto, 1996). Although this population may succeed academically, these students face other challenges as a minority in the school system. Some authors have termed Arab American students as "the invisible minority" (Al-Khatib, 1999; Nieto, 2000; Suleiman, 2001); however, this population has been highly visible through negative images and stereotypes portrayed in the media (Nieto, 2000).

Arab American students have faced discrimination in the schools, especially after September 11, 2001 (9/11; Wingfield, 2006). The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee published reports on discriminatory acts in the schools, documenting the most commonly occurring incidents as harassment, verbal abuse (i.e., derogatory names such as "towel head" and "camel jockey"), and the stereotyping of Arabs by students, teachers, and administrators (Ibish, 2001). Peers may taunt Arab American students, associating them with events of terrorism and political violence (Ibish, 2001). Although such incidents occurred before 9/11, they have increased ever since and are lucidly associated with the attacks and the war in Iraq (Ibish, 2008).

The experiences of Arab American students in the schools may potentially harm their social-emotional well-being; more specifically, their self-concept may become damaged after such experiences. Self-concept can be defined as the judgments people hold about the characteristics of their personal self in general and within distinct domains, such as cognitive competence, social acceptance, and physical appearance (Harter, 1999). A potential result of these interactions is that one accepts the perceived opinions of others and then uses these perceived judgments to define oneself as a person (Harter, 1999). For example, perceived judgments of approval would be internalized as

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acceptance of the self, whereas perceived judgments of rejection would be internalized as rejection of the self and unworthiness.

The symbolic interaction theory suggests that a person's general self-concept is influenced by perceived social support from others, or the attitudes he or she believe that others hold (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1925). For example, students who believe they have strong support from their teachers at school are also likely to have a more positive self-concept (Demaray & Malecki, 2002; Demaray, Malecki, Rueger, Brown, & Summers, 2009; Forman, 1988; Harter, 1990, 1993; Klooomok & Cosden, 1994; Martin, Marsh, McInerney, Green, & Dowson, 2007; Reddy, Rhodes, & Mulhall, 2003). Adolescents in particular become greatly concerned with the judgments of significant others in different roles (Elkind, 1967). Even more, the interrelationships built with others may lead to affective reactions to themselves (Harter, 1999). Depending on the quality of the relationship, these reactions include pride, shame, guilt, and embarrassment of the self. Consequently, negative perceptions in the schools can create a sense of shame about students' cultural heritage, inevitably leading to a negative self-concept. For example, when teachers and peers hold negative opinions about the Arab American culture and exhibit these perceptions in interactions with Arab American students, this may affect these students' self-concept.

Experiences of prejudice and discrimination have also been documented as being related to the self-concept (e.g., Moradi & Hasan, 2004; Ruggiero & Taylor, 1995; Ruggiero, Taylor, & Lydon, 1997), a relationship known as the stigma hypothesis. The stigma hypothesis states that the internalization of stigma, or minority status, leads to lower self-concept in minority groups (Twenge & Crocker, 2002). The status of being a minority becomes internalized with experiences of prejudice and discrimination. These experiences would be considered to be negative social interactions with others, according to symbolic interaction theorists. As a result, people of minority groups become affected psychologically (e.g., Baez, 1997; Berger & Milem, 2000; Calhoun, Sheldon, Serrano, & Cooke, 1978; Kenny & McEachern, 2009).

Although there is a wealth of research on self-concept in various ethnic minority groups, the research on self-concept in Arab American students is limited. Al-Khatib (1999) conducted a study to explore the self-concept of a sample of Arab-American adolescents in Grades 6 through 12. Results indicated that the overall self-concept profile of these students was positive; however, more than half of the sample was from a city where there is a significant population of Arab Americans and thus considered the majority, not a minority. Al-Khatib did not investigate perceptions of external sources, such as teachers or peers, or experiences of discrimination, making it impossible to conclude whether these factors were related to the self-concept in that sample of adolescents.

Kovach and Hillman (2002) investigated the self-esteem in Arab, African, and European American high school students, as well as their experiences of discrimination. Although self-concept and self-esteem are not interchangeable constructs, the two are related. Self-concept is the judgments a person holds about the characteristics of himself or herself; self-esteem is defined as a person's general feelings of self-worth or self-value. Therefore, it might be expected that if one has a high self-concept, then one would also have high self-esteem and vice versa. In terms of self-esteem, results from this study conflicted with the results from the study conducted by Al-Khatib (1999). The authors found that Arab American students had the lowest self-esteem compared with the other two ethnic groups. Arab American students were also more likely to attribute negative feedback from out-group members to prejudice. Although experiences of discrimination were not analyzed in relation to the students' self-esteem, Moradi & Hasan (2004) examined such experiences in Arab Americans aged 18 through 60 years and concluded that discriminatory events were significantly and negatively related to self-concept.

Research suggests that perceived social support from significant others, actual perceptions of significant others, and experiences of discrimination are factors that are related to self-concept.

Thus far, no research exists on how any of these factors are related to Arab American adolescents' self-concept. The current study examines the relationships of several external factors that have been found in the literature to be related to the self-concept of other minority groups.

Therefore, this study sought to answer the following questions: (a) Will the overall sample generally hold positive or negative levels of self-perceived classmate social support, self-perceived teacher social support, and self-concept in three domains (Scholastic Competence, Social Acceptance, and Global Self-Worth)? (b) What is the prevalence of discrimination among the sample? (c) Does self-perceived classmate social support, self-perceived teacher social support, and experience of discrimination predict self-concept?

## METHOD

### *Sample*

Two-hundred and forty surveys were mailed to subjects who volunteered to participate in the study. A total of 68 students completed all of the instruments (28.3% response rate); 2 students did not meet the eligibility criteria for age, 1 student attended home school, and 4 students did not complete the self-concept forms correctly. Thus, there were 61 useable surveys. The average age of the 61 respondents was 15.3 (range 12–18). Forty-five (73.8%) of the respondents were in high school. There were 28 males (45.9%) and 33 females (54.1%). Students were predominately Muslim ( $n = 51$ , 83.6%). Christians comprised 14.8% ( $n = 9$ ) of the sample, and 1 person reported no religious affiliation (1.6%). The majority of the participants resided in the midwestern region of the United States, with Ohio (29) and Illinois (18) the most common states of residence. Two thirds of the students (67.2%) were first-generation Americans. Ancestry was Palestinian (34.4%), Syrian (23.0%), multiple-Arab ancestries (14.8%), Arab/non-Arab (13.1%), Egyptian (4.9%), Iraqi (4.9%), Jordanian (3.3%), and Yemeni (1.6%).

### *Instrumentation*

Self-perceived social support from classmates and teachers was measured by Harter's (1985) Social Support Scale for Children (SSSC). This instrument was standardized with elementary- and middle-school-aged children and resulted in high internal consistency reliabilities ranging between 0.74 and 0.79 and between 0.81 and 0.84 for classmate and teacher support, respectively. The items in these two subscales are in a Likert-scale-question format. The questions are posed in either positive or negative wording on one side and negative or positive on the other side of the form, respectively. This method is a structured alternative format and is used to counter the answering of items in a socially desirable manner. The question items are scored 4, 3, 2, or 1, where 4 represents the most support or regard from the source and 1 represents the least support or regard. These scores are then calculated to obtain a mean for each subscale, which defines the participant's profile.

A questionnaire was developed by the first author to measure experience of discrimination. This measure was developed because there were no established instruments that addressed specific concerns relative to this study. Participants were asked to self-report whether either they or another Arab student they knew had been "treated badly or differently." If participants answered "Yes" to either question, they were categorized as having experienced discrimination. If they answered "No" to both questions, they were categorized as having no discrimination experience. Students were then asked to describe an incident that occurred. This follow-up information was used solely to provide qualitative explanations of the answers. No statistical analyses were conducted regarding these descriptive responses.

Self-concept was measured by asking the participants to complete the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (SSPA; Harter, 1988). For the purposes of this study, only the Scholastic Competence, Social Acceptance, and Global Self-Worth domains were examined because they were most related to school experiences. Scholastic Competence measures the students' perceptions of their abilities in the area of scholastic performance. Examples include how well they are doing in school and how intelligent they feel they are. Social Acceptance measures the degree to which the student feels he or she is accepted by classmates, is popular, has many friends, and is easy to like. Global Self-Worth is a self-perceived judgment of one's worth as a person. The format of the questionnaire is a structured alternative format similar to the SSSC. Internal consistency reliabilities ranged from .80 to .85 for Scholastic Competence, .75 to .80 for Social Acceptance, and .78 to .84 for Global Self-Worth. The SSPA has been validated in numerous studies (Harter, 1988) and has been used nationally and internationally with diverse cultural groups (e.g., Birman, 1998; Canpolat, Orsel, Akdemir, & Ozbay, 2005; Kuperminc, Darnell, & Alvarez-Jimenez, 2008; Putnick et al., 2008; Thomson & Zand, 2002). A demographic questionnaire was also included. Data were gathered on age, grade, gender, grade point average (GPA), religion, and ancestry.

### *Data Analysis*

Frequency counts were conducted for gender, grade, religion, and ancestry, and means and standard deviations were calculated for age and GPA. To contrast the early- versus late-adolescent development and the different environments in middle and high schools, grade levels were collapsed into a "school level" variable with two levels: middle school and high school. Correlations among demographic characteristics, self-concept, discrimination, and self-perceived social support variables were calculated. Demographic variables resulting in statistical significance were added as control variables in the multiple regression models discussed later. School level and GPA variables were added as control variables to the Scholastic Competence regression model. Only school level was added to the Global Self-Worth regression model as a control variable.

Three multiple regression analyses were conducted, one on each of the criterion variables (Scholastic Competence, Social Acceptance, and Global Self-Worth). The predictor variables for each model were entered simultaneously. Predictor variables for the Scholastic Competence regression model included classmate support and discrimination. Classmate support was the only predictor variable for both Social Acceptance and Global Self-Worth regression models. This method of entry was chosen because predictor variables were chosen a priori, and this method allowed for simultaneous estimation of the regression parameters (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006). This method was chosen over other methods, such as hierarchical, because this study was exploratory, and there was no method of determining a logical hierarchy of entry. All data analyses were completed by using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 19).

### *Procedures*

This study used a nonrandom, convenience sample. Snowball sampling was used to recruit participants because Arab American students were difficult to identify and schools were reluctant to single out populations for studies. Snowball sampling is a technique in which each person or group contacted was instructed to contact other potential participants. This type of sampling is valuable when participants are difficult to identify. For this study, snowball sampling began by contacting Arab American organizations around the country by email and phone. Six organizations demonstrated interest in helping to recruit participants. Three National Network of Arab American Communities organizations (the Arab American Family Services of Chicago, the Center for Arabic Culture in

Table 1  
*Means and Standard Deviations (SD) for Self-Concept Domains, Self-Perceived Classmate and Teacher Support, and Self-Reported GPA*

Measures	Mean	SD
Scholastic Competence	3.15	.692
Social Acceptance	3.28	.560
Global Self-Worth	3.19	.640
Classmate Social Support	3.23	.517
Teacher Social Support	3.25	.578
GPA	3.63	.437

*Note.*  $n = 61$ .

Massachusetts, and the Alif Institute) sent letters to their members, and three Ohio organizations (the Noor Islamic Cultural Center in Columbus, the Islamic Center of Cleveland, and the Alif Ba Arabic Learning Center of Columbus) advertised and recruited participants during their youth group sessions. The researchers also utilized snowball sampling with friends and family members to increase the number of potential respondents. To be eligible for inclusion, participants had to self-identify as an Arab American who was between the ages of 12 and 18 and enrolled in a public or private school.

Potential participants were mailed parental consent and assent forms, the surveys described previously, a demographic questionnaire, and a prepaid, return envelope. Two-hundred forty surveys were sent. The estimated time to complete the instruments was between 45 to 60 minutes.

## RESULTS

### *Descriptive Statistics*

Means of the three self-concept domains, self-perceived classmate support, self-perceived teacher support, and self-reported GPAs are presented in Table 1. Students tended to have positive self-concept in all domains (all means were above 3.0). Self-perceived classmate support and self-perceived teacher support were also positive. The mean self-reported GPA was 3.63. This finding is consistent with the literature claims that Arab Americans are generally a high-achieving ethnic group (Samhan, 2007).

Students were asked to report their experiences of discrimination in their schools. Thirty-one (50.8%) students reported either experiencing or knowing of some form of discrimination. Twenty-four of these students experienced discrimination personally. Descriptive reports of these students included being called derogatory names such as "terrorist" or being told to go back to their own country. Several female students who were Muslim reported having their head coverings pulled off by their classmates. One Christian student reported being taunted and called "Muslim terrorist." Twenty-two of the 31 students knew someone close to them who experienced discrimination or witnessed discrimination against another individual. One student witnessed a fellow student being beaten into unconsciousness after defending his religion. Other students reported overhearing classmates making fun of other Arab students because of the way they talked or dressed. The remainder of the sample ( $n = 30$ ) reported that they did not experience discrimination in their school. Several of these students also reported that people were not aware that they were Arab because they did not "look" Arab.

Table 2  
*Correlations of Self-Concept, Self-Perceived Social Supports, and Demographic Variables*

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. GPA	–								
2. Scholastic Competence	.49**	–							
3. Social Acceptance	–.08	.19	–						
4. Global Self-Worth	.08	.58**	.41**	–					
5. Classmate Support	.23	.46**	.57**	.45**	–				
6. Teacher Support	.34**	.14	–.01	.17	.28*	–			
7. Gender	.14	–.09	–.08	–.08	–.13	.23	–		
8. School Level	–.07	–.26*	–.18	–.35**	–.13	–.05	–0.3	–	
9. Discrimination	.06	–.27*	–.13	–.16	–.30*	.06	.08	–.14	–

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

### *Correlational Analyses*

Several statistically significant relationships were found (Table 2). Self-perceived classmate support was positively related to all the self-concept domains, with Social Acceptance the highest (.57). Self-perceived support from teachers was not related to any of the self-concept variables. The literature suggests that during adolescence, peer support becomes more critical than adult support in the development of self-concept (Harter, 1999). This may be a rationale for classmate support being related to all domains, whereas teacher support was not. Students' self-reported GPA was positively related to Scholastic Competence and teacher support. Research has long suggested a positive relationship between GPA and academic competence (Brookover, Paterson, & Thomas, 1962; Hoge, Smit, & Hanson, 1990). Whether higher achievement leads to higher competence or high competence leads to higher achievement still remains unclear. In addition, perceived teacher support has been identified in multiple research studies as a critical component to students' academic achievement (Martin et al., 2007; Reddy et al., 2003). In this sample of Arab American adolescents, there is evidence that teacher support was important for academic achievement. School level was negatively related to Scholastic Competence and Global Self-Worth, with high school students having lower self-concept. Researchers examining the development of self-concept suggest that as individuals progress through stages of adolescence, their self-concept becomes more differentiated and more complicated (Delugach, Bracken, Bracken, & Schicke, 1992; Rosenburg, 1986). Cantin and Boivin (2004) found that as students progressed into junior high school, their Scholastic Competence and Global Self-Worth decreased. The authors speculated that a decrease in Scholastic Competence may be related to the increased academic expectations and changes in the school environment once these students entered middle school. Perhaps once students enter high school, these demands increase further and the environment changes even more. Consequently, their self-concept may decrease further. In addition, students who have to cope with major transitions, such as progressing from middle to high school, may be at greater risk for maladjustment and decreases in Global Self-Worth. This may explain the relationship of the two self-concept domains with school level in the current sample: with increasing demands and need for coping strategies, these high school students felt less competent overall. School level was not related to discrimination: middle-school students did not report a higher prevalence of discrimination than did high school students. Gender was not related to any variables in this study. Finally, perceptions of discrimination were negatively related to Scholastic Competence and classmate support. Students who reported an experience of discrimination felt less competent academically and felt they had less support from classmates. Discrimination was not related to Social Acceptance or Global Self-Worth.

Table 3  
Coefficients for Scholastic Competence Model

	<i>B</i> ( <i>SE B</i> )	Beta	95% Confidence Intervals of <i>B</i>
Constant	.015 (.699)		
School Level	-.356 (.159)*	-.228	-.673, .038
GPA	.686 (.162)**	.433	.361, 1.011
Discrimination	-.345 (.146)*	-.251	-.637, -.052
Classmate Support	.336 (.146)*	.251	.045, .628

Note.  $R^2 = .453$ ,  $F = 11.579$ . Middle School is the reference category of School Level, and No Discrimination is the reference category for Discrimination.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

Table 4  
Coefficients for Global Self-Worth Model

	<i>B</i> ( <i>SE B</i> )	Beta	95% Confidence Intervals of <i>B</i>
Constant	1.872		
Classmate Support	.505 (.139)**	.408	.228, .783
School Level	-.422 (.162)*	-.292	-.746, -.098

Note.  $R^2 = .284$ ,  $F = 11.479$ . Middle School is the reference category of School Level.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

### Regression Results

For all domains, Normal P-P Plots and residual plots were constructed and resulted in no serious violations of homogeneity of variance and normality. Linearity was satisfied by including only variables that shared a significant linear relationship with the dependent variable.

*Scholastic Competence.* School level, GPA, discrimination, and self-perceived classmate support were statistically significant ( $F = 11.579$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $R^2 = .453$ ) in the regression model for Scholastic Competence (Table 3). Students who had experienced discrimination had lower Scholastic Competence and less classmate support. High-school students had lower Scholastic Competence than middle-school students. Students with a higher GPA and higher classmate support had higher Scholastic Competence.

*Social Acceptance.* The only variable with a statistically significant correlation to Social Acceptance was self-perceived classmate support ( $r = .57$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Higher classmate support predicted higher Social Acceptance.

*Global Self-Worth.* Self-perceived classmate support and school level were statistically related to Global Self-Worth ( $F = 11.479$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $R^2 = .284$ ; Table 4). High-school students had lower Global Self-Worth than middle-school students, and higher classmate support predicted higher Global Self-Worth.

## DISCUSSION

Generally, the students in the sample were academically high achieving; however, there appear to be factors within the school environment that may be affecting aspects of their self-concept. Students with high Scholastic Competence had high classmate support, had high GPAs, experienced

no discrimination, and were in middle school. High Social Acceptance was associated with high classmate support. Students with high Global Self-Worth also had high classmate support and were in middle school. Overall, higher classmate support was related to higher self-concept in all three areas, suggesting that classmate relationships are essential to these adolescents' perceptions of their competencies. Teacher support was not related to any of the variables. Results were consistent with the symbolic interaction theory in terms of classmate support, but not teacher support. As mentioned previously, this may be because, at this stage of adolescence, individuals seek more peer approval than adult approval. Furthermore, perceived discrimination was associated with lower Scholastic Competence and lower perceptions of classmate support. Discrimination was not, however, associated with Social Acceptance or Global Self-Worth. It seems that self-perceived classmate support triumphed over discrimination in these areas and possibly served as a protective factor. Results were consistent with the stigma hypothesis in terms of Scholastic Competence, but not in terms of Social Acceptance or Global Self-Worth. Perhaps the latter two findings are more consistent with the Rejection-Identification model (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999), which hypothesizes that "individuals often respond to perceptions of discrimination by becoming more highly identified with their targeted in-group, which can help to preserve psychological well-being in the face of societal devaluation" (Armenta & Hunt, 2009, p. 36). Therefore, it may be worthwhile to investigate identity in relationship to the social aspects of self-concept. Several studies have discussed the potential effects that various factors in the school environment may have on the self-concept of adolescents. Although these studies were not conducted with Arab American adolescents, they did utilize ethnic and sexual minority youth, which may have applicability to Arab American youth. Kenny and McEachern (2009) found that Black students had significantly lower self-concept than White students. Many of the Black students were Haitian, were considered the minorities in their school, and were treated differently by their classmates, thereby creating a sense of isolation from the majority. A recent study by the National Education Association investigating school environment effects in gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender youth found that students who do not feel safe in school and who are alienated tend to drop out of school at a higher rate (Kim, Sheridan, & Holcomb, 2009). Students reported being stigmatized by school staff, parents, and classmates because of their sexual orientation. Parents of these students tended to search for schools with supportive environments so their children would not be affected academically and/or socially. These cases may be similar to those of Arab American students in that Arab American students may feel isolated and unsafe in schools that are not set up to counter discrimination or stigmatism by staff or classmates. To mediate these consequences, it is necessary to implement interventions to promote Arab American cultural awareness and social support in the schools.

Discrimination of minority groups may be facilitated by the majority's lack of awareness and understanding of particular groups. The literature provides specific strategies for schools to use to counter discrimination of Arab American youth. For example, Wingfield and Salam (1993) discussed strategies that schools may utilize to decrease discrimination toward Arab American children and adolescents. A main theme from this discussion was the utility of culturally relevant and representative curricula and textbooks to increase cultural awareness among students and staff and to increase Arab American students' perceptions of cultural inclusion in the schools. Wingfield and Salam (1993) published a guide to help schools in the transformation of curriculum and instruction to include culturally relevant materials that may be beneficial to the needs of Arab American students. School psychologists may utilize this guide to help their schools incorporate accurate Arab American ethnic content into the curriculum. Wingfield and Salam (1993) also suggested that schools may benefit from requesting Arab American figures to participate in the provision of cultural knowledge to school personnel. These figures may teach culturally competent practices and help schools create a school climate that is welcoming for Arab American students. In turn, teachers

may present this knowledge in their classrooms to increase their students' knowledge of the culture. School personnel may also request Arab American students in their schools to hold a student panel to answer questions about the culture. By taking such action, peer support may increase as the understanding and awareness of the Arab American culture increases.

Wingfield (2006) suggested that schools be proactive in using discrimination incidents as learning experiences and as a means to strengthen peer relations. The author proposed that schools may benefit from encouraging students to develop anti-discrimination or diversity committees. Students are then encouraged to write letters of protest to mass media when groups are portrayed by negative stereotypes. For example, when an Arab character is portrayed as a terrorist in a film, students can write a letter asking why the character was portrayed in that way and asking for an Arab to be portrayed positively. Wingfield (2006) also suggested that students may write letters asking for apologies when political leaders make bigoted public statements. These types of activities may require students to advocate for each other and learn from each other, thereby, increasing support for one another.

Because many of the responses that were shared were kin to bullying, anti-bullying interventions may be beneficial to Arab American youth in the schools. Developing zero-tolerance and anti-bullying policies may address problems with lack of social support in the schools from peers. These types of programs may also aid staff in developing awareness of discrimination incidents in their schools. Ibish (2003) reported that schools that had such policies in place after 9/11, had significantly fewer incidents of discrimination.

#### *Limitations and Directions for Future Research*

There were several potential limitations of this study. The first was the use of a nonrandom, convenience sample. A convenience sample limited the generalizability of the results. The relatively small sample size was also a limitation. This study warrants replication using a larger, random sample of students to increase power and generalizability of the results. The second limitation was the exclusion of potentially related variables, as it was difficult to include every possible variable that may constitute a relationship. For example, the investigation of ethnic identity in relation to the various self-concept domains would have been interesting, especially in terms of the social aspects of self-concept to determine whether or not identity played a protective role. Third, the cross-sectional design may be considered a weakness by researchers. Longitudinal designs allow for multiple observations of subjects over a long period of time, hence, allowing researchers to observe changes in the variables. Future research should focus on using a longitudinal design to examine how changes in perceived social support, teacher ratings, and experiences of discrimination affect changes in students' self-concept. Finally, self-report measures constituted a weakness in that response bias is difficult to control. Although Harter's (1985; 1988) surveys were developed especially to control for response bias, the discrimination questionnaire did not have that same quality. The researchers could not control the way participants responded to this questionnaire one way or another. It also was not possible for the researchers to control for social desirability bias, in which the participants responded with a socially desirable answer. There was no way to control or determine whether participants were influenced to complete the surveys by parents, friends, or both. Due to the nature of the discrimination questionnaire, there was no way to ascertain the accuracy of the responses. In addition, there was no way to differentiate between students who experienced one incident or multiple incidents of discrimination. Future research should focus on using different means of collecting this type of information by controlling response and socially desirable biases.

Although this study does contain limitations, it is the first study that examined school experiences and social support in relation to self-concept with a sample of Arab American adolescents.

Sue (1999) discussed the lack of ethnic minority research in psychology. He stated that research is often criticized for being “descriptive in nature, simple in design, and lacking in grounding in sophisticated and mature psychological theory” (p. 1071). However, he also pointed out that although this may be so, many of these studies add new knowledge to the field, especially when little is known about certain ethnic minority groups. Our study was exploratory; however, it adds value in providing new and valuable information about a group of Arab American adolescents. Although the results are limited to this group, researchers at least now have a direction for future research. Although these students were generally high achieving, the study found that they were also having problems with discrimination and social support in school. Discrimination and classmate support were two essential factors that had a relationship with various aspects of self-concept. This study opens the door for future research with this population and provides information that may be used for future programs aimed at improving social supports in the school environment.

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