Identity Politics Among Arab-American Women*

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Objective. Identity politics has dominated contemporary analyses of protest movements. Although multiple identities are commonplace, progress in delineating their empirical relationship has been slow. This article examines the relationships among ethnic and religious identities and feminist orientations among Arab-American women, a group that bridges multiple cultural identities. The primary research question is whether ethnic and religious identities undermine feminism in this population or whether multiple identities are mutually supportive. *Methods.* Using data from a national mail survey of Arab-American women, regression analyses examine the separate effects of various dimensions of ethnic and religious identity on women's feminist orientations. *Results.* Arab political identity is positively associated with feminism while religious and feminist identities are inversely related. The effects of ethnic cultural identity and Muslim affiliation are negligible. *Conclusions.* This study finds a complex pattern of relationships among multiple identities and underscores the underlying political dynamic linking group identities.

Political mobilization on the basis of cultural identity seemed to erupt in the latter decades of the 20th century. This phenomenon, known as identity politics, has been applied to ethnic wars in the former Soviet Union (Meznaric, 1994), militant Islamic movements in the Middle East (Ismail, 1998), and the rise of the religious right and feminist movements in the United States (Hunter, 1991; Ryan, 2001). Most research on identity politics focuses on one main organizing identity, relegating the others to secondary importance. Although numerous theoretical treatments have considered the intersection of race and gender politics, supporting empirical evidence derives mainly from case studies of ethnic communities.

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SOCIAL SCIENCE QUARTERLY, Volume 84, Number 4, December 2003

This article examines the relationships among multiple identities using a national survey of Arab-American women, a group located at the intersection of ethnic, religious, and gender politics. We expand on prior research by separating the effects of different group identities and by considering the relative importance of various dimensions of identity constructs on women's feminist orientation. We assess two divergent hypotheses about the relationships among multiple identities: the competition hypothesis, which posits that both ethnic and religious identity reduce feminist support, and the contagion hypothesis, which proposes that ethnic identity promotes feminist attitudes because it heightens awareness of grievances and recognition of the benefits of collective action.

We seek clarification of the construct of identity in two ways. First, we distinguish between the political and cultural dimensions of ethnic identity and measure their independent effects on support for women's rights. Second, we differentiate between religious and ethnic identities, which are typically conflated in studies of Arab populations. Our final objective is to examine the belief structures of Arab-American women, a relatively invisible but growing minority group.

Literature Review

In recent decades, identity has become a more problematic concept for social scientists. Psychologists now emphasize the social construction of race, ethnicity, and gender, which were formerly viewed as ascribed biological categories. Group identities are conceptualized as complex, negotiated, and culturally embedded meaning systems (see review by Frable, 1997). They are important components of individuals' self-definition and key frames of reference that influence collective values, attitudes, and actions.

The term *identity politics* is used to explain political divisions derived from group identities based not on economic grievances and class conflict, but in defense of more expressive issues of cultural identity, such as religion, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality (Hunter, 1991; Ryan, 2001; Taylor and Whittier, 1992). Identity politics are a product of the complexity of modern life, which is responsible for the breakup of relatively fixed identity schemas grounded in traditional kinship systems (Calhoun, 1994). This approach regards group identity as a variable, the product of discourse and debate, rather than an objective social category. Identity politics frequently appear as "culture wars" over what it means to be "woman," "Christian," or "Arab." They become salient frameworks for interpreting events and motivating collective mobilization (Johnston, Laraña, and Gusfield, 1994; Melucci, 1985). Although the process of identity formation may be intensely personal, the activities of identity politics occur in the public sphere where groups seek recognition, legitimacy, and power (Calhoun, 1994).

Given the multiplicity of identities available in the modern world, their interrelationships have drawn increasing attention. In gender studies, for

example, in-depth field research among immigrant and ethnic communities verify that gender, ethnicity, and class uniquely shape women's behaviors and belief structures (Di Leonardo, 1984; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Kibria, 1990). Differences among women often appear more significant than their common oppression (Collins, 1990; Mohanty, Russo, and Torres, 1991; Spelman, 1988). Moreover, intersecting stratification hierarchies may produce oppression or opportunity depending on social location and historical context, leading some to propose the concept of multiple feminisms as a corrective to the putative race and class biases of earlier formulations (Baca Zinn and Dill, 1996). Empirical specification of how cross-cutting hierarchies interact has not followed these theoretical advances, however, and as a result important questions remain about the relationships among multiple group identities. The range of possible permutations of intersecting social locations, for instance, could logically lead to the conclusion that everyone is uniquely situated, confounding efforts to establish empirical patterns.

The prevalent view is that the competition field of multiple identities is often resolved by the dominance of one identity over the others in salience and loyalty (Calhoun, 1994; Hovsepian, 1995). In some settings it appears to be religion, since religious traditions and institutions are among the most stable of cultural forms, providing secure anchors of meaning in an environment of social change (Mol, 1976). In other contexts it may be race, which is often viewed as an ''overarching structure of domination'' (Collins, 1990). When multiple identities compete, many scholars propose that gender ends up on the bottom rung, as minority women experience intense pressure to demonstrate primary loyalty to their ethnic group at the expense of gender interests. Studies find that ethnicity trumps gender as an influence on political attitudes not only among groups with a cultural tradition of female subordination, such as Asian Americans and Hispanics (Almquist, 1986; Chow, 1987), but even among African Americans, where women experience greater autonomy from men (Gay and Tate, 1998; Joseph and Lewis, 1981). A similar pattern is found in ethnic communities not commonly labeled as minorities, raising questions about the extent to which the maintenance of ethnic identity supports male dominance (Di Leonardo, 1984). Nor is ethnicity the only restrictive influence; all major religions endorse patriarchy, and adherence to more conservative sects reduces feminist orientation among both black and white women (Hertel and Hughes, 1987; Wilcox, 1997).

An alternative proposal is that the dominant identity acts as a potentially subversive force promoting the formation of other politicized identities (Collins, 1990). According to the contagion hypothesis, experiences of racial discrimination facilitate heightened political consciousness and mobilization among minority women to remedy both forms of inequality. In support of this view, the racial grievances of African-American women were positively related to their support for the Equal Rights Amendment and other feminist

issues (Marshall, 1990; Wilcox, 1997). Theorists rightly caution, however, against the a priori elevation of race to a central role in the "dynamics of oppositional agency" without further research on a diversity of minority groups (Baca Zinn and Dill, 1996).

The emergent ethnic identity of Arab Americans illustrates the social process of identity construction. The ambiguity of this ethnic group is reflected in the fact that the U.S. Census classifies Arab Americans with European whites; thus their exact numbers are unknown (Naber, 2000). The earliest Arab immigration stream to the United States, which began around 1880, was composed mostly of Christians (Naff, 1985) and did not become more diverse until after World War II (Suleiman, 1994). Despite recent increases in Muslim immigration, most of the Arab-American population remains native born and Christian (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990; Zogby, 2001).

Strong American support of Israel helped forge Arab-American unity, both because it has created a new immigrant pool of Palestinian refugees and also because media coverage of the conflict facilitated the perception of American hostility to Middle Eastern culture (Haddad, 1991; Sandoval and Jendrysik, 1993). Most observers concur that the 1967 Arab-Israeli war served as a catalyst for the assertion of ethnic identity, evidenced by the establishment of new political organizations. These include the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, which aims to combat the negative images in the mass media, and the Arab American Institute, whose goal is to change U.S. Middle Eastern policy (Majaj, 1999). The activities of these organizations—researching anti-Arab prejudice, lobbying, and voter registration campaigns—have further facilitated the growth of Arab-American political identity. In the aftermath of the attacks of September 2001, for example, they released poll data demonstrating the patriotism of Arab Americans (Zogby, 2001) and made media appearances to protest acts of discrimination.

The political views of Arab Americans are not monolithic, however. There is widespread consensus on the subjects of perceived U.S. bias against their ethnicity and strong support for Palestinian statehood. Increasing self-identification as Arab Americans rather than as Americans or by nation of origin suggests a recent upsurge in ethnic identity (Suleiman, 1994). On the other hand, there are often marked differences in political views by age, nativity, and religion, with greater opposition to U.S. Middle Eastern policy found among younger, foreign-born, and Muslim Arab Americans (Sandoval and Jendrysik, 1993). Underscoring the multidimensionality of ethnic identity, younger Arab Americans are not necessarily more devoted to cultural traditions and practices, but they manifest greater political identification as Arabs (Suleiman, 1994). The establishment of separate associations for Muslim Americans from varied regions underscores the complex relationship between religious and ethnic identities (Johnson, 1991).

Most research on Arab and Arab-American women implicitly supports the competition hypothesis, emphasizing the cultural constraints of ethnicity and religion on the development of feminist orientations. The continued importance of traditional kinship systems is identified as a key cultural factor inhibiting the formation of feminist identities (Esposito, 1998; Haddad and Smith, 1996). In recent years, the emergence of militant Islamist movements has encouraged women's return to traditional forms as evidence of cultural authenticity and political rebellion (Moghadam, 1994; Timmerman, 2000). In this climate, the secular concept of gender equality is rendered suspect as a Western import (Badran, 1994), while an indigenous feminism based on sacred doctrine is often thwarted by male control of religious institutions (Arat, 1998).

Demographic profiles of Arab-American women suggest the limited applicability of research based in the Middle East. As has been found among a diversity of immigrant populations, geographic dislocation, financial need, and altered employment opportunities may enhance women's economic position and reduce patriarchal control (Aswad, 1994; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Kibria, 1990). American women of Arab descent are more educated, have higher employment rates, and fewer children compared to their Arab peers (Read, forthcoming); even low-educated Arab immigrants perceive their lives as better than their mothers and manifest an incipient feminist critique of male dominance (Cainkar, 1996). Social class variations among Arab Americans remain significant, with greater personal autonomy and more power in family decision making found among more educated women, while those with fewer resources seek the security of tradition that upholds male authority within traditional kinship systems (Aswad, 1994; Read, 2002).

On the other hand, growing U.S. military involvement in the Middle East and throughout the Muslim world may have raised the salience of gender as well as ethnic and religious identities among Arab Americans (Hatem, 1998). Minority status in a perceived hostile society may impel Arab-American women to differentiate themselves from Western notions of gender equality and feminism as a demonstration of solidarity (Hermansen, 1991; Read and Bartkowski, 2000). Although to date there has been no systematic examination of feminist attitudes among Arab-American women, available evidence tends to support the competition hypothesis, predicting negative effects of ethnic and religious identities on feminist orientation.

Data and Methods

To examine the relationships among multiple identities for Arab-American women, we use data from a mail survey administered in 2000 to a national sample of women with Arab surnames. These data represent the first attempt to move beyond community-based studies of this

population. Survey data also allow us to separate empirically the effects of multiple identities. The sampling frame was constituted from two sources: the membership roster of the Arab American Institute, and a list of female registered voters assembled by Zogby International. Given these sources, the sample is probably older, more highly educated, and more politically active than the Arab-American population as a whole. This is reflected in the high degree of Arab identity among the respondents; fully 75 percent self-identified as either Arab or Arab Americans rather than by nationality. One advantage of the sample is its religious heterogeneity, representing a higher percentage of Muslims compared to previous national samples (Sandoval and Jendrysik, 1993). Women were drawn randomly from both lists, and filter questions were used to exclude non-Arab women. Since the majority of Arab-American women are U.S. citizens and 92 percent are proficient in the English language (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990), the questionnaire was administered in English. The completed sample size was 501, with a response rate of 47.2 percent.

The primary dependent variable is feminist orientation. This concept generally emphasizes the politicization of gender attitudes, encompassing a critique of women's inequality and high identification with women as a group (Cook, 1993; Rhodebeck, 1996). We assess women's feminist orientation with a five-item index that includes support for the U.S. women's movement, perceived gender grievances (that men have too much power, that women have too little power), the salience of women's issues for presidential candidate preference, and the likelihood of voting for a woman president. This index omits questions about gender roles and specific policy issues such as abortion rights that are particular to liberal feminist ideology. The index has a high level of internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.70), with higher scores representing greater ideological support for feminism.

The central research question is the relationship among ethnic and religious identities and feminist attitudes. We distinguish between the political and cultural dimensions of ethnic identity to measure the degree of perceived affiliation with the Arab-American community (Frable, 1997; Zogby, 2001). Arab political identity addresses attention to issues of group rights. Due to high respondent consensus on these attitudes, we use dummy variables to measure feelings of ethnic grievance (that Arab Americans have too little power) and the perceived salience of Arab politics on presidential candidate preferences (whether a candidate's stance on the Middle East is very important).

We measure the cultural dimension of ethnic identity, a more conventional measure of conformity to group traditions, with three indicators. The first is a four-item index signifying the extent to which the respondent's lifestyle includes ethnic practices: the frequency of cooking Arabic meals, Arabic language fluency, the number of Arab friends, and the number of organizational memberships shared with other Arabs (Cronbach's

alpha = 0.78). The second measure of cultural identity is a dummy variable for homogamy, or having an Arab spouse. For all ethnic groups, in-group marriage connotes the importance placed on ethnicity and the likelihood of maintaining group traditions, and Arab cultural norms impose this obligation more strongly on women. The final measure of Arab cultural identity is nativity. Prior studies suggest that ethnic identification varies by birthplace, with immigrants to the United States maintaining stronger ties to indigenous cultural norms and values (e.g., Aswad, 1994). Accordingly, we use a dummy variable to identify foreign-born respondents.

To assess the impact of religious identity on women's feminist orientations, we include one dummy variable for religious conservatism (belief in scriptural inerrancy) and another for the respondent's religious observance over the lifecycle (high religiosity in both childhood and adulthood). We also include a dummy variable for Muslim affiliation in order to examine the possibility that Islamic practice rather than religiosity in general is related to feminist orientation.

Finally, the analysis includes several control variables that are known to affect feminist orientation. Prior research finds that social class background, educational attainment, and labor force participation increase women's support for gender equality and feminism (Glass, 1992; Wilcox and Jelen, 1991). To account for these potential effects, we measure mother's and respondent's educational attainment (whether each completed college), as well as the respondent's labor force activity (whether she is employed full time). Party preference, measured by a dummy variable for Democratic party identification, controls for overall political ideology, since feminist orientation is associated with liberal political views and Democratic affiliation (Conover, 1984; Cook, 1993). We also include the respondent's age to control for generational differences in women's feminist orientations (Glass, 1992); the analysis uses a continuous variable as well as a quadratic term to examine the possibility of nonlinear age effects.

Analysis

We begin the analysis by examining the belief structures of Arab-American women. As Table 1 indicates, the respondents have very high levels of Arab political identity. Eighty percent of those sampled feel that Arab Americans have "too little power" in American life and politics, and two-thirds feel that a presidential candidate's stance on the Middle East is "very important" for their support. Women's Arab cultural identity likewise falls on the upper end of our index, with a mean score of 11.04 (on an index ranging from 4 to 16). Their scores also reflect considerable variation (*SD* of 2.95). Most striking is the high level of homogamy, with three-fourths of the married respondents reporting an Arab spouse. Finally, the sample is comprised almost equally of foreign-born and native-born women.

TABLE 1

Ethnicity, Religion, and Feminist Orientation Among Arab-American Women ($n = 501$)

	Percent
Independent Variables	
Arab political identity	
Arab Americans have too little power	80.0
Presidential candidate's stance on Middle East is very important	66.3
Arab cultural identity	
Cultural ethnicity index	11.4[a]
Arab spouse	77.5[b]
Foreign born	48.7
Religious identity	
Belief in scriptural inerrancy	55.3
High religiosity over the lifecycle	68.5
Muslim affiliation	39.6
Dependent Variable	
Feminist orientation index	
U.S. still needs strong women's movement to bring about equality	65.5
Women as a group have too little power	76.9
Men as a group have too much power	74.1
Presidential candidate's stance on women's issues is very important	58.9
Very likely to vote for female presidential candidate, all else being equal	59.9

[a]Mean score.

[b]Married respondents only.

The religious identity of Arab-American women is also strong. Over two-thirds of respondents (68.5 percent) report high levels of religiosity over the life course, demonstrating the importance of religious socialization. The majority holds conservative religious views, agreeing with the statement that the holy book of their religion is the literal word of God. Consistent with national poll data (Zogby, 2001), the group is mostly Christian (54.4 percent), while Muslims represent a sizable minority (39.6 percent), and only 6 percent of the sample claimed another religion or no affiliation. These results indicate the high salience of religious identity among the women sampled.

High levels of Arab ethnic and religious identity in this sample coexist with fairly progressive feminist beliefs. There is considerable consensus (65.5 percent) on the continued need for a strong women's movement in the United States; this level of support for feminism is comparable to that found among the adult U.S. female population (Boxer, 1997). Most striking are the high levels of gender grievance among respondents: 76.9 percent feel that women have "too little power" in American life and politics and 74.1 percent feel that men have "too much power." The political salience of their feminist values lags slightly behind ethnic issues; nonetheless, a clear majority

TABLE 2

Zero-Order Correlation Matrix of Ethnic and Religious Identity Indicators

	Arab Political Identity		Religious Identity
	Too little power	Presidential candidate's stance	Muslim affiliation
Arab Cultural Identity			
Cultural ethnicity index	−0.041	0.223**	0.423**
Arab spouse	0.020	0.083	0.277**
Foreign born	−0.039	0.142**	0.336**
Arab Political Identity			
Too little power			0.083
Presidential candidate's stance			0.218**

NOTE: All items coded to reflect higher levels of identity.
**$p < 0.01$.

(58.9 percent) of respondents stated that a presidential candidate's stance on women's issues was "very important" in gaining their support, and similar numbers (59.9 percent) claimed that they would be "very likely" to vote for a female presidential candidate. The degree to which Arab-American women support general feminist principles is striking.

We next establish the empirical distinctiveness of the various dimensions of ethnic and religious identity by examining zero-order correlations among selected predictor variables. The results of Table 2 confirm the separate political and cultural dimensions of ethnic identity. Perceptions that Arab Americans have too little power are not related to any of the cultural ethnicity items, and the salience of Middle Eastern politics manifests only weak associations with the maintenance of Arab cultural traditions. These findings provide further support for the multidimensionality of Arab ethnic identity (Suleiman, 1994) and more generally argue for refinement of the concept in identity politics research.

Table 2 also examines the relationship between ethnic and religious identities, which are often conflated in analyses of Middle Eastern populations. We specifically assess the relationship between measures of Arab identity and Muslim affiliation. The findings indicate that being a Muslim Arab American is associated with higher cultural identity, especially for lifestyle preferences such as food, language, and friendship networks. This partly reflects the impact of more recent immigration among Muslim Arabs. But Table 2 also shows a weak association between Muslim affiliation and Arab political identity, indicating that Arab political consciousness is not a phenomenon limited to Muslim women. In sum, while some aspects of ethnic and religious identity are related, they constitute separate dimensions of Arab-American women's belief structure.

To this point, our analysis reveals the complexity of women's ethnic and religious identities. According to the competition hypothesis, higher religious and ethnic identification should be negatively associated with respondents' feminist orientations. The contagion hypothesis, on the other hand, proposes positive relationships, at least between ethnic identity and feminist attitudes. To test these competing hypotheses, Table 3 presents ordinary least squares regression coefficients for the effects of ethnic and religious identities on women's feminist orientations. Model 1 examines only the influence of Arab political identity, Model 2 adds Arab cultural identity and background characteristics included as control variables, and Model 3, the full model, incorporates measures of religious identity.

According to the results of Model 1, there is a significant positive association between Arab political identity and women's support for feminist ideology. This indicates support for the contagion hypothesis that multiple identities are mutually supportive. Model 2 considers whether this pattern remains when the more traditional aspects of Arab cultural identity are included. Of the three measures of Arab cultural identity, only marital homogamy has a significant and negative impact on women's feminist beliefs. The maintenance of everyday Arab cultural practices has trivial effects on feminist orientation. Moreover, the positive influence of Arab political identity on feminist support remains strong despite the inclusion of the cultural identity variables, reinforcing our earlier claim that culture and politics are separate dimensions of ethnic identity. These findings further suggest that they have contradictory effects on gender ideology, net of respondent's background characteristics.

The results of Model 2 also demonstrate the importance of socialization for the development of feminist attitudes. Highly educated mothers positively impact women's feminist beliefs, as do respondents' own educational achievements, full-time labor force participation, and Democratic Party affiliation. Support for women's rights generally increases with age, but declines among the oldest respondents, as evidenced by the negative coefficient for the quadratic term. Except for age, these findings replicate patterns for U.S. women generally (Conover, 1984; Cook 1993). Moreover, social class and Arab political identity have independent effects on feminist orientation, suggesting that the linkage between ethnic and gender politics is a cross-class phenomenon, although we acknowledge that our sample underrepresents the least privileged members of this population.

The third model assesses the impact of religious identity on feminist attitudes. The findings clearly demonstrate the significant negative effects of two of the three measures of religiosity. Respondents who believe in scriptural inerrancy and those who are highly religious over the life cycle are less likely to have feminist views, demonstrating the strong effects of religious doctrine and practice. But this relationship is not unique to Muslim believers; Muslim affiliation is unrelated to Arab-American women's feminist orientations. This result was consistent even when the

TABLE 3

OLS Coefficients for the Estimated Effects of Ethnic and Religious Identity on Arab-American Women's Feminist Orientations ($n = 501$)

	Feminist Orientation Index		
	Model 1 b	Model 2 b	Model 3 b
Arab Political Identity			
Too little power	1.333**	1.258**	0.955**
	(0.353)	(0.339)	(0.339)
Presidential candidate's stance	1.105**	1.141**	1.135**
	(0.238)	(0.235)	(0.232)
Arab Cultural Identity			
Cultural ethnicity index		− 0.011	0.022
		(0.047)	(0.048)
Arab spouse		− 0.386*	− 0.409*
		(0.262)	(0.257)
Foreign born		− 0.294	− 0.405
		(0.258)	(0.266)
Religious Identity			
Belief in scriptural inerrancy			− 0.804**
			(0.241)
High religiosity over the lifecycle			− 0.772**
			(0.250)
Muslim affiliation			0.281
			(0.258)
Background Variables			
College-educated mother		0.671*	0.496*
		(0.326)	(0.321)
College education		0.407*	0.071
		(0.235)	(0.241)
Employed full time		0.364^{+}	0.372^{+}
		(0.243)	(0.238)
Democrat		1.258**	1.085**
		(0.219)	(0.217)
Age in years		0.088*	0.097*
		(0.045)	(0.044)
Age^2		− 0.001*	− 0.001**
		(0.000)	(0.000)
Constant	14.078	11.598	12.597
R^2	0.081	0.210	0.250
Adjusted R^2	0.078	0.192	0.228

NOTE: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors.

$^{+}p < 0.10$; $*p < 0.05$; $**p < 0.01$.

variable was entered in earlier models (not shown). This finding stands as an empirical corrective to popular assumptions that Arab conservative religious views on gender reflect Islamic beliefs. Moreover, neither religious nor

cultural commitment mitigates the strong positive effect of Arab political identity on feminist orientation, as evidenced by the consistent relationship between the variables found in all three models.

Discussion and Conclusion

This survey of Arab-American women dissected relationships among complex identity structures that are not easily separated by social actors in their everyday constructions of meaning. Several notable findings emerge from our analysis of multiple identities. First, the belief structure of Arab-American women is complex. They score high on our indexes of ethnic cultural and religious identity, and especially high on ethnic political identity. The extent of their politicized attitudes suggests that Arab-American women are involved in public issues and are not merely focused on kinship work in the domestic sphere. It should be noted, however, that this finding may be an artifact of the sampling frame, which was constructed in part from membership lists of an Arab-American interest group. Although the analysis finds some empirical evidence that participation in ethnic kinship networks supports gender traditionalism, the coexistence of strong ethnic, religious, and feminist identities among the sample suggests a complex attitudinal structure that supports a progressive gender ideology. They also provide counterevidence to the claim that feminism must necessarily be tailored to specific ethnic concerns; as we found, Arab-American women respond very positively to general questions concerning what many regard as mainstream feminism.

The separation of various dimensions of ethnic and religious identity yielded additional insights into the belief structures of this group. First, the cultural dimension of ethnic identity is far less important than the political dimension for predicting feminist orientation. For example, enacting traditional cultural practices, such as preparing ethnic food and speaking Arabic, has negligible effects on women's feminist orientations. Another noteworthy finding is that foreign-born women are no less feminist than are native-born Arab Americans, which is consistent with previous research on increased female assertiveness among Hispanic and Asian immigrant groups (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Kibria, 1990). The one significant cultural variable that reduced support for feminism was marriage within the ethnic group. As Di Leonardo's (1984) study of Italian Americans concluded, adherence to ethnic traditions encodes the ideal of the patriarchal family. A marital partner of the same ethnicity may enhance the effects of traditional Arab gender norms through women's kinship work of maintaining extended family relationships and greater participation in ethnic rituals and institutions that support male dominance.

Although religious identity dampens feminist orientation, as expected, the particular religious affiliation is irrelevant. In unpacking ethnic and religious

identities, we find it is not Muslim doctrine per se but religious practice and conservative beliefs more generally that quash gender consciousness, consistent with findings on U.S. Christians and Jews (Hartman and Hartman, 1996; Hertel and Hughes, 1987) as well as other ethnic minorities (Wilcox, 1997). Moreover, the positive effects of social class background, employment, and political liberalism replicate patterns found among U.S. women. In total, these findings imply that Arab-American women are best compared to their American counterparts, rather than to women of their countries of origin or ethnic heritage. These results partly support the concept of multiple feminisms (Baca Zinn and Dill, 1996). The construction of feminist identity among Arab-American women is both a product of multiple oppressions derived from minority group status and the result of nontraditional socialization and access to female role models within the family. The discovery of both differences and similarities between Arab-American and other U.S. women supports the view that, despite unique social locations derived from the intersection of gender, ethnicity, social class, and even religion, the resulting ideologies may not form endless permutations but a more limited range of patterns.

Concerning our primary research question about the relationships among multiple identities, the findings are mixed. The contagion hypothesis receives support from the finding that political ethnic identity is consistently associated with women's higher feminist orientation. These findings are consistent with prior research on African-American women (Marshall, 1990; Wilcox, 1997), and suggest that the compatibility between ethnic and gender identities may extend to cultural traditions that are less gender egalitarian and in which we expect more conflicting group interests. More broadly, these results support feminist theorists who argue for the centrality of race in constructing feminism (Baca Zinn and Dill, 1996; Collins, 1990). Although it is premature to generalize these results across gender and ethnicity, these findings highlight potential similarities across ethnic groups based on structural position rather than shared culture. The finding that cultural and political dimensions of ethnic identity have very different associations with feminism helps clarify the concept of identity as used in identity politics and underscores Calhoun's (1994) point that identities are not simply categorical affiliations, but vary within groups and are often contradictory.

The competition hypothesis receives its strongest support from the negative relationship between religious identity and feminist orientation. Conservative religious beliefs and consistent religious practice over the lifecycle are associated with lower support for feminism. As noted above, this result is not unexpected, given the universal patriarchal content of religious doctrine. We caution, however, that our measures do not capture the more politicized dimensions of religious identity, such as whether one's religious beliefs have too little or too much influence on U.S. policy. This caveat extends to the finding that Muslim affiliation is unrelated to feminist

orientation, since our study includes no Islamist critique of U.S. culture or measures of perceived grievances concerning U.S. religious bias. Further research is needed to determine whether the political dimensions of religious identity fit the competition hypothesis or whether, like the two dimensions of ethnic identity, the results are contradictory.

Although the research hypotheses received mixed support, the major conclusion of this study is that ethnic identity can be compatible with feminist orientation. The key dynamic appears to be the politicization of group memberships, whether ethnicity or gender. Identity politics is potentially more powerful than sentimental group attachments or the enactment of group rituals. Indeed, the cultural and political dimensions of ethnic identity appear to be distinctive identity constructs. When ethnic identity includes the development of grievances and the analysis of political issues and candidates through the lens of group interests, it can be a mutually reinforcing process that incites analysis and social critique of positions of other group memberships. Our findings indicate that this can occur even when ethnic and gender interests are ostensibly oppositional. Overall, these results indicate that it is possible to go beyond broad acknowledgment of multiple identities to chart more precisely the complexity of relationships among their various dimensions.

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