Arab and Jewish Students' Attitudes towards Multiculturalism in Israel: The Moderating Role of Ethnic Identity

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Doi:10.5901/mjss.2013.v4n14p303

Abstract

Israeli society presents a particularly interesting case of multicultural existence. The relations between Arabs and Jews are the most difficult and sensitive among the different groups in Israel, due to the ongoing Jewish —Palestinian historical conflict. Higher education campuses in Israel serve as socialization agencies where students from both ethnic groups share a mutual learning environment and need to cooperate in a predominant Jewish milieu. The present study examined group differences in general and specific attitudes towards multiculturalism. In addition the moderating role of ethnic identity in the effect of ethnic group on attitudes toward general and specific multiculturalism was studied. Restluts indicated group differences in general and specific attitudes towards multiculturalism. Jewish students have more positive attitudes toward general multiculturalism and more negative attitudes toward specific multiculturalism than Arab students. In addition a moderating effect of ethnic identity on ethnic group attitudes toward specific multiculturalism was found. These findings suggest the importance of understanding college climate at interpersonal and institutional levels and of assessing impact for both majority and minority students.

Keywords: Multiculturalism, Ethnic identity, Arab students, Jewish students

1. Introduction

1.1 Attitudes towards Multiculturalism

One of the main problems facing multi-cultural theory stems from the fact that different groups make opposing claims and have diverse aspirations and goals which need to be addressed within a common political, administrative, budgetary, educational and judicial framework (Nachtomy, 2003). The study of multiculturalism examines the influences of this phenomenon, and the attitudes and positions of people and groups toward it (Linnehan, Chrobot-Mason, & Konrad, 2006). It is concerned with the importance of culture for individual autonomy and recognizing ethnic and cultural diversity in a society (Taylor, 1994). Hartman & Gerteis (2005) argued that multiculturalism is a response-or a set of responses-to diversity that seeks to articulate the social conditions under which difference can be incorporated and order achieved from diversity. Berry & Kalin, (1995) define multiculturalism as a psychological concept. It is an attitude related to the political ideology, which refers to the acceptance of, and support for, the culturally heterogeneous composition of the population of a society. The impact of multiculturalism may differ for the ethnic majority group and ethnic minorities. For minority groups, multiculturalism offers the possibility of maintaining their own culture and obtaining higher social status in society. Majority-group members, on the other hand, may see ethnic minorities and their desire to maintain their own culture as a threat to their group identity and status position (Quintana, 2007). Studies show that each group attempts to gain as much power as possible, and perceives the other group as competition or a threat to its goal (Berry, 2001; Gonza lez, Verkuyten, Weesie & Poppe, 2008). Shamai & Pual-Binyamin (2004) argued that the majority group members often favors multiculturalism in terms of ideology, declaration, folkloristic and symbolic aspects and by that hope to coincide with liberal democratic values, but not to practice them. They favor general attitudes towards multiculturalism, but when it gets to the attitudes towards specific groups and specific practices, the endorsement of multiculturalism is less positive. Minority group members on the other hand favor ideological multiculturalism, but focus more on specific practices and implementations of multiculturalism regarding their group. Further studies indicated that the difference in the endorsement of multiculturalism between majority and minority groups is also related to in –group ethnic identity (Verkuyten, 2005; Verkuyten & Burg, 2004; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002).

Ethnic identity is defined as a set of ideals, values, behaviors, and attitudes one holds regarding one's identity as a member of a distinguishable social group. It is a way to understand whether and to what degree a person has explored the meaning of his or her ethnicity and developed a sense of commitment to his or her ethnic heritage (French, Seidman, Allen, & Aber, 2000; Phinney, 1992). Ethnic identity is based on two elements-the first refers to the level to which the individual is aware of his belonging to a group and his recognition of the group's values and customs. The second relates to an emotional aspect of acceptance or rejection of belonging to a certain group (Phinney & Ong, 2007).

Ethnic identity was mostly studied in relation to self-efficacy, self-worth, academic achievement and quality of life, and found to be positively related, especially for minority groups. It has also been studied in relation to nationality, racism, prejudice, acculturation and attitudes towards multiculturalism, and has been found to serve as a moderator when dealing with diversity (Arends-Tóth, & Van de Vijver,2003; Breugelmans, Van de Vijver,& Schalk-Soekar, 2009; Operario & Fiske, 2001; Utsey, Chae, Brown & Kelly, 2002; Worrell, 2007).

Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen ,& Allen (1998) claim that higher education campuses often serve as socialization agencies, and therefore should have a diversity policy , and practice a climate for ethnic/racial diversity. Research suggests that ethnic majority and minority students at the same institution often experience different attitudes towards diversity (Chavous, 2005). Some studies suggest that students may be similar in their views about general aspects of the multicultural environment, but they differ regarding some specific practice of the diverse milieu (Loo & Rolison, 1986) . Research by Helm, Sedlacek,& Prieto (1998) suggests that the way diversity and race are discussed and perceived on campus has implications for the social and academic adjustment for both minority and majority group members. Hurtado et.al (1998) suggest that in order to develop and maintain a diversity climate, each campus should engage in self-examination, learn the institutional contexts, and provide a current policy of inclusion and exclusion of various racial/ethnic groups, psychological climate concerning perceptions and attitudes between and among groups, and actual relationships between groups.

1.2 Multiculturalism in Israel

Israeli society presents a particularly interesting case of multicultural existence. It comprises many different communities and identities, with very different purposes and hopes for the future, and diverse forms of social organization and modes of living (Smooha, 2002). The relations between Arabs and Jews are the most difficult and sensitive among the different groups in Israel, due to the ongoing Jewish –Palestinian historical conflict (Al-Haj, 2002). Throughout the years of Israel's existence the message that has been internalized by Jewish students is that Israel is a Jewish state and for Jews; there has been no attempt to foster a civic culture in which the Arab citizens are a separate but equal component. On the other hand, Arab students are called on to accept this situation of identification with the state, although its nature remains vague and, unlike Jewish students, they are not called on to play an active role in it (Al-Haj, 2002).

Arabs comprise 20% of the population in Israel. However most of the power is concentrated in the Jewish population (Jamal, 2007). It controls the military, the language, cultural and societal symbols (Saban, 2002). Economically, most of the Arab communities are in the bottom 50% in income, and Arab children's academic achievement is lower than that of their Jewish counterparts (Fricsh, 2006). On the other hand Israel's Jews are a small minority in the Middle East, surrounded by many Arab countries that identify with the Arabs living in Israel and in the occupied territories. This situation naturally creates a sense of threat among Israeli Jews, so that each group feels threatened by the other: Israeli Jews feel threatened by Israeli Arabs who belong to the Arab world that threatens their existence, while Israeli Arabs feel threatened by Israeli Jews who hold the power in Israel (Jamal, 2007; Karayanni, 2007). In a 1995 survey, 86.1% of Israeli Arabs vs. 28.2% of Israeli Jews favored Arab control of State radio and television channels in the Arabic language, 84.4% of Israeli Arabs vs. 31.5% of Israeli Jews supported establishing an Arab university in Israel, and Arabs expressed a desire to elect a supreme group that would represent them while the Jews opposed this step (Smooha, 2001). The same survey found that almost all the Jews questioned felt it necessary that Israel continue to exist as a Jewish state, describe themselves as Zionists, want to preserve the Jewish demographic majority and the State's Hebrew language and Jewish symbols, and oppose both change in the country's symbols and the 'right of return' to Israel for Arabs living today in other Arab countries. A research study conducted at Tel-Hai academic College in northern Israel found that Arab students had more positive specific attitudes toward multiculturalism than did Jewish students. Arab students hope to gain power by demanding assistance and recognition of Hebrew as their second language (Hager, Shamai, Garriba, Sivan, Saba, & Shay, 2011). A similar study at Beit- Berl College in central

Israel showed that multiculturalism is demanded by the Arab minority group, recognized to some degree by the dominant Jewish group, but with no real attempt to practice it (Shamai and Paul-Binyamin, 2004).

Following the above literature review, the present study is aimed at examining group differences in general and specific attitudes towards multiculturalism among Arab and Jewish students that study in the same predominant Jewish college in Israel. In addition the moderating role of ethnic identity in the effect of ethnic group on attitudes toward general and specific multiculturalism will be explored.

It is hypothesized that:

- 1. There will be differences between Jewish and Arabs students' attitudes towards general and specific multiculturalism: Jewish students will have more positive attitudes toward general multiculturalism and more negative attitudes toward specific multiculturalism than Arabs.
- 2. Ethnic identity will moderate the effect of ethnic group on attitudes toward general multiculturalism: among the Arab students, subject with high ethnic identity will show more negative attitudes toward general multiculturalism than subjects with low ethnic identity, while among the Jewish students there will not be a difference between subjects with high and low ethnic identity regarding the attitudes toward general multiculturalism.
- 3. Ethnic identity will moderate the effect of ethnic group on attitudes toward specific multiculturalism: among the Arabs, subject with high ethnic identity will show more positive attitudes toward specific multiculturalism than subjects with low ethnic identity, while among the Jews, subjects with high ethnic identity will show more negative attitudes toward specific multiculturalism than subjects with low ethnic identity.

2. Method

2.1 Sample and procedure

This research is based on a convenience sample of 142 undergraduate students from a college located at Northern Israel (68% females and 32% males, 54% Jews and 46% Arabs, mean age was 24.3, SD = 4.1). Sixty seven percent of the students studied liberal arts and social sciences, while 33% studied exact sciences. Fifty four percent of students defined themselves as secular, 42% as traditional and only 4% claimed that they are religious.

Questionnaires were administered during regular class time. Anonymity of the participants was assured, as well as the right of each student not to take part or to stop participating in the study at any time and for any reason.

2.2 Instruments

Ethnic identity. To measure ethnic identity we used Multigroup ethnic identity measure – Revised (MEIM-R) (Phinney & Ong, 2007). This measure consists of six Likert-scale items from "1" (strongly disagree) to "5" (strongly agree) and relates to the individual's identification with his/her ethnic group ("I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group"). In order to adjust the measure to national identity, references to ethnicity in the questionnaire were substituted by references to nationality.

Attitudes toward general multiculturalism. To measure this construct we used the Munroe Multicultural Attitude Scale Questionnaire (MASQUE) (Munroe & Pearson, 2006). This inventory is composed of 18 items on 5-pointx Likert scale from "1" (do not agree at all) to "5" (very much agree), divided into three subscales: 1) knowing ("I know that gender-based inequality exists"), 2) caring ("I am sensitive toward people of all economic levels") and 3) acting ("I do not actively respond to religious prejudice"). For the purposes of the current research, we used a general mean score (α =.72).

Attitudes toward specific multiculturalism. To assess attitudes toward specific multiculturalism, we used a scale developed by Hager et al. (2011). The original questionnaire comprised of 88 items on 5-points Likert-scale from "1" (do not agree at all) to "5" (very much agree), divided into eight subscales. In the current research we used the first five subscales: 1) "The presence of two nations and different cultures on campus" ("Arabs' Remembrance days should be celebrated, such as Nakba Day, Land Day"), 2) "Relationships between Arab and Jewish students at the College ("I am willing to live with an Arab/Jewish roommate in the dorms"), 3) "The State's attitude toward its citizens— the Arabs" ("Israel's Arabs constitute a threat to the State's existence"), 4) "The reality of studying in a mixed classroom of Arabs and Jews" ("Usually, Arab students cause the lecturer to slow his progress in teaching the academic material"), 5) "The need to lend assistance to non-native Hebrew speakers" ("It is a good idea to have an Arab librarian in the library to help

the Arab students").

For the purposes of the current research (ethnic identity, general and specific multiculturalism and its subscales) we computed a general mean score for each construct: ethnic identity (α =.78), general (α =.72) and specific multiculturalism (α =.91). High mean score of ethnic identity reflects that the subjects have strong ethnic identity, while high mean scores of general and specific multiculturalism and its subscales mean that the subjects have positive attitudes toward multiculturalism.

2.3 Analysis strategy

Following strategies of other multiculturalism studies (Operario & Fiske,2001; Verkuyten,2005,2009) and in order to classify the subjects as having high or low level of ethnic identity, we computed a median of the mean score of ethnic identity for each ethnic group (*Me*=3.64 for Jews and *Me*=3.93 for Arabs). Then we created a new dichotomous variable indicating a level of ethnic identity (*"low"* for subjects having ethnic identity score below the median and *"high"* for subjects having ethnic identity score equal or above the median). Afterwards, to test our hypotheses, using multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), we examined the effects of ethnic group, ethnic identity and of the interaction between them on the attitudes toward general and specific multiculturalism.

3. Results

Our first hypothesis was that there are differences between Jewish and Arab students' attitudes towards general and specific multiculturalism: Jews have more positive attitudes toward general multiculturalism and more negative attitudes toward specific multiculturalism than Arabs. Results shown in Table 1 support our first hypothesis: Jews have higher mean scores on attitudes toward general multiculturalism (M=4.01) than Arabs (M=3.85), while Arabs have higher mean scores on attitudes toward specific multiculturalism (M=4.17) than Jews (M=3.42).

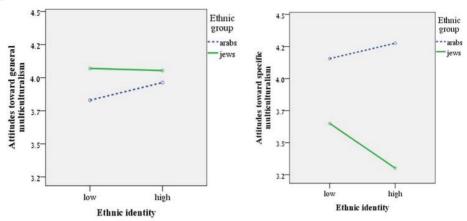
Our second hypothesis dealt with the moderating role of ethnic identity in the effect of ethnic group on attitudes toward general multiculturalism. Results did not support this hypothesis and showed no significant interaction between ethnic identity and ethnic group.(See Figure 1).

Our third hypothesis was that ethnic identity moderates the effect of ethnic group on attitudes toward specific multiculturalism. The results showed that Jewish students with low ethnic identity had more positive attitudes toward specific multiculturalism (M=3.60) than Jews with high ethnic identity (M=3.25), while Arabs with low ethnic identity had more negative attitudes toward specific multiculturalism (M=4.11) than Arabs with high ethnic identity (M=4.23). These findings support our third hypothesis.

Table 1.

		Ethnic identity		Ethnic group						Ethnic identity *	
	Ethnic group	Low	High	Jews	Arabs	Ethnic identity		Ethnic group		Ethnic identity * Ethnic group	
		(n=67)	(n=75)	(n=77)	(n=65)						
		M	M	M	M	F _(1, 138)	Eta ²	F _(1, 138)	Eta ²	F _(1, 138)	Eta ²
		(SD)	(SD)	(SD)	(SD)	(p)		(p)		(p)	
General multi- culturalism Specific multi- culturalism	Total	3.91	3.96	4.01	3.85	0.70	.01	5.54	.04	1.13	.01
		(0.46)	(0.39)	(0.46)	(0.36)	(.40)		(.02)		(.29)	
	Jews	4.02	4.00								
		(0.51)	(0.42)								
	Arabs	3.78	3.91								
		(0.35)	(0.36)								
	Total	3.83	3.71	3.42	4.17	1.75	.01	73.13	.35	7.35	.05
		(0.54)	(0.73)	(0.65)	(0.33)	(.19)		(.00)		(.01)	
	Jews	3.60	3.25								
		(0.57)	(0.67)								
	Arabs	4.11	4.23								
		(0.33)	(0.33)								

Figure 1.



4. Discussion

In most predominant Jewish higher education campuses in Israel, Jewish and Arab students study together and share the same rights and obligations. In some of the campuses there is an active dialogue concerning diversity, while in other campuses multiculturalism exists, but is not discussed and dealt with (Hager et.al, 2011). Al-Haj, (2002) describes Israel as a deeply divided society, stating that the deepest and the most salient division is the national division between Arab and Jews. The relationship between Arab and Jews in Israel are based on an on-going historical conflict, and often times dominate the mutual learning milieu on campus (Shamai & Paul-Binyamin, 2004). Following Hurtado et.al (1998) conclusions regarding the importance of a clear diversity climate on campus, the following study examined Arab and Jewish students' attitudes towards overall (general) multiculturalism and specific multiculturalism on campus. Findings clearly indicated a difference between the groups. While Jewish students indicated more positive attitudes towards groups that do not impose a direct threat to their dominant status (general multiculturalism) than Arab students, their attitudes towards specific multiculturalism on campus were lower than Arab students' attitudes. These findings align to some degree with other studies that examined majority and minority participants' attitudes towards race, prejudice , assimilation, and multiculturalism in Canada (Berry & Kalin, 1995) United States (Operario & Fiske , 2001) and the Netherlands (Verkuyten &Thijs, 2002; Verkuyten & Brug, 2004). However none of these studies focused on general versus specific attitudes towards multiculturalism. These findings may suggest that majority group students tend to agree with the overall ideas of multiculturalism, however when it effects their everyday routines, they experience discomfort or a threat to their existence and become less positive (Gonza'lez, Verkuyten, Weesie & Poppe, 2008). Majority group members declare multiculturalism and recognize specific ethnical symbols, but do not make a real attempt to practice it (Shamai & Pual-Binyamin, 2004) . This finding can be explained on the basis of "group threat theory" that argues that each group attempts to gain as much power as possible, and perceives the other group as competition or a threat to its goal (Sprague -jones, 2011). In a further attempt to better understand both groups' attitudes towards general and specific multiculturalism, and following other studies (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002; Operario & Fiske, 2001) the present study examined the moderating role of ethnic identity in the effect of ethnic group on attitudes toward general and specific multiculturalism. Results indicated no effect on general attitudes towards multiculturalism in both groups, however an effect was found for both groups in specific attitudes towards multiculturalism. Jewish students with low ethnic identity had more positive attitudes toward specific multiculturalism than Jewish students with high ethnic identity, while Arabs with low ethnic identity had more negative attitudes toward specific multiculturalism than Arabs with high ethnic identity. These findings suggest that people who identify strongly with their group are likely to perceive and react to specific multiculturalism attitudes differently from group members who identify less strongly. This occurrence may support social identity theory (Taifel & Turner, 1979) proposing that dominant group (Jewish) students who are high in their ethnic identity will perceive specific multiculturalism as a threat to their group's core values and that they may therefore react to this threat by exhibiting biases against out-groups. These members are more concerned than their less identified counterparts about protecting the ingroup's social identity, especially if the group is dominant to begin with (Morrison, Plaut & Ybarra, 2010).

In contrast, high ethnic identification in minority group was related to stronger endorsement of multiculturalism. It

offers the possibility of maintaining their own

culture and obtaining higher social status in society, a collective strategy for dealing with a negative group identity, and is an important condition for collective action (Verkuyten & Burg, 2004).

Overall this study suggest to follow Hurtado et.al (1998) conclusions, and to further examine the multicultural context in higher education campuses in Israel. Policies concerning multiculturalism are important, but in order to implement them, and develop practice that will fit both majority and minority groups, further studies should emphasis on the unique role that ehnic identity plays for each group, and in relation to specific multiculturalism.

The current research study has several limitations, stemming mainly from reasons of methodology. The questionnaire used in the study was in the Hebrew language, which is not the Arab students' native tongue. This may have damaged the structural validity and reliability of the study. Yet another limitation is the sensitivity of the topics discussed here. There is always the possibility that the respondents did not want to express extreme opinions, and thus toned down their answers to sound more moderate. In addition, sample was relatively small ' and we utilized only self-report measurements.

Future studies may, based upon the model suggested in this study, examine the interaction between a sense of threat and group identification, and their relationship to attitudes toward multiculturalism. Also, the current study did not investigate political views and the sample size did not allow a comparison based on religion, but these variables may serve as an interesting basis for a follow-up study on whether these variables interfere with the connection between nationalistic identification and attitudes toward multiculturalism.

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