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## REPLICATIONS AND REFINEMENTS

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# Religious Bias Among Religiously Conscious Black Christians in the United States

DEBBIE VAN CAMP

*Trinity Washington University*

LLOYD REN SLOAN  
AMANDA ELBASSIOUNY

*Howard University*

**ABSTRACT.** Research with White participants has demonstrated religious intergroup bias; however, religious identity may be different for Black Americans. Only religiously conscious Black Christians demonstrated a preference for Christian targets over Muslim and Atheist targets. Future research should consider what factors result in a person becoming conscious of other's religion.

**Keywords:** Atheist, group relations, intergroup bias, Muslim, religion

MAJORITY WHITE CHRISTIAN SAMPLES have demonstrated a preference for their religious ingroup over religious outgroups, including Atheists and Muslims (Johnson, Rowatt, & LaBouff, 2012; Ysseldyk, Haslam, Matheson, & Anisman, 2011). Religious group identity may function somewhat differently for other groups. Black Christians in the United States have a unique status as a majority on one dimension (religion) and simultaneously a minority group subject to prejudice on another (race). Black Christians have the highest church attendance of any group in the United States (Gallup Wellbeing, 2010), and the Black church remains an influential institution with many positive benefits (Battle, 2006; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Pinn, 2002). However, the Black church may have other effects, such as contributing to anti-gay attitudes (Ward, 2005). Therefore, Black Christians might be susceptible to certain kinds of intergroup bias, including bias towards what are perceived as value-violating outgroups, such as religious

outgroups. Furthermore, social identity theory suggests that intergroup bias is more likely among persons with strong ingroup identities (Brewer, 1979; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Therefore, the nature of religion in the Black community raises the question of whether this group might be at risk for demonstrating religious intergroup biases.

## METHOD

Participants were 175 Black Christian undergraduates in the United States, of which 76% were female and the mean age was 19.26 ( $SD = 1.73$ ). Participants viewed a target called Aisha who was Christian, Muslim, or Atheist, and either Black or White. In the Muslim condition, Aisha wore a hijab. Participants rated Aisha on positive traits (happy, kind, friendly, sincere, warm, devout, and down-to-earth [ $\alpha = 0.83$ ]) and negative traits (self-centered, conceited, vain, rude, cliquish, hostile, insensitive, materialistic, inconsiderate, superficial, feminist, standoffish, rigid, and militant [ $\alpha = 0.86$ ]). In addition, participants listed things they had thought about when evaluating Aisha and completed demographics and personality measures (need to belong, motivation to control prejudice, social desirability, and numerous measures of religiosity).

## RESULTS

Religious intergroup bias is likely only to be present in participants who are conscious of the religion of others. Therefore, two of the authors—an assistant professor and a graduate student, both familiar with religious identity literature—coded the participants' responses for explicit mentions of religion; initial inter-rater reliability was  $\kappa = 0.82$  and subsequent discussion resolved all differences until the coders reached 100% agreement. Based on this coding, 70 participants mentioned Aisha's religion as a basis of their judgment and 105 did not. These participants were not different on any demographic or personality measures.

Trait ratings were analyzed with 2 (religiously conscious: yes/no)  $\times$  3 (target religion: Christian/Muslim/Atheist)  $\times$  (target race: Black/White) ANOVAs. There was a significant main effect of target religion for both positive,  $F(2, 160) = 7.84, p = .001, \eta^2 = .09$ , and negative trait ratings,  $F(2, 160) = 5.77, p = .004, \eta^2 = .07$ . However, this main effect was qualified by a significant interaction of religious consciousness and target religion for both positive,  $F(2, 160) = 4.58, p = .012, \eta^2 = .05$ , and negative trait ratings,  $F(2, 160) = 4.31, p = .015, \eta^2 = .05$ . For religiously conscious participants, target religion had a significant effect on positive,  $F(2, 66) = 7.44, p = .003, \eta^2 = .18$ , and negative trait ratings,  $F(2, 66) = 7.66, p = .001, \eta^2 = .19$ . The pattern of means showed a consistent pattern of ingroup favoritism (see Table 1). For participants who did not indicate using religious information in their judgments, target religion had no effect on positive,  $F(2, 94) = 0.99, p = .37, \eta^2 = .02$ , or negative trait ratings,  $F(2, 94) = 0.17, p = .84, \eta^2 = .004$ . There were no main or interaction effects of target race.

TABLE 1  
Descriptive Statistics for Trait Ratings of Christian/Muslim/Atheist Applicants

	<i>Religious conscious participants (n = 70)</i>						<i>Remaining participants (n = 105)</i>					
	<i>Christian</i>		<i>Muslim</i>		<i>Atheist</i>		<i>Christian</i>		<i>Muslim</i>		<i>Atheist</i>	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Negative traits	1.70 <sup>a</sup>	0.52	2.10 <sup>b</sup>	0.83	2.81 <sup>c</sup>	1.10	2.10	0.83	2.19	0.82	2.13	0.89
Positive traits	5.55 <sup>a</sup>	0.79	4.90 <sup>b</sup>	0.86	4.26 <sup>b</sup>	1.47	5.19	0.82	5.22	0.76	4.98	0.97

*Note.* Means which do not share a superscript are significantly different at  $p < .05$  or better.

## CONCLUSION

This research adds to the body of work suggesting that religion is an important social identity that may result in typical intergroup biases, specifically a preference for one's religious ingroup (Johnson et al., 2012; Ysseldyk et al., 2011). This research utilizes a sample of young Black Christian participants, and while perhaps a limitation, this helps to generalize the findings of studies with predominantly White participants (Johnson et al., 2012; Ysseldyk et al., 2011) and adds to the literature concerning the role and influence of religion in Black American culture (e.g., Battle, 2006; Pinn, 2002). The presence of religious bias in these participants is particularly notable when viewed in contrast to the lack of typical racial ingroup bias.

It is reasonable to expect religious information to have the largest impact upon the most religiously conscious people, and this is the finding here. In this study, religiously conscious participants did not differ on any personality variables, but future research should investigate what factors result in a person becoming religiously conscious, and why many seem so willing to admit using another's religion when judging them. We conducted this research in the United States, which is a relatively religious country with some religious tensions; future research should investigate whether participants in other countries show the same level of religious consciousness in their judgments of others. Similarly, future research should investigate in what situations religion has its relatively greatest impact—for example could Muslim Aisha's hijab result in the perception that she is strongly religious and thus in greater bias?

## AUTHOR NOTES

**Debbie Van Camp** is an Assistant Professor of Psychology in the College of Arts and Sciences at Trinity Washington University. **Lloyd Ren Sloan** is a Full Professor in the Department of Psychology at Howard University. **Amanda ElBassiouny** is a Doctoral Candidate in the Department of Psychology at Howard University.

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*Received April 5, 2013*

*Accepted July 31, 2013*