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**Outgroup Evaluation, Religious Identity, and Acculturation
Orientations of the Coptic Minority in Egypt**

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Abstract

The first aim of this study was to explore the acculturation orientations, assessed in employment and endogamy/exogamy domains, adopted by Coptic minority towards Muslims (dominant majority group) and Protestants (another minority group) in Egypt. The second aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between religious identity, evaluative attitude towards outgroup and acculturation orientations of Copts. Results showed that adoption of acculturation orientations differs widely according to domain, while little differences are noticed depending on the outgroup. Moreover, religious identity appears more related to endogamy/exogamy domain, whereas evaluative attitude is more related to employment domain.

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1. Introduction

Christians constitute a significant minority in Egypt; nonetheless the International Religious Freedom Report by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (2010) shows that the Egyptian government failed to redress laws and governmental practices that discriminate against Christians. It is therefore important to be mindful of the complex social composition and intergroup relations in this country. In this study acculturation orientations adopted by Coptic minority towards Muslims (dominant majority group) and Protestants (another minority group) were analyzed. Moreover, some correlates of acculturation orientations (religious identity and outgroup evaluation) were examined.

1.1. Copts in Egypt

Egypt has a population of around 86 million, almost 90 percent of whom are Muslims (particularly Sunni). The exact count of Christians is unknown, with estimates ranging from six to ten million (Suad & Afsaneh, 2005), the majority belonging to the Coptic Orthodox Church (almost six/seven millions).

Copts are native Egyptians whose ancestors endorsed Christianity in the first century. The word 'Copt' was originally used to refer to Egyptians in general, but when Arabs invaded Egypt (641 A.D.) and the Egyptian

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population was converted to Islam, the term Copt was adopted to indicate exclusively Egyptian Christians. Most Copts belong to the Coptic Orthodox Church having its own Pope. Recently, the Coptic community has been targeted by hate crimes and physical assaults. In the months preceding the popular insurgence, Egypt has seen a rise in violence against its Copts. A Christmas Day shooting left six Coptic Christians dead, and 21 people were killed in a bomb attack outside a Coptic church on New Year's Day.

As Christians, Protestants belong to the Coptic community (in this paper, the term Copt was used to refer to members of the Coptic Orthodox Church, while the term Protestant was used to refer to members of the Coptic Protestant Church), however, their history in Egypt is more recent. The first Protestant missionary arrived in Egypt in 1633. The Coptic Orthodox Church experienced the arrival of this new religion as a threat, because the Protestant missionaries were preaching their message especially among the Coptic Orthodox, rather than among the Muslims. Today, almost 150,000/300,000 Egyptians are Protestants (see The International Religious Freedom Report of Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 2010 for a more detailed account of the current situation of the religious minorities in Egypt).

The Egyptian Constitution guarantees freedom of belief and practice of religion (Article 46); however, Islam is the official state religion, and Islamic law is the principal source of legislation (Article 2).

1.2. Acculturation orientations

The term acculturation describes a phenomenon occurring when two ethno cultural groups come into contact with each other (Graves, 1967). One of the most influential models in the acculturation field was proposed by Berry (1997). This model postulates the existence of four acculturation orientations (or strategies): separatism, assimilationism, integrationism, and marginalization. The separation orientation reflects the desire to reject relationships with dominant group members and to maintain all features of the immigrant or minority group culture. Assimilationism is characterized by the desire to relinquish the own minority culture for the sake of adopting the dominant culture. Integrationism reflects the desire to maintain important features of immigrant culture while adopting important features of dominant culture. People who endorse marginalization reject both their own culture and that of dominant group; these people lose contact with both immigrant and dominant group.

Bourhis, Moïse, Perreault, and Senécal (1997) proposed a refinement of the marginalization strategy by splitting this strategy in two different strategies: marginalization and individualism. The first strategy, reflecting marginalization in Berry's model (1997), is characteristic of people who experience cultural alienation. On the other hand, individualism is an orientation endorsed by people who define themselves and others as individuals rather than as members of group categories such as immigrants or dominant majority members.

Regarding the adoption of acculturation orientations, studies carried out with university students showed that integrationism and individualism were the prevailing acculturation strategies endorsed by immigrants towards dominant communities in a variety of intergroup settings (e.g., Bourhis, Barrette, El-Geledi, & Schmidt, 2009). On the other hand, some studies, carried out with immigrants from various occupational backgrounds, showed that they endorsed separatism to a moderate degree (e.g., Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind, Horenczyk, & Schmitz, 2003). In this study we expected to find that Copts would prefer to avoid extensive contact with members of other groups (especially Muslims) in order to preserve their religious specificity; as a consequence, the most adopted acculturation orientation could be separatism because this is the only strategy which would allow preserving the Coptic religion and identity intact. Indeed, all the other strategies entail a partial (integration) or substantial (assimilation) alteration of the native religious values, their rejection (marginalization) or they attribute only a minor importance as compared to other, more idiosyncratic, characteristics (individualism).

Immigrants' endorsement of acculturation strategies has been shown to vary depending on public versus private domains (Phalet & Kosic, 2006). In this study we used a public (employment) and a private (endogamy/exogamy) domain. We expected that separatism would be more endorsed in the private domain than in the public one; regarding other strategies, opposite results are expected. In the workplace, the religious affiliation should not be important, therefore Copts could accept to be integrated with or assimilated to other groups. On the other hand, in the endogamy/exogamy domain Copts should tend to avoid other groups, in order to preserve their own religious identity and practices.

Bourhis, Montaruli, El-Geledi, Harvey, and Barrette (2010) found that immigrants' acculturation strategies vary on the basis of the host community being considered. It is possible to hypothesize that also minority endorsement of acculturation strategies might vary according to outgroup; in particular, because Muslims should be more devalued than Protestants, we expected that Copts would wish to maintain more distance from the former rather than from the latter group. Copts would therefore adopt more separatism towards Muslim than Protestants. All other strategies should be equally rejected, regardless the outgroup.

Literature in this field examined various intergroup and personal correlates of the acculturation orientations (Bourhis et al., 2009). In this study we focus on religious identity and outgroup evaluation. Regarding the relationship between identity and acculturation orientations, Copts who identify strongly with their religious group might be motivated to preserve their distinctiveness (see Jetten, Spears, & Manstead, 2001) and to maintain their culture (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002). We therefore expect them to endorse more strongly the separationist orientation, which aims to protect the ingroup from contamination, while they should reject other strategies.

As for outgroup attitude, studies carried out with majority groups have found that a positive evaluation of the outgroup is positively related with integrationism and individualism and negatively related with assimilationism, segregationism and exclusionism; the reverse was the case for a negative attitude (Bourhis et al., 2009). Studies concerning minority groups found that assimilationism, individualism, and integrationism were associated with favorable attitudes towards the outgroup; on the contrary, separatism was associated with a negative attitude towards the outgroup (Bourhis et al., 2010). We expected to replicate such findings in our context.

2. Method

2.1. Participants and procedure

Participants were 100 Copts (39 males and 50 females, 11 participants did not indicate gender) members of various parishes in The Cairo. The age ranged from 14 to 59, with a mean of 25.92 years ($SD = 11.12$). Participants were volunteers that completed a questionnaire containing measure of investigated construct. They were informed that their responses would remain strictly confidential and granted anonymity.

2.2. Measures

Outgroup evaluation. In order to measure evaluative attitude towards Muslims and Protestants, the Ethnic Thermometer Scale (Haddock, Zanna & Esses, 1993) was used. Participants evaluated both outgroups using a 100-point scale ranging from 0 (*extremely unfavorably*) to 100 (*extremely favorably*).

Religious identity. The identification with the Coptic religious group was measured using seven items adapted from Trifiletti, Dazzi, Hichy, and Capozza (2007). An example of items is: "To what extent do you feel at ease to be a Copt?". Participants answered on a 7-point scale ranging from *not at all* to *very much*. Reliability was .62.

Acculturation orientations. To measure Copts' acculturation orientations towards Muslims and Protestants the Immigrant Acculturation Scale (IAS; Berry, Kim, Power, Young, & Bujaki, 1989; Montreuil & Bourhis, 2004) was used. The IAS comprises five items, representing five acculturation orientations, assessed in the context of employment and endogamy/exogamy. Examples of items are: "I would rather marry a person from my own religious community than a Muslim" (separatism); "The religion of the person I marry is irrelevant because what counts most to me are the individual qualities of the spouse" (individualism). Participants expressed their opinions on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), with 4 meaning *neither agree, nor disagree*.

3. Results and Discussion

In order to test differences in the adoption of acculturation strategies between employment and endogamy/exogamy domains, a MANOVA with a two-level factor (two domains) and five dependent variables (the

five strategies) was carried out. Results showed an effect of domain, $F(5,95) = 140.94, p < .001, \eta^2 = .88$; moreover all univariate tests were significant. As shown in Table 1, Copts adopted separatism more in the endogamy/exogamy domain than in the employment domain. This domain concerns the private sphere, where the individuals' personal values and belief systems - one of the most important of which being religion - play a central role. Therefore, marrying someone of the same religion means that own principles and values are shared and preserved. On the contrary, assimilationism and marginalization were refused more in the endogamy/exogamy domain than in the employment domain. Finally, integrationism and individualism were moderately adopted in the employment domain and refused in the endogamy/exogamy domain. These results reflect the Copts' desire not to be discriminated against in the workplace on the basis of their religious affiliation. Indeed, in the employment domain, the personal characteristics of the individuals are more relevant, while their religious affiliation is less important.

Table 1. Differences between employment and endogamy/exogamy domain

	Employment		Endogamy/Exogamy		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Separatism	5.00	1.37	6.73	0.67	$F(1,99) = 168.33, p < .001, \eta^2 = .63$
Integrationism	4.96	1.07	1.53	0.88	$F(1,99) = 583.00, p < .001, \eta^2 = .86$
Assimilationism	2.60	0.99	1.25	0.46	$F(1,99) = 189.95, p < .001, \eta^2 = .66$
Marginalization	2.05	1.12	1.28	0.60	$F(1,99) = 51.25, p < .001, \eta^2 = .34$
Individualism	4.51	1.86	1.37	0.90	$F(1,99) = 296.41, p < .001, \eta^2 = .75$

To test the differences in the endorsement of acculturation strategies towards Muslims and Protestants a MANOVA with a two-level factor (two groups) and five dependent variables (the five strategies) was carried out. Results showed a main effect of Group, $F(5,95) = 9.95, p < .001, \eta^2 = .34$. Univariate analyses were significant only for assimilationism [$F(1,99) = 38.49, p < .001, \eta^2 = .28$] and individualism [$F(1,99) = 4.06, p < .05, \eta^2 = .04$]: assimilationism was refused more toward Muslims ($M = 1.65, SD = 0.61$) than toward Protestants ($M = 2.21, SD = 0.86$), while individualism was rejected more toward Protestants ($M = 2.83, SD = 1.30$) than toward Muslims ($M = 3.05, SD = 1.23$). These results can be explained by the fact that both groups are evaluated similarly - and negatively - by the Coptic group; therefore similar strategies were adopted towards them.

With regard to outgroup evaluation, both Muslims ($M = 19.94, SD = 20.62$) and Protestants ($M = 35.54, SD = 23.95$) were negatively evaluated, but Muslim group was more devalued than the Protestant one, $F(1,99) = 4.21, p < .001, \eta^2 = .30$. Moreover, participants showed high levels of identification with the Coptic religious group ($M = 6.16, SD = 0.70$).

To test the relationships between acculturation strategies, outgroup evaluation, and religious identity, bivariate correlations were calculated. As shown in Table 2, the more positive was the attitude towards Protestants and Muslims, the more rejected was separation and the more endorsed were other strategies. That is, when a group is positively evaluated, it is more likely for individuals to try to have a relationship with its members, and to consider its members on the basis of their individual characteristics, and/or to adopt aspects of their culture. This pattern is particularly apparent in the employment domain; in the endogamy/exogamy domain, especially with regard to Muslims, outgroup evaluation seems not to be linked to the strategies, probably because in this domain the attitude towards the specific outgroup is less important than the fact that it follows a different religion. Indeed, in the endogamy/exogamy domain, the religious identity was correlated with acculturation strategies, positively with separation and negatively with other strategies: the higher was the religious identification as a Copt, the more Copts desire to preserve their religious beliefs, the more they refuse to have contact with other groups. The religious identity had very few correspondences with acculturation strategies applied to the employment domain, confirming that it is not important in this domain.

Table 2. Correlations of outgroup evaluation and religious identity with acculturation orientations

	Muslim		Protestant	
	Outgroup evaluation	Religious identity	Outgroup evaluation	Religious identity
Employment				
Separatism	-.32***	.07	-.31**	.20*
Integrationism	.28**	.06	.26**	.06
Assimilationism	.37***	-.03	.36***	-.12
Marginalization	-.10	-.21*	.01	-.29**
Individualism	.33***	.05	.21*	-.02
Endogamy/Exogamy				
Separatism	-.12	.16	-.23*	.31**
Integrationism	.08	-.10	.28**	-.24*
Assimilationism	.20*	-.28**	.24*	-.24*
Marginalization	.01	-.14	.10	-.34***
Individualism	.11	-.21*	.15	-.24*

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

In general, the results of this research indicate that Copts seem to aim at to preserving their culture and prefer to have little or no contact with other groups. As suggested by Bourhis et al. (2009), the endorsement of separatism may be seen as a coping strategy to avoid contact with a dominant community that discriminates towards a minority community. Further studies should jointly investigate strategies adopted by the Muslim majority and the Coptic minority, in order to have an overview of Egyptian situation and to better understanding the relationship between dominant group and minority groups or indigenous people.

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