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The Influence of American Urban Culture on the Development of Normative Beliefs About Aggression in Middle-Eastern Immigrants[1]

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The effects of a community's culture on children's and adolescents' normative beliefs about the appropriateness of aggression were examined. One hundred forty-seven high school students and 103 fourth graders participated in a survey of normative beliefs; 69 high school and 44 elementary school students were of Middle-Eastern background. Although there were no differences in the beliefs of immigrant and nonimmigrant fourth graders, adolescents born in the United States were more accepting of aggression than those who immigrated from the Middle East. Moreover, adolescents who immigrated to the U.S. at age 12 or later were less accepting of aggression than those who immigrated prior to age 12.

KEY WORDS: culture; Middle East; aggression; assimilation; normative beliefs.

Violence in our culture is widespread, and much of its origin can be traced to childhood. The more aggressive child generally grows up to be the more aggressive adult (Huesmann, Eron, Lefkowitz, & Walder, 1984). Multiple factors must converge for serious violent behavior to emerge, but it seems clear that the young child's community and culture play a substantial role in the socialization process that makes aggression more or less likely. But how large a role does ethnic community and culture play in individual differences in aggressiveness among urban American youth? While some studies have examined aggressiveness within major ethnic subcultures in

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America, few have examined how ethnic immigrants compare to indigenous Americans and how they change over time. Yet, such studies are vital for understanding the role of community and culture in violence. They provide the opportunity to examine change in aggressiveness as a function of change in culture and community. Are Americans more accepting or less accepting of violence than individuals from other cultures? How do immigrant children respond to perceived differences? How do ethnic immigrant children change as a function of acculturation to American views on aggression? These are questions that have not been adequately addressed in the research literature but are vital for understanding the role of community and culture in violent behavior.

The current study attempts to address some of these questions by examining differences between recent immigrant children from a Middle-Eastern culture and longer residing children from the same cultural background. The study focuses on the beliefs about aggression that these children maintain and how these beliefs differ as a function of their cultural background and age of immigration.

Normative Beliefs About Aggression

One important contributor to aggressive behavior is individuals' normative beliefs about aggressive behavior. According to Huesmann and Guerra (1997; Guerra, Huesmann, & Hanish, 1994), normative beliefs are individualistic cognitive standards about the acceptability of a behavior. It is proposed that these beliefs develop during childhood and, once established, are resistant to change. The development of these beliefs may be influenced by a number of personal and environmental variables, but they are primarily learned through a combination of observational and enactive processes (Huesmann, 1988, 1998). Although in flux and open to change during the early years of development, by about age 10 or so, normative beliefs about aggression seem to become a stable trait that accurately predicts subsequent adolescent aggression (Huesmann & Guerra, 1997) and is correlated with adult aggression (Huesmann, Moise, Podolski, & Eron, 1997).

Normative beliefs accepting of aggression promote aggressive behavior by affecting information processing in a variety of ways. Such beliefs activate schemas that cause hostile attributions, stimulate the encoding of scripts promoting aggression, and allow aggressive scripts to be enacted when other beliefs might have filtered them out. Individuals who are highly approving of aggression can be expected to attend to fewer cues that may inhibit aggression, to perceive greater hostility in their environment, to

retrieve more aggressive scripts, and to utilize the more aggressive scripts they retrieve (Dodge, 1993; Hudley & Graham, 1993; Huesmann, 1998).

Recent research has helped us to gain greater understanding of these normative beliefs. Females hold beliefs less approving of aggression than males, and younger children are less approving of aggression than older children (Huesmann & Guerra, 1997; Huesmann, Guerra, Miller, & Zelli, 1992). Populations that face great economic hardships, which heighten an individual's stress, are at greater risk for the development of aggressive beliefs and behavior (Guerra, Huesmann, Tolan, VanAcker, & Eron, 1995). Economic hardship alone may not be a predictor, however, since a number of confounding variables appear to contribute to this relation.

Cultural Differences in Normative Beliefs

Recent research also has found interesting differences in normative beliefs about aggression across cultures. Huesmann, Zelli, Fraczek, and Upmeyer (1993) examined attitudes about aggression in American, German, and Polish college students. Students' mean scores were significantly different between countries. The U.S. students were most approving of aggression; the Germans showed the smallest difference in approval of aggression against males as compared to females; and the Polish students showed the largest difference in approval of aggression against males as compared to females. In a comparative study of Hispanic schoolchildren in Chicago whose families had been in the U.S. for varying amounts of time, differences in beliefs also were found as a function of length of time living in the U.S. (Guerra, Huesmann, Hanish, Font, & Henry, 1993). Specifically, approval of general aggression was higher for children whose families had been in the U.S. longer, whereas approval of aggression against females was lower for these children.

It seems likely that these cultural differences in beliefs about aggression may be attributed to differences in socialization practices among cultures (Ogbu, 1981; Staub, 1996). According to Huesmann and Guerra (Guerra *et al.*, 1994; Huesmann, 1998; Huesmann & Guerra, 1997), children's normative beliefs are acquired through a socialization process involving observation of the behaviors and beliefs of those around them, perception of social norms, identification with specific reference groups, and personal evaluation based on the response of the environment to their behaviors. The type of socialization to emerge and the length of this process are both strongly influenced by one's culture (Ross & Nisbett, 1991).

Two construals of the self also are influenced, as well as emphasized, differently by various cultures: the independent and interdependent self

(Markus & Kittyam, 1991). The independent self is Western in nature. It is unique, self-serving, and its motives are more driven by personal goals (Markus & Kittyam, 1991). The interdependent self, conversely, is Eastern in nature. It is integrally tied to the group, emotions are other-focused (e.g., shame), and it is committed to group goals and objectives (Markus & Kittyam, 1991). These construals of the self obviously also could influence beliefs about situations in which aggression is more or less appropriate (e.g., for self gain, for societal gain).

Middle-Eastern Culture and the Development of Beliefs

As the current study examines normative beliefs about aggression within a sample of Middle-Eastern immigrant and nonimmigrant children, it is necessary to describe some characteristics of Middle-Eastern culture. Middle-Eastern culture is collectivist, or Eastern, in orientation (Barakat, 1993). The family is the key social institution, with extended kinship and a hierarchical structure (Aswad, 1993; Barakat, 1993; Bates & Rassam, 1983; Denny-Dweik, 1988; Naff, 1983). The family is organized around a patriarchal, hierarchical order with respect to sex and age (Aswad, 1997; Barakat, 1993). The family is all powerful in monitoring and controlling its members. For example, Bierbrauer (1992) found that Lebanese were less likely than other cultures (e.g., German) to allow the state to intervene in family and group disputes. Maintaining family honor is a key focus for members (Dodd, 1973). Because of this familial importance and influence, fear of shame works to control members' deviant behavior. The presence of an audience and the fear of being criticized and rejected by this audience, and particularly of having one's family criticized and rejected, produces great feelings of shame (Bierbrauer, 1992). The power of shame in the Arab culture to control norm violations is great (Bates & Rassam, 1983; Dodd, 1973; Naff, 1983). The fear of shame works to restrain crime and indigence (Naff, 1983). Unlike the Western culture's values, Middle-Eastern children may refrain from committing acts of aggression because they fear shaming their families. This may work to reduce their acceptance of aggressive beliefs.

These qualities of the Middle-Eastern family may help to explain the development of aggressive beliefs and behaviors among members. The family may play a particularly critical role in the development and mitigation of aggression, particularly where family ties are strong (Eron, Huesmann, & Zelli, 1991; Gorman-Smith, Tolan, Huesmann & Zelli, 1996; Patterson, 1986). As stated, the Middle-Eastern culture grants the family much power. Children are highly valued and cared for by all members of the family

(Aswad, 1997). Extensive monitoring is present, which may be particularly important, as Patterson (1986) argues.

The inner family circle in the Middle-Eastern culture has the duty of arbitrating conflict and functions as a peace maker (Haddad, 1979). This has the effect of reducing conflict between members. The use of compromise to de-escalate conflict is common among many collectivist cultures (Trubiskey, Ting-Toomey, & Lin, 1991). The Western individualistic culture, which lacks this support, has a high degree of intragroup and intergroup conflict (Tafarodi & Swann, 1996). Excessive physical punishment by family members is stopped by other family members in the Middle-Eastern culture (Aswad, 1997). This intervening network is often absent in our American, nuclear family culture. Parental discipline among Middle-Eastern families revolves around the idea of shame and honor (Dodd, 1973). In a study of Anglo, Greek, Lebanese, and Vietnamese parents, Lebanese parents were less likely than the Anglo and Greek parents to use power assertion in their discipline practices (Papps, Walker, Trimboli, & Trimboli, 1995).

Although little has been written on the topic, it is reasonable to expect important distinctions between American and Middle-Eastern cultures in beliefs about aggression against women, given the different roles women play in both cultures. The Arab culture's patrilinear system, like other patrilinear systems, grants men certain privileges. Females are subordinate to males, while the young are subordinate to the old (Aswad, 1993). The subordination of women has its root in a number of cultural practices. The division of labor, property ownership, degree and quality of involvement in social and economic activities, control over the production of process and products, and the overall position of women in the social structure, all influence women's position (Barakat, 1993; Aswad, 1994). Women are considered to be under the authority of their fathers, brothers, or husbands (Bates & Rassam, 1983).

In examining differences in beliefs as a function of cultural background within this country, one must consider the acculturation process that immigrants experience, as well as more general cultural differences. Acculturation at the micro, or individual, level is termed psychological acculturation (cf. Cuellar, Arnold, & Maldonado, 1995). This type of acculturation is associated with changes in attitudes, beliefs, values, and behavior (Cuellar *et al.*, 1995). The acculturation process, even if temporary, has been found to influence basic values (Feldman, Mont-Reynaud, & Rosanthal, 1992; Kimhi & Bliwise, 1992). The change of values associated with acculturation varies depending on the new culture's expectations and the age of the immigrant (Georgas, Berry, Shaw, Christakopoulou, & Mylonas, 1996). Georges *et al.* found that immigrants experienced greater value change when the host society expected acculturation and when immigration oc-

curred at a young age. The young were more open to change than their parents. In fact, the greater willingness of the young to change values and beliefs is often a source of conflict between the parent and child, especially among cultures that are less individually oriented (Rosenthal, Demetriou, & Efklides, 1989). Particularly in collectivist cultures, attitude change in children is still highly influenced by parents. This may be because the experience of autonomy and self-definition outside the family is forbidden in highly collectivist cultures (Tafarodi & Swann, 1996). Thus, another variable of interest in this study is the age of immigration of the Middle-Eastern children and whether this influenced their beliefs.

In sum, this study was designed to explore, within an urban community in the United States, culture differences in beliefs about aggression and the development of these beliefs. It was predicted that children's and adolescents' normative beliefs about aggression would be consistent with the social norms prevalent during the period in their childhood when they were learning their normative beliefs. Thus, children who immigrated to the U.S. prior to age 12 were expected to hold beliefs about aggression more similar to those held by other youth in the U.S., whereas adolescents who immigrated from the Middle East after age 12 were expected to hold beliefs less similar to adolescents raised in America. Specifically, as Middle-Eastern cultural norms are generally less accepting of interpersonal violence, it was predicted that Middle-Eastern children who immigrated after age 12 would be less accepting of aggression than those students born and raised in the U.S. They should also be less accepting of aggression than those Middle-Eastern students who immigrated at an earlier age. However, due to the distinct roles women hold in both cultures, beliefs concerning the acceptability of aggression toward women might not show this pattern and might even show a reverse trend with later immigrants holding beliefs more accepting of aggression against women.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were elementary and high school students from a multiethnic, predominately middle-class, urban community that is adjacent to Detroit, MI. The students were recruited from one high school and two elementary schools. One of the elementary schools served children of predominately Middle-Eastern descent; the other served children of predominately non-Middle-Eastern "White" American background. The high school served both neighborhoods. Two classes of fourth graders were

selected at random from each elementary school, and all children in those classes were recruited to participate. In the high school, all students in the two advanced bilingual transitional classrooms were invited to participate and all students in the two sociology and two English classes were invited. All recruited students consented to participate although about 1% were absent when assessments were conducted and could not be assessed later. Origins could not be determined for 3 participants. These 3 students were dropped from the sample. The final sample consisted of 250 students. The elementary sample consisted of 103 fourth graders (63 boys and 40 girls). They ranged in age from 9 to 11 (M = 9.54; SD = 0.61). The high school sample consisted of 90 boys and 57 girls, ranging in age from 14 to 20 (M = 16.54; SD = 1.26).

In addition to questionnaire data, a variety of demographic information was collected on each child from both self-reports and school records. Participants were either immigrants from the Middle East (n = 57), first generation Middle-Easterners (n = 56), or non-Middle-Easterners born in the U.S. (n = 137). Forty-four elementary students and 69 high school students were of Middle-Eastern decent. The Middle-Eastern students were primarily from Yemen. Of those children of Middle-Eastern decent, 35 of the elementary students and 22 of the high school students were born in the U.S. Twenty-eight of these high school students immigrated to the U.S. at age 12 or later. A breakdown of the samples, age, ethnicity, and immigrant status is reported in Table I.

Assessment Procedure and Measures

The data were collected during one visit to the children's classroom. All classroom assessments were administered by one bilingual tester. Although the assessments were identical in content for each class, the elementary classroom assessments were approximately 50 minutes in duration, whereas those administered in the high school classes were approximately 40 minutes in duration.

Each class was administered a set of four questionnaires. Only one, The Normative Beliefs about Aggression Scale (Huesmann & Guerra, 1997), was of interest in the current study. This 20-item scale asks about the extent to which the child thinks it is appropriate to behave aggressively. Twelve questions focus on appropriate retaliation to provocations (e.g., "Suppose a girl says something bad to another girl, Mary. Do you think it's OK for Mary to scream at her?"). These questions vary on four dimensions (a) severity of provocation; (b) severity of response; (c) gender of provoker; (d) gender of responder. In the current study, 8 of these 12

Table I. Sample Size

School	Group	*n*	*N*
Elementary			
	Male		
	Non-Middle Eastern		41
	Middle Eastern born in U.S.	18	
	Middle Eastern born in ME	4	
	Middle Eastern (total)		22
	Female		
	Non-Middle Eastern		18
	Middle Eastern born in U.S.	17	
	Middle Eastern born in ME	5	
	Middle Eastern (total)		22
High school			
	Male		
	Non-Middle Eastern		37
	Middle Eastern born in U.S.	13	
	Middle Eastern born in ME	40	
	Moved < 12 15		
	Moved ≥ 12 25		
	Middle Eastern (total)		53
	Female		
	Non-Middle Easter		41
	Middle Eastern born in U.S.	8	
	Middle Eastern born in ME	8	
	Moved < 12 1		
	Moved ≥ 12 7		
	Middle Eastern (total)		16

questions were modified to assess beliefs without a provocation being specified (e.g., Do you think it's OK for a girl to scream at another girl?). These questions seemed more appropriate for the wide range of ages in this study than did the specific retaliation versions. The other 8 questions also focus on general beliefs about aggression (e.g., "It is usually OK to push or shove other people around if you're mad."). Response options are on a four-point scale and range from *It's perfectly OK* to *It's really wrong.*

Despite the slight changes in format, the internal consistency reliability of the 20-item scale in the current sample is high (coefficient alpha = .87). This is identical to that found in another sample of 2,035 first, third, and fourth-grade urban elementary children (Huesmann & Guerra, 1997). In the current study, like the Huesmann and Guerra study, the scale also correlated positively with the sample's self-reports of aggression ($r = .43$, $p < .0005$).

RESULTS

Results are presented in two sections. First, group differences in normative beliefs about aggression with respect to ethnicity, gender, and age are

examined. Second, we present group differences in normative beliefs based on age at immigration.

Ethnic, Sex, and Age Differences in Normative Beliefs About Aggression

A 2 (Ethnicity) × 2 (Sex) × (Age) multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with the total Normative Beliefs about Aggression scale and its eight subscales as dependent variables. The MANOVA did not reveal any significant interaction with gender. However, there was a significant main effect for gender at the multivariate level, $F(9, 234) = 4.19$, $p < .0005$. The mean scores for males and females on each subscale are shown in Table II. As illustrated in the table, univariate tests showed that the mean approval of aggression was higher for boys than for girls on the total scale and five of the subscales. Girls scored as high or higher than boys only on approval of aggression by girls, approval of aggression by girls at boys, and approval of aggression at boys.

Although gender did not interact with ethnicity or age in its effects on normative beliefs, the MANOVA did reveal a significant multivariate age by ethnicity interaction, $F(9, 234) = 7.20$, $p < .0005$. There also were significant multivariate main effects for age, $F(9, 234)$, $= 7.20$, $p < .0005$, and ethnicity, $F(9, 234) = 2.45$, $p < .01$, but these must be interpreted with

Table II. Main Effects of Sex

Approval of Aggression	Female (n = 98)	Male (n = 152)	F
Total aggression	1.78	1.96	11.27[d]
Verbal aggression	1.87	1.94	3.18[a]
Physical aggression	1.72	1.97	15.28[e]
By men	1.70	1.91	12.60[e]
By women	2.19	2.20	ns
At men	2.18	2.15	ns
At women	1.71	1.96	12.78[e]
By men at women	1.32	1.61	11.95[d]
By women at men	2.27	2.09	ns
Multivariate $F(9, 234)$			4.19[e]

[a] $p < .10$.
[b] $p < .05$.
[c] $p < .01$.
[d] $p < .001$.
[e] $p < .0005$.

Table III. Main Effects of Age and Ethnicity

Approval of Aggression	Elementary (n = 103)	High School (n = 147)	F	Non-Middle Eastern (n = 137)	Middle-Eastern (n = 113)	F
Total aggression	1.66	2.05	37.02[e]	1.95	1.82	ns
Verbal aggression	1.71	2.05	25.97[e]	2.03	1.77	6.99[c]
Physical aggression	1.62	2.05	33.77[e]	1.89	1.85	ns
By men	1.58	2.00	30.30[e]	1.89	1.75	2.83[a]
By women	1.81	2.47	50.01[e]	2.32	2.04	4.70[b]
At men	1.78	2.43	52.45[e]	2.31	1.98	6.27[c]
At women	1.62	2.04	28.80[e]	1.91	1.81	ns
By men at women	1.43	1.55	ns	1.46	1.54	ns
By women at men	1.81	2.41	32.33[e]	2.30	2.00	3.49[a]
Multivariate $F(9, 234)$			7.20[e]			2.45[c]

[a] $p < .10$.
[b] $p < .05$.
[c] $p < .01$.
[d] $p < .001$.
[e] $p < .0005$.

care in light of the significant interaction. The mean normative belief scores for age and ethnic background are shown in Tables III and IV.

These means suggest that the main effect for age is real—elementary school students were less approving of aggression than high school students on every subscale across ethnic groups. For the total sample, a significant

Table IV. Age by Ethnicity Interactions

	Elementary		High School		
Approval of Aggression	Non-Middle Eastern (n = 59)	Middle-Eastern (n = 44)	Non-Middle-Eastern (n = 78)	Middle-Eastern (n = 69)	F
Total aggression	1.65	1.67	2.17	1.92	7.25[b]
Verbal aggression	1.73	1.68	2.25	1.83	8.85[b]
Physical aggression	1.60	1.66	2.11	1.97	4.31[a]
By men	1.58	1.59	2.13	1.85	6.15[b]
By women	1.76	1.87	2.75	2.15	14.91[d]
At men	1.70	1.88	2.77	2.05	23.75[d]
At women	1.65	1.58	2.11	1.95	ns
By men at women	1.49	1.34	1.44	1.66	ns
By women at men	1.74	1.90	2.72	2.06	13.70[d]
Multivariate $F(9, 234)$					7.20[d]

[a] $p < .05$.
[b] $p < .01$.
[c] $p < .001$.
[d] $p < .0005$.

effect for age was found on all of the subscales except the approval of aggression by boys at girls.

The pattern for ethnic differences is more complicated. An examination of the means reveals that Middle-Eastern students were less of approving of aggression than non-Middle-Eastern students, but only in the high school sample. The ethnicity by age interaction was significant for all of the subscales except aggression at girls and aggression by boys at girls. The apparent main effects for ethnicity on several subscales are mostly due to the effects in the high school subsample. Middle-Eastern and non-Middle-Eastern students in the Fourth-grade sample do not hold different normative beliefs.

Differences in Normative Beliefs with Respect to Age of Immigration

The next set of analyses examined whether age at immigration is associated with beliefs about aggression. Our hypothesis was that those who immigrated after their normative beliefs had been established would be less influenced by their American experience and display normative beliefs different from the American students, (i.e., they would be less approving of aggression). We adopted age 12 as a dividing age on the basis of Huesmann and Guerra's (1997) theory suggesting that by age 12 beliefs about aggression are crystalized. The high school sample was partitioned into those who were of non-Middle-Eastern background (n = 78), Middle-Eastern and immigrated before age 12 (n = 37), and Middle-Eastern and immigrated at age 12 or later (n = 32). Then a 2 (Gender) × 3 (Ethnic Status) MANOVA was conducted on the normative beliefs of the 147 high school students. The elementary school sample (i.e., 4th graders) was excluded because none could have immigrated after age 12.

A significant multivariate effect was found for immigration, $F(18, 264) = 4.45, p < .0005$, with no significant interaction between immigration status and gender. The mean scores on each subscale are shown in Table V. Univariate tests revealed significant differences in the means on every subscale except aggression by boys against girls. The order of the means was also the same for all of the subscales except aggression by men against women—the non-Middle-Eastern students were most approving of aggression; the Middle-Eastern students who immigrated before age 12 were the next most approving; and the Middle-Eastern students who immigrated at age 12 or later were the least approving. Only on aggression by men against women were the Middle-Eastern students more approving of aggression (though not significantly).

To compare differences between the two Middle-Eastern groups, we used Tukey's test. This test revealed significant differences on three of the

Table V. Main Effects of Age at Immigration

Approval of Aggression	Non-Middle-Eastern (n = 78)	Middle-Eastern Move < 12 or Born in U.S. (n = 37)	Middle-Eastern Move ≥ 12 (n = 32)	F
Total aggression	2.17	2.06	1.75	8.76[d]
Verbal aggression	2.25	2.02	1.60	12.28[d]
Physical aggression	2.11	2.08	1.86	4.48[b]
By men	2.13	2.03	1.66	9.28[d]
By women	2.75	2.28	2.01	13.60[d]
At men	2.77	2.25	1.83	20.77[d]
At women	2.11	2.06	1.83	4.23[a]
By men at women	1.44	1.66	1.67	ns
By women at men	2.72	2.10	2.01	10.31[d]
Multivariate $F(2, 140)$				4.10[d]

[a] $p < .05$.
[b] $p < .01$.
[c] $p < .001$.
[d] $p < .0005$.

subscales (aggression at boys, aggression by girls, and aggression by girls at boys) as well as the total scale. As hypothesized, Middle-Eastern students who immigrated to the U.S. at age 12 or later were less approving of most kinds of aggression than those who immigrated earlier.

The subscale that proved an exception to this pattern deserves comment. As mentioned above, "Approval of Aggression by Men at Women" was the only subscale on which the non-Middle-Eastern students scored lower than Middle-Eastern students, although the difference was not significant. Furthermore, this was the one scale on which the later immigrants reported approval of aggression that was no less than that of the earlier immigrants. As discussed in the introduction, this was not unexpected given what is known about the respective roles of women in American and Middle-Eastern cultures.

DISCUSSION

The results of our assessment of the normative beliefs of urban American children of Middle-Eastern descent generally confirm our hypotheses about the role of culture in the development of normative beliefs about aggression and the developmental timing of the formation of these beliefs. Children of Middle-Eastern origin who were born in this country or immigrated before age 12 reported beliefs about aggression that were very similar to those of other American children. However, children of Middle-

Eastern origin who immigrated at age 12 or later look different. They were much less approving of most kinds of aggression. The one exception is that they were actually just as approving of aggression against women as Middle-Eastern students who were born here or immigrated at an earlier age, and they were much more approving of aggression against women than non-Middle-Eastern children.

Our findings support the theory that normative beliefs are influenced not only by family and peers, but by the prevailing beliefs of the culture in which the child is socialized. Previous studies have shown that beliefs about aggression are unstable in the early elementary years and only crystallize in the later elementary years (Huesmann & Guerra, 1997). As such, the community in which a child develops from birth to early adolescence has a substantial effect on the beliefs about the appropriateness of aggression that the child adopts. However, by early adolescence, those beliefs are well established and highly resistant to change. Thus, the effect of a new community on the child's beliefs is limited after that time. The findings of this study are certainly consistent with this interpretation.

The findings also suggest the potential importance of the child's early community in influencing actual aggressive behavior. Although this study investigated only normative beliefs, other research has demonstrated that normative beliefs about aggression are influencing actual aggressive behavior by early adolescence (Huesmann & Guerra, 1997). Given the well-known continuity of aggressive behavior over time, one can expect early community and culture to have a long-lived effect on aggressive behavior through the mediating variable of normative beliefs.

Having determined that differences in normative beliefs exist depending on one's degree of exposure to American and Middle-Eastern cultures, future research should explore the specific aspects of culture and family life that influence the development of aggressive beliefs and aggression. A number of distinctions exist between the two cultures presented in this study. For example, as presented earlier, Middle Easterners have strong identity and affiliations with their extended family; family obligation and honor is important and emotional, economic, and social support is provided by one's family. Which of these mechanisms play a significant role in affecting aggressive beliefs? Answering this question may have great intervention implications.

This study provides more evidence that a community's culture has a powerful influence on the development of aggression in children. Culture, as Rohner (1984) defined it is a "highly variable system of meanings, learned and shared by a people." This definition stressing the malleability of culture offers one hope in bringing about changes within communities so that the prevailing culture becomes one that is less conducive to the development

of aggressive beliefs in its members. Betancourt and Lopez (1993) also talk about the variable, learned and socially shared aspects of a culture. Cultures' variable characteristics have great intervention implications for American communities.

A number of characteristics, once identified, in Middle-Eastern culture which may affect the development of aggressive beliefs in children may be adopted on various levels in our American communities. It may be impossible to form communities of biologically extended families that provide individuals with support as present in Middle-Eastern culture, but it is possible to substitute neighborhoods and communities for extended families. The effect would be to give people a sense of belonging and social support so that stressful life events are better managed. Members would also be accountable to one another, each having a sense of responsibility for the group. Increased monitoring and support by the group would exist so that members may be less likely to be involved in deviant behavior. This would involve tremendous effort but the outcomes may have far-reaching societal implications.

At the same time, one must guard against a culture promulgating values that work to subordinate a segment of the population should be guarded against. As evident by this study and other works (Aswad, 1993; Barakat, 1993; Bates & Rassam, 1983), the role of women in Middle-Eastern culture may influence the acceptability of aggression related to gender. The current findings support the hypothesis that aggression against women is more acceptable in Middle-Eastern culture. This is likely due to the subordination of women. However, as the West has witnessed the liberation of women in recent past, the Middle East is beginning to witness this trend (Bates & Rassam, 1983). The informal power that women hold, due to their role of maintaining the home in Middle-Eastern culture, may eventually translate to formal power which will influence male and female beliefs.

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