

# Preface

From a perspective of ethnic identity, the process of my development as both a person and a professional has followed parallel paths. Due to ethnicities (and perceived ethnicities!) of the primary elders in my family of origin, coupled with the structure of my family of origin, I have grappled since childhood with the task of determining my own identity. Thus, despite over a decade of professional scholarship focused on Arab Americans, I continue to develop an identity and sense of place. Perhaps it is those developmental challenges that have continually led me into circumstances in which a broad range of possibilities and interactions is evident, albeit perhaps not always so clearly. For example, my scholarship spans multidisciplinary conceptual and empirical literature both within the counseling profession (with publications in journals across the American Counseling Association's primary divisions) as well as external to it (with publications across psychology, social work, cultural anthropology, and health care outlets). Within these publications, the overarching theme is the promotion of effective counseling research, practice, and more recently, policy-based interventions.

Perhaps the precursor of this particular vein of scholarship over the last decade can be attributed to a dual pivotal personal-professional experience that occurred just over a decade ago. In 1999, en route to Lebanon for the first time, I stopped off in Dearborn, Michigan (just outside my hometown) to attend the first inaugural International Conference on Health Issues in Arab Communities sponsored by the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services. During that conference, I participated in a breakout symposium with other mental health clinicians and scholars. It was at that time, as yet unbeknownst to me, that I was exposed to the criticality of culture within the biopsychosocial perspective on health care delivery. In hindsight it may have been my broad base of personal and professional experiences to date that allowed that concept to resonate within me. Subsequently visiting family in Lebanon, and the Arab Middle East for the first time, created an interactive synergy with that professional experience that I, only now, am realizing.

Within the subsequent decade, I had experiences in which I continually felt on the periphery—of my profession (i.e., counseling and counselor education); within the Arab American community nationally; within the community of interdisciplinary scholars; as a political entity. At the same time, I have had the extreme good fortune along the way to connect with interdisciplinary colleagues in fruitful personal and professional endeavors. I have come to believe that it was Kismet (Fate) that brought me the opportunity to put together this collective volume of works. When Janice Stern, Senior Editor for Health and Behavior publications at Springer, first approached me with the opportunity to create this book project, I was convinced there must be someone better suited, particularly because she clearly wanted a health focus for the project. Through her gentle urging and supportive negotiations, I realized that it was indeed the perfect opportunity to weave together key perspectives, across the multiple disciplines of which I had so long felt on the periphery! In so doing, I have had the opportunity to co-create, with my wise and wonderful coeditors, the synergy of these disciplines, taken together. I sincerely hope that this book will have the synergistic impact that our invaluable chapter authors, all of whom are top scholars and clinical experts focused on Arab American issues, along with my coeditors Kristine Ajrouch and Julie Hakim-Larson, to whom I owe a huge debt of gratitude, have envisioned.

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The study of Arab Americans has been my primary focus since I conducted my dissertation research in the mid 1990s. As a sociology graduate student aiming to work toward the promotion of cross-cultural understanding, the topic I examined was ethnic identity development. Convinced that we needed a deeper understanding of how people think about who they are relative to from where they come, I embarked on a project that included in-depth interviews with adolescent children of immigrants and their parents. That initial study laid the foundation of my future program of research. From there I expanded my interests to pursue the study of Arab American aging. In that quest, I developed a clear commitment to elaborating the Arab American experience over the life course, and most centrally the key role social relations play in health and well-being.

The decision I made to study Arab Americans stemmed from my personal experiences as the granddaughter of Lebanese immigrants. Growing up in an upper-middle class area of metro-Detroit in the 1970s and 1980s, where virtually no Arab Americans lived, I did not understand my heritage through the daily encounters of ethnic community living. Instead, my identity emerged through the stories that my maternal grandmother told. Yet my grandmother's stories of life in Lebanon, and her immigrant experience, clashed with media accounts of what it meant to be "Arab." Media portrayals of conflict in the Arab Middle East promoted an odious Arab culture that did not fit with the persona of my immediate family, extended relatives, or for that matter the Arab American community emerging during that time in Dearborn, Michigan. It was this dichotomy, between personal experience and larger social characterizations that first pulled me to the study of Arab Americans. Moreover, coming from an immigrant family kindled a fascination with the ways in which cultural world views inform relations between and among people.

The study of Arab Americans has developed over the last decades to include a wide array of disciplinary perspectives. The goal of promoting a biopsychosocial perspective to the study of Arab Americans has become possible due to the proliferation of scholars dedicated to discerning attributes of Arab Americans that are

universally human, as well as culturally unique. The opportunity to work with Sylvia Nassar-McMillan and Julie Hakim-Larson, both established scholars in their own disciplines, to develop and coedit a volume intent on advancing a more rounded and multidisciplinary view of Arab Americans has been a distinct privilege and joy. Moreover, the opportunity to work with the leading Arab American scholars who contributed to our volume has provided an enriching academic and personal experience. It is my hope that this book provides a much needed resource to those interested in learning more about Arab Americans, especially for those who work directly with Arab Americans as well as those charged with policy directives that influence the lives of all Americans.

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