

## **Professional Efficacy among Arab American Journalists**

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### **Abstract**

This survey assessed professional efficacy among Arab American journalists and editors (N=45) working at news organizations in the United States. Professional efficacy is a belief in one's professional abilities and a sense that one's professional activities produce some kind of desirable result. Approximately half of journalists in the sample work for small, Arab American news outlets, while others work at mainstream American news organizations. Results suggest that, overall, Arab American journalists demonstrate high levels of professional efficacy, expressing strong confidence in their journalistic capabilities, and in their abilities to affect public opinion and to inform their audiences of important current events. Respondents reported higher levels of internal professional efficacy than external efficacy. Based on the fact that some prior mass communication scholarship has weakly defined journalistic professional efficacy, the author advocates adoption of a professional efficacy scale originally developed for educational field research. The scale demonstrated solid reliability among the sample of Arab newsmakers.

### **Keywords**

Professional efficacy, external and internal efficacy, Arab-American journalists

In January 2009, Barack Obama granted his first television interview as U.S. president to the Arabic TV network Al-Arabiya (Cowell, 2009). Stunning many commentators in Arab countries as well as in the U.S., Obama's message to the Arab world was clear: as the new author of U.S. foreign policy, he considers the Arab world an important constituency, and its communication system and that of the U.S. are not discrete units; they are connected. That same month, Obama fielded his first question in the White House Press Room from Lebanese American Helen Thomas ("Mother of Journalism," 2009). These events underscore the point that Arab and American journalism are not necessarily separate, competing institutions; they are, to a certain, extent, connected and integrated.

To this point, Arab Americans play a small but important and growing role in American media. Arab American journalists such as Rami Khouri, Lorraine Ali, Fouad Ajami, Ramzi Baroud and Anthony Shadid add important perspectives to American journalistic discourse about the Arab-Muslim world. Arab American editors and journalists write for publications—both Arab American outlets and mainstream news organizations—serving the general public as well as large Arab populations in places like Dearborn and Detroit, Michigan, Washington, D.C. and southern California. There are more than 90 Arab American newspapers and magazines published across 23 U.S. states in both Arabic and English ("Overview of Arab American Media in the United States," July 2009), and a few hundred Arab Americans work for mainstream media outlets across the country.

Arab Americans' inclusion in processes of American news production seems especially important at a time when the U.S. is trying to revitalize its global image. Arab American journalists have the potential to add different perspectives to the American media system—much criticized around the world for its uniformity—and to encourage greater global awareness among American news

consumers. To learn more about these newsmakers, this study surveys levels of professional efficacy—one's sense that his or her efforts in the workplace result in some positive outcome(s)—among Arab American journalists and editors.

While media researchers have surveyed Arab journalists in Arab countries (see Gamal, 1989; Amin, 2002; Pintak & Ginges, 2008), and have studied news coverage of Arabs (Avraham, Wolfsfeld & Aburaiya, 2000; Noakes & Wilkins, 2002) and of Arab Americans (see Weston, 2003), virtually no scholarship has surveyed Arab American newsmakers. Arab Americans have largely been left out of scholarly research on diversity in U.S. newsrooms.

Najjar (1995), for example, summarized two decades of efforts made by the American Society of Newspaper Editors to increase minority representation in American newsrooms, but made not one mention of Arabs or Arab Americans. Similarly, in a survey of minorities at eight U.S. newspapers, Liebler (1994) defined "ethnic" minorities as African American, Hispanic, or Asian, leaving Native Americans and Arab Americans out of the discussion. Such omissions are not entirely unforgivable, however, as Arab Americans do not have the same level of representation at American news organizations enjoyed by other ethnic minorities, and they represent a much smaller percentage of the U.S. population than African Americans or Hispanics. In 2000, Arab Americans represented 1.2 million of 281 million people in the U.S., and were one of 33 ancestry groups with populations greater than one million (de la Cruz & Brittingham, 2003). (The Arab American Institute disputes this figure, however, claiming the number of Americans of Arab descent is closer to 3.5 million, according to a 2009 report by the Project for Excellence in Journalism).

Whatever the reasons, research on ethnic minorities in American journalism has generally excluded discussions of Arab American newsmakers. The author of the current study could not locate a single scholarly article discussing numbers or characteristics of Arab American journalists at news

organizations in the United States. In an effort to address this oversight, the current study reports the results of a survey among Arab American journalists assessing their levels of journalistic professional efficacy, a measure of professional satisfaction. In doing so, this study will hopefully add greater diversity to, ironically, research on newsroom diversity in the United States. The best press systems are pluralistic ones in which different voices abound, and the reach of these voices should be assessed from time to time.

### **Arab Americans in General and in Journalism**

The value of studying ethnic minority groups in journalism rests on the suspicion that such populations may be vulnerable in some way—in percentage of workforce if not to discrimination and racism—and that they may differ from other ethnic groups in terms of professional characteristics, such as job satisfaction or salary levels. The current study is the first step in gaining an understanding of Arab American newsmakers and ways that this population may be vulnerable or different in some way from other ethnic minorities in American journalism.

Arab Americans are, on several levels, a vulnerable ethnic population in the United States which faces workplace, institutional, and hate crime discrimination (Ibish, 2001). Unlike other U.S. immigrant populations to whom many Americans feel more culturally proximate, Arabs are often viewed as an alien, even dangerous, people (Walt & Mearsheimer, 2007). While Arab Americans have achieved educational and median income levels well above national averages—40 percent have earned bachelor's degrees or higher, and 30 percent of Arab American households enjoy median incomes higher than \$75,000, compared to 24 percent and 22 percent, respectively, for the general population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000)—anti-Arab violence and defamation in the U.S. are well documented. Wingfield (2006) argues that anti-Arab racism was increasing

in the U.S. before the attacks of September 2001 and skyrocketed immediately afterward. Anti-Arab discrimination in the U.S. has receded somewhat since the first few years following the 9/11 attacks, but it would be hard to argue that such discrimination doesn't persist in disturbing forms. A 2008 report by the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee maintains that the annual rate of violent hate crimes against Arab Americans remains higher than in the years preceding 2001 ("Report on hate crimes and discrimination against Arab Americans, 2003-2007").

Non-violent racism exists too, of course. Consider the following statement written by a columnist for *The Daily Tar Heel*, a student-run newspaper with a circulation of 30,000 serving the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill: "I want all Arabs to be stripped naked and cavity searched if they get within 100 yards of an airport," (Slagle, 2008). Or consider the statement that the father of Rahm Emanuel, Barack Obama's chief of staff, made to an Israeli newspaper about his son's role in the new administration: "Obviously he'll influence the president to be pro-Israel. Why wouldn't he?"... "What is he, an Arab? He's not going to be mopping floors at the White House." To be sure, these are episodic and hyperbolic examples of public, anti-Arab racism in the U.S., but they point to the argument that the tone of public statements in the U.S. toward Arabs may differ from that toward other ethnic minorities.

As for the representation of Arab Americans at mainstream media outlets in the U.S., there are no indications that Arab Americans are being deliberately kept from news production and reporting positions because of their race, but it is likely that they are underrepresented. When compared to Jewish Americans, for example, Arab Americans have been much less successful at obtaining influential positions at major American media outlets, according to Walt & Mearsheimer (2007), due to the fact that large-scale Arab immigration to the U.S. is a relatively recent trend. Walt and Mearsheimer, however, whose book *The Israel Lobby and*

*U.S. Foreign Policy* only occasionally discusses Arab Americans, do not cite survey research to support this claim, and the assertion appears to rest on their personal observations.

The reason for this is the fact that mass communication scholars studying diversity at mainstream American media outlets have not enumerated Arab American journalists and editors. The American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE, 2004), for example, conducted a major national survey of minority representation at daily newspapers in the U.S., but only reported percentages for four racial categories: white, black, Asian and Native American. Similarly, Weaver et al. (2007) did not report figures for Arab American journalists in the U.S. in their book, *The American Journalist in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, but did list percentages for Caucasians, Native Americans, African Americans, Hispanic, and Jewish journalists.

Presumably, Weaver and colleagues classified Arab Americans as Asians, although we cannot be sure. Arab Americans do not consider themselves Asian, particularly the Arabs of North African countries such as Egypt and Algeria. In any event, Weaver et al. reported that just one percent of American journalists in their sample were “Asian Americans,” despite the fact that Asian Americans represent four percent of the U.S. population. ASNE reported similar numbers, listing the national percentage of Asian American reporters in the U.S. at around 1.5 percent. A study from the journalism school at the University of Maryland exploring racial diversity in the Washington Press Corps also did not provide percentages for Arab American correspondents, but reported that Asian American reporters *and* editors totaled 1.9 percent of all members of the gaggle (“Diversity in the Washington newspaper press corps,” 2004).

The Arab Writers Syndicate, an organization devoted to gaining exposure for Arab newspaper columnists, claims that Arab voices are underrepresented in mainstream American news media (Hanania, 2008). The organization’s

president, Ray Hanania, claims that only three of the 4500 daily newspapers in the United States have Arab American columnists that contribute regularly, and also claims that only 200 Arab Americans have print media jobs at all (Hanania, 2007). Presumably, however, these figures are based on Hanania's speculation alone, for he does not cite any survey research examining his claims. There is reason to suspect that Arab Americans are underrepresented in American news media, but figures specifying such a trend do not exist.

Much of the research on ethnic and gender minorities in America's newsrooms has mainly focused on two ends: 1) Quantifying, and attempting to increase, minority representation at American news organizations (see, for example, Najjar, 1995); and 2) Surveying the beliefs and attitudes (such as measures of job satisfaction) of minorities at these American news organizations (see Liebler, 1994). Again, suspicion exists that some sort of gap may exist between newsroom minorities and majorities in terms of a number of factors: pay, job security, promotional mobility, job satisfaction. The current study focuses on the second of the two ends; while the author suspects that Arab American journalists are severely underrepresented in American newsrooms, this study does not focus on a quantification of Arab American journalistic presence. Instead, this survey is a professional assessment of Arab American journalists and editors as the first step in gaining an understanding about how they perceive themselves and their abilities in the journalistic workplace. More specifically, this study examines the extent to which Arab American journalists feel professionally efficacious as creators and disseminators of America's news.

### **Research on Journalism & Professional Efficacy**

The ways journalists view themselves and their work has been an interest for a number of mass communication researchers (see Weaver & Wilhoit, 1986; Wilnat & Weaver, 2003; Tsfati, 2004; Burgoon et al., 1984; Herscovitz, 2004;

Viall, 1992; and Stamm & Underwood, 1993). Such research has examined, among other things, journalists' sense of accomplishment, job satisfaction, income levels, and frequency of promotion. Studies like these have asked journalists how satisfied they are with their bosses, whether their offices are pleasant work environments, and whether they feel they are fairly compensated for their work.

While most of these studies have used scales related to, but not exactly, professional efficacy (such as a sense of professional achievement), a few others have. Kim and Oh (1974) examined professional efficacy among a sample of South Korean journalists, defining the concept as the extent to which journalists feel they are trusted by the public and therefore have a significant impact on public opinion." Marron (1995) examined professional efficacy among Irish journalists, defining the concept as Kim and Oh did: possessing the feeling that one is trusted by the public and that one can exert considerable sway over public affairs.

Burke & Matthiesen (2005) measured workplace efficacy among a sample of Norwegian journalists using items from Maslach's Burnout Inventory General Survey (Schaufeli, Leiter, Maslach & Jackson, 1996) a measure which includes a subscale of professional efficacy defined as the perception of one's workplace accomplishments and abilities. Reinardy (2008) also used the Maslach Burnout Inventory to assess professional efficacy among female newspaper reporters in the U.S.

While these studies approach a sound definition of journalistic professional efficacy, their definitions operationalizations of the concept present a few problems, and a slightly different definition of journalistic workplace efficacy is used in the current study. Take both Kim & Oh's and Marron's studies, for example, in which professional efficacy depends on one's sense of public trust in their competence. Although journalists' perceptions of public trust may be a



correlate of professional efficacy, trust might not be a necessary component. A British tabloid editor, for example, may be aware that public trust in her journalistic genre is low, but may at the same time possess high levels of professional efficacy if her publication is selling and if her reporting is spurring debate among readers. By equating professional efficacy with perceptions of public trust, Marron and Kim and Oh may be confusing the former with some form of professional esteem or self-esteem.

In the studies by Burke & Matthesen and Reinardy, the authors rely on the Maslach Burnout Inventory in order to measure journalists' professional efficacy, which largely defines professional efficacy as one's sense of workplace accomplishment (see Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001). The original Maslach Burnout Inventory's assessments of professional efficacy included items such as "I have accomplished many worthwhile things in this job" and "I feel exhilarated after working with my [noun depends on the nature of the field research]" (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). One's sense of past accomplishments no doubt contribute to a sense of efficacy—confidence in one's ability to contribute to some future outcome—but it seems possible that acknowledgment of one's accomplishments may represent just one component of professional efficacy.

Due to some of these operational concerns, the current study defines journalistic professional efficacy in a slightly different way, drawing partly from the work of Marron and Kim et al., but also from literature in occupational psychology and educational research. Specifically, this study builds on scales of professional efficacy from educational field research by Friedman & Kass (2002) and from a definition of professional efficacy in occupational psychology research by Schutte, Toppinen, Kalimo & Schaufeli (2000), who describe workplace efficacy as "employees' expectations of continued effectiveness at work." (p.54). In their scale measuring professional efficacy among primary school teachers, Friedman and Kass (p.682), measured workplace effectiveness by asking teachers

to what extent they agreed with statements such as “I believe my teaching produces positive change in my students’ lives,” and “I think I know how to tie my teaching with my students’ everyday interests.”

For the purposes of this study, Schutte et al.’s definition of professional efficacy will be used, as well the second half of both Kim and Oh and Marron’s definitions. And the scale by Friedman and Kass, tweaked slightly in order to be appropriate for mass communication research, is used to measure Arab Americans’ sense of professional efficacy. Professional efficacy is here defined as Arab American journalists’ sense that they can effect changes in public affairs and public opinion. Journalistic professional efficacy is the extent to which journalists can, through their professional activity, effect change. Put even more simply, professional efficacy is the belief that one’s work makes a difference of some kind.

In most cases, scales assessing “efficacy” of any form measure some capacity for change. Political efficacy, for example, is the feeling that a political system responds to one’s actions (Finkel, 1985), while self efficacy is a person’s belief that they can control life (Bandura, 1982). And although new to political communication literature, political information efficacy is a feeling of being well-enough informed of current events to participate in politics and in political discussions with others (Kaid, McKinney, & Tedesco, 2004). It follows, then, that professional efficacy in journalism should involve feelings that one’s professional activities are effective. As in the definitions of political efficacy, self efficacy, and information efficacy, journalistic professional efficacy is the feeling that one’s activities are impactful.

Part of Kim and Oh’s study tried to determine the extent to which Korean reporters felt their profession could effect change and have an impact on public opinion. The educational research of Guskey (1998), too, examined change, suggesting that teachers’ levels of professional efficacy were strong predictors of

their likelihood to adopt instructional innovations in the classroom. Believing their work was meaningful and efficacious, these teachers were willing to try something new.

The current study also assesses the degree to which Arab American journalists feel their professional activities can spur change. Items on Friedman and Kass' professional efficacy scale involve such things as journalists' ability to help solve societal problems, to have an impact on readers' morals and values, and their aptitude in informing audiences of news during a time of crisis. By using this scale to measure professional efficacy among Arab American journalists, this study examines the professional satisfaction of a severely understudied population of American newspeople. Also, by defining professional efficacy in a way that slightly differs from past research on journalists' workplace efficacy, this study might increase the visibility of the Friedman and Kass scale for mass communication researchers studying newsmakers' levels of professional satisfaction.

### **Research Questions**

#### **RQ1: What are the levels of professional efficacy among Arab American journalists in the current sample?**

This first research question is the starting point of inquiry for this study, and will provide a basis for the remaining questions. Subscales of *internal* and *external* professional efficacy will be compared. Internal professional efficacy measures consist of self-assessments of one's capabilities, while external efficacy involves the degree to which one's own abilities produce a desired response in some external agent or factor.

#### **RQ2: Do levels of professional efficacy among Arab American journalists working at Arab American news organizations differ from those Arab Americans working for mainstream American news organizations?**

As was noted earlier in this paper, there are more than 80 Arab American news publications in the U.S., in addition to Arab American radio programming in places with high concentrations of Arab Americans, such as Detroit and Dearborn, Michigan. This question will compare levels of professional efficacy between Arab American journalists working at Arab outlets (those focusing specifically on Arab American issues and predominantly managed by Arab Americans) and those working for mainstream news organizations.

**RQ3: What are some of the demographic variables associated with professional efficacy among Arab American journalists in the sample?**

This research question will regress age, education, gender, and years of journalistic experience, and years at current job onto levels of professional efficacy.

**RQ4: Do levels of professional efficacy differ according to specialization? That is, do Arab American reporters, columnists, and editors' differ in their levels of professional efficacy?**

**Method**

This study reports the results of an e-mail survey assessing Arab American journalists' (N=45) levels of professional efficacy and a number of other professional and demographic variables. Data were collected in the spring of 2008. An e-mail containing a link to the survey, which was available in both Arabic and English and constructed using Qualtrics survey software, was sent to approximately 250 Arab American reporters, editors and columnists in the spring of 2008. The survey had a response rate of 18 percent.

Most recipients of the e-mail were members of the National Arab American Journalists Association and subscribe to the organization's listserv, to which the author was graciously granted access. Other potential respondents who are well-known Arab journalists were contacted directly through their work e-

mail at a variety of outlets, including *The Arab American News*, *The Washington Post*, *Newsweek*, ABC and CBS news. Editors at other Arab American publications were also contacted and asked to complete the questionnaire and to forward the survey link to reporters and columnists on their staff.

### **Instrument & Variables**

The survey took about five to ten minutes to complete and consisted of 20 questions: 12 items comprising the professional efficacy scale, and 7 demographic questions. The demographic questions assessed journalists' age, ethnicity, gender, name of news publication, education level, years of journalism experience, and years spent working for their current employer.

#### *Professional Efficacy Scale*

The professional efficacy scale used in the survey is from the work of Friedman & Kass (2002) who, in surveying over 550 primary and secondary school teachers in Israel. They created a scale of 19 items assessing professional efficacy, which they defined in ways similar to the definition presented in this paper: an assessment of feelings that one's professional activities make some sort of positive difference. Eleven items from Friedman and Kass' scale were used in the current survey (eight of the items did not translate into statements appropriate for journalists, such as "I can handle student disturbances in the classroom without raising my voice"). In addition to Friedman and Kass' eleven items, one item was added by the author, for a total of 12 items assessing professional efficacy. These 12 items were summed to compute a professional efficacy score for each respondent. As there were 11 professional efficacy items measured on a 5 point scale, the range of the scale ran from 12 (very low levels of professional efficacy) to 60 (highest possible professional efficacy score). Cronbach's alpha, an assessment of the scale's internal consistency, was .783.

Respondents in the current survey were asked the extent to which they agreed/disagreed with the following statements about their professional activity

(the first 11 items come from Friedman & Kass; item 12 was added by the author): 1) I believe my writing produces a positive change in my readers' lives; 2) I believe I am a highly capable journalist; 3) I believe my writing has an impact on the morals and values of my readers; 4) I think I can be creative in my writing; 5) I think I am an interesting and motivating journalist; 6) I think that in conflict situations I can report events in a way that would not lead to a crisis; 7) I believe my writing keeps readers informed of important topics; 8) I think I can adapt my writing style to fit the needs of a story; 9) I do not know how to tie my reporting to my readers' interests; 10) I don't think I can encourage my readers to express their thoughts and feelings; 11) In my reporting I don't think I know how to address problems my readers may be having; 12) I don't think my writing can play an important role in solving serious societal problems. Four of the eleven items on the scale were reverse-coded before the overall professional efficacy index was calculated.

Subscales of the items were created to separately examine Arab American journalists' levels of *internal* professional efficacy (by averaging responses to items 2, 4 & 5, as listed above) vs. *external* professional efficacy (an average of all other items).

## Results

Respondents in this study represent a convenience sample of Arab American journalists (N=45) working at various news organizations around the country. About half (49 percent) of respondents work at Arab American publications such as *In Focus* and the *Arab American Times*, while 51 percent work for mainstream news organizations, such as NBC, CBS, *Newsweek* and *The Washington Post*. Most of the journalists and editors in the sample (86 percent) work at print outlets—either paper or online—while fewer are employed at radio and TV stations (14 percent). Men comprised 51 percent of the sample. The

median age of respondents was 38, and median values for years of journalism experience and years of service at current job were 10 and 5, respectively. More than ninety percent of respondents chose to complete the survey in English as opposed to Arabic.

Respondents in the sample were highly educated. Ninety-three percent of respondents in the sample were college graduates, and 64 percent had earned a graduate degree(s). In terms of professional specializations, reporters comprised a majority of the sample (51 percent), followed by editors (27 percent) and columnists (22 percent). In terms of national ancestry, the majority of respondents were Americans of Palestinian (36 percent), Lebanese (14), Egyptian (14), Syrian (11) and Iraqi (11) descent. The remaining 14 percent of the sample were Americans of Jordanian, Sudanese, Moroccan, Libyan, Algerian and Saudi Arabian ancestry.

### **Overall Professional Efficacy**

Research question one inquired about overall levels of Arab American journalists' professional efficacy. In general, professional efficacy scores of Arab American journalists on the Friedman & Kass scale were quite high. The mean score of professional efficacy (which ranges from 12 to 60) among respondents in the sample was 48.47 (SD=5.62). This means that about 64 percent of the sample scored between 42.85 and 54.09 on the scale. Respondents' professional efficacy scores showed a strong central tendency, ranging from 28 to 60 and having an inter-quartile range six (45-51). A normal P-P Plot suggests that scores on the professional efficacy index were normally distributed.

### **Internal vs. External Professional Efficacy**

Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations of the 12 items comprising the professional efficacy scale. Respondents tended to agree strongest with statements assessing their abilities as a capable journalist, or measures of *internal* professional efficacy. Respondents, for example, agreed most with

statements such as the following: “I think I can be creative in my writing” (95.6 percent of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed); “I believe I am a highly capable journalist” (93.2); and “I think I am an interesting and motivating journalist” (91.1).

Many of the statements with which respondents agreed less involved the perceived impact that their reporting has on audiences, or *external professional efficacy*. Respondents agreed less with statements such as, “I believe my writing has an impact on the morals and values of my readers,” (68.9 percent agreed or strongly agreed); and “I think that in conflict situations I can report events in a way that would not lead to a crisis,” (79.1). Conversely, respondents tended to rarely agree with statements like “I do not know how to tie my reporting to my readers interests” (4.4 percent agree/strongly agree); and “I don't think my writing can play an important role in solving serious societal problems,” (9.1); Overall, Arab American journalists’ report high levels of professional efficacy, but levels of internal professional efficacy appear to be higher than levels of external professional efficacy.

A paired sample *t*-test supports this. Items from the professional efficacy scale assessing internal professional efficacy (items 2, 4, and 5 from Table 1) were summed and averaged ( $M=4.20$ ,  $SD=.49$ ). Remaining items, those assessing external professional efficacy (all other items from Table 1), were similarly summed and averaged ( $M=3.99$ ,  $SD=.49$ ). Respondents’ levels of internal professional efficacy were higher than their levels of external professional efficacy  $t(41)=2.57$ ,  $p=.015$  (two-tailed). Respondents felt more confident in their general journalistic worth than in their ability to affect public opinion among their audiences.

**Table 1**

Means of Professional Efficacy Scale	M	SD	N	% A/SA
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1. I believe my writing produces positive change in readers' lives.	4.00	.816	44	72.1%
2. I believe I am a highly capable journalist.	4.14	.594	45	93.2
3. I believe my writing has an impact on the morals and values of my readers.	3.87	.757	45	68.9
4. I think I can be creative in my writing.		4.27	.72	45
95.6				
5. I think I am an interesting and motivating journalist.		4.18	.576	45
91.1				
6. I think that in conflict situations I can report events in a way that would not lead to a crisis.		4.00	.845	43
79.1				
7. I believe my writing keeps readers informed of important topics.		4.49	.757	45
95.6				
8. I think I can adapt my writing style to fit the needs of a story.		4.00	.826	45
82.2				
9. <i>I do not know how to tie my reporting<sup>1</sup> to my readers' interests.</i>	4.27	.751	45	4.4
10. <i>I don't think I can encourage my readers to express their thoughts and feelings.</i>		3.58	1.12	45
20.0				
11. <i>In my reporting, I don't think I know how to address</i>		3.79	.954	44
9.0				

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<sup>1</sup> Italicized items were reverse-coded.

*problems my readers may be having.*

12. *I don't think my writing can play an important role* 3.89 .993 44  
9.1  
*in solving serious societal problems.*

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N=45

### **Professional and Demographic Predictors of Professional Efficacy**

Research question two asked whether levels of professional efficacy differ between Arab American journalists working for Arab American news organizations ( $M=48.69$ ,  $SD = 6.09$ ) and those working for mainstream American outlets ( $M=48.54$ ,  $SD=5.06$ ). An independent-samples  $t$ -test suggests there is no statistical difference between these two groups  $t(43)= .08$ ,  $p=.935$  (two-tailed). In fact, the mean professional efficacy scores of the two groups are nearly identical.

Research question three involved demographic predictors of Arab American journalists' levels of professional efficacy. Five demographic variables (age, gender, education level, years experience and years at current job) were entered into a regression model predicting professional efficacy. None of these variables were associated with significant variation in the dependent variable. A near exception was years of experience [ $\beta= .202$ ,  $t(43) = 1.47$ ,  $p = .15$ ] which approached significance, but did not satisfy an alpha level of .05.

Research question four asked whether levels of professional efficacy differ among journalistic specializations (that is, among reporters, editors, and columnists). One-way analysis of variance suggests that they do not  $F(2,39) = 1.92$ ,  $p = .16$ .

## **Discussion**

### **Overall Professional Efficacy**

Overall, Arab American journalists and editors in the sample reported seemingly high levels of professional efficacy, which did not differ according to gender, age, education, news outlet type (American mainstream vs. Arab American), years of experience, or years at current job. What is also noteworthy is the fact that high levels of professional efficacy were observed across the entire sample, which included an award-winning writer from *The Washington Post*, and well-known reporters from MSNBC, McClatchy newspapers and *Newsweek*, as well as reporters from lesser-known Arab American outlets across the country. Professional efficacy was high even for journalists reporting for and in small Arab American communities.

More than 90 percent of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with a number of the professional efficacy scale items, including, “I believe I am a highly capable journalist,” “I believe my writing keeps readers informed of important topics,” and “I think I can be creative in my writing.” While Arab Americans may represent a very small portion of the American news force, those that do make their living in American journalism feel quite positively about their abilities and the perceived effects of their reportage. This is good. While reliable figures of percentages of Arab American journalists and editors at American news organizations do not exist, nor do median salary values with which Arab Americans’ compensation could be compared with other journalistic ethnic groups, it is encouraging to discover that Arab American journalists in this sample have positive feelings about their capabilities and how they do their jobs.

Arab American journalists’ levels of internal professional efficacy were higher than their levels of external efficacy. Internal efficacy relates to feelings of one’s own competence (“I feel I am a highly capable journalist”), while external efficacy measures assess perceptions of the responses of one’s actions (“I believe my writing has an impact on the morals and values of my readers”). This is a distinction political scientists have made for some time in research examining

political efficacy (Niemi, Craig & Mattei, 1991). The fact that Arab American journalists in the sample reported higher levels of professional efficacy is in line with some prior research on self-efficacy and political efficacy. Individuals often feel more confident in their own abilities than in the responsiveness of external agents. Arab American journalists appear to have more faith in their own reporting abilities than they do in the responsiveness of their audiences.

*Professional and Demographic Predictors of Professional Efficacy*

Professional efficacy was nearly uniformly high across the sample of Arab American journalists. Standard deviations from the mean of the professional efficacy index were quite narrow. Because of this—a lack of variability in the dependent variable—covariation with a number of demographic and professional predictors was not common. A variable cannot covary with another predictor if it does not first vary alone. Professional efficacy did not differ according to age, gender, education, years of journalistic experience, years at current job, or professional position (editor, reporter). It may be worth reiterating, though, that years of journalistic experience approached significance as a predictor of professional efficacy, and the relationship was positive.

In general, the results of this survey suggest that Arab American journalists feel confident in their abilities to produce valuable and influential news in this country. To be sure, Arab Americans face different forms of discrimination in post-9/11 America, and are a vulnerable immigrant population in a number of ways, but any such discrimination or vulnerability do not seem to adversely affect faith in their abilities to successfully produce important and effective news. This may be due to the fact that Arab American journalists are often hired by news organizations as Middle Eastern analysts or commentators at a time when news of the Arab-Muslim world seems highly prominent and important. Whatever the reasons for their hiring, though, Arab American journalists in this sample feel that

their capacities to effect change and have an impact on news audiences are very real.

### **The Friedman & Kass Professional Efficacy Scale in Mass Communication Research**

To the author's knowledge, this was the first time the Friedman and Kass professional efficacy scale, originally designed to assess educators' feelings of professional efficacy in their classrooms, has been used to survey professional satisfaction among mass communication practitioners. The author believes that the scale offers a more theoretically sound operationalization of professional efficacy than that adopted previously by some mass communication scholars. Foremost, the scale focuses on one's feel that (s)he has the ability to effect some level of positive change through their toil in the workplace.

In the current study, the scale yielded acceptable levels of internal consistency (.783) among a diverse group of news practitioners. While all Arab, respondents represented eleven different countries, a wide age range, and worked for outlets in many different U.S. states. Recall also that the survey was offered in Arabic as well as English, and while most respondents chose to complete the questionnaire in English, a handful of respondents chose the former language. Thus, the Friedman and Kass scale may translate well into other languages in terms of reliability—often a major issue in cross-cultural survey research (Seligson, 2005).

If the Friedman and Kass scale provides a sound operationalization of professional efficacy among Arab American news practitioners, than it may also be appropriate for other journalistic populations as well. It is worth noting that Friedman and Kass' scale was initially administered to a non-western population—Israeli elementary and secondary teachers—so the scale was conceived in a different cultural setting. Regardless of the geographic origin of the scale, though, the author of the current study believes the index demonstrates

face validity and could be applicable to a number of professional populations in mass communication. If scholars are unsatisfied with the reliability of the scale reported here—acceptable but not stellar—they should recall that the scale used in the current study contained 12 items and, therefore, has some margin for adjustment in the interests of internal consistency.

### **Limitations & Future Research**

There are two main limitations to this study. The first involves a small sample size. While the 45 Arab American journalists in the sample represent a decent portion of the few hundred Arab American journalists the Arab Writers Group claims work in the U.S., the author of this study believes that there may be more who are uncounted given that Arabs have not been enumerated in studies of newsroom diversity. It should be noted, then, that this study is a preliminary investigation into Arab representation and professional satisfaction in U.S. newsrooms. Because of such uncertainties it is difficult to estimate how large a sample would be sufficient to study this population. In the next major, omnibus study of journalists in the United States, such as those similar to the *Global Journalist* studies by Weaver et al., researchers should more precisely document journalists' ethnicities. It is neither accurate nor instructive to categorize Arab American journalists as "Asian American," as some of these omnibus studies do.

The second challenge to the current study involves the somewhat untested nature of the Friedman & Kass professional efficacy scale. While the author does feel confident in the utility of the scale in mass communication research, the index may not be perfect for any and all populations of communication practitioners. Although the scale's levels of internal consistency were acceptable in the current study, this scale should continue to be tested to assess professional efficacy among journalists and other professional groups, in order to strengthen confidence in the scale's validity. The author believes that, at least in journalism and mass communication research, Friedman and Kass' scale is useful for assessing

professional efficacy, which has heretofore been slightly mis-operationalized by scholars in these fields. The scale should, though, be used to assess professional efficacy among other ethnic groups in American journalism so that cross-ethnic comparisons can be made and to create a better sense of what values on the Friedman & Kass scale represent low or high levels of journalistic efficacy.

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