Consumer Racism and Its Effects on Attitudes
  Jean-Francois Ouellet, HEC Montreal

ABSTRACT - Marketing literature has so far largely occulted the impact of racism on consumer behaviour. This article first reviews the concept of racism and contrasts it with ethnocentrism and animosity. The postulated influence of racism on consumers’ attitudes towards 4 product categories of varied ethnic origin is then verified through an experimentation involving a sample of French and English Canadian consumers. Findings suggest that consumers’ evaluations of domestic products of varied ethnic origins are significantly correlated with declared levels of racism towards said ethnic groups.

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ABSTRACT
Marketing literature has so far largely occulted the impact of racism on consumer behaviour. This article first reviews the concept of racism and contrasts it with ethnocentrism and animosity. The postulated influence of racism on consumers’ attitudes towards 4 product categories of varied ethnic origin is then verified through an experimentation involving a sample of French and English Canadian consumers. Findings suggest that consumers’ evaluations of domestic products of varied ethnic origins are significantly correlated with declared levels of racism towards said ethnic groups.

Racism, its antecedents and its consequences have been the object in academic research in many fields including sociology, law, public health, journalism, and psychology. Racism has been studied in economic terms as a cost (Alexis 1999), and in management to identify for example how racism could influence evaluation of personnel (Knight et al. 2003). While general applicability of racism in marketing has been established especially through research in advertising (e.g., Bristor, Lee, and Hunt 1995; Bush, Resnik, and Stern 1980; Cox 1969-70; Kassarjian 1969; Taylor and Lee 1994; Wilkes and Valencia 1989), its impact on consumer behaviour is largely unexplored.

Yet it should be, along with other types of ideologies. Indeed, with the notable exceptions of ethnocentrism, patriotism as well as such constructs as animosity, the influence of ideologies in general on consumer behaviour and attitudes has itself not been the object of much attention from researchers. Marinov et al. (2001) studied for instance the impact of communist ideological legacy in Bulgaria, Romania, and Ukraine. However, when ideology-related research has been conducted in marketing, it usually held as an object how ideologies were manifested in marketing, not at the consumer level (see research in advertising cited before). For example, studies examined whether industrial advertising was sexist (LaTour, Henthorne, and Williams 1998) and the effect of ethnic ideologies on marketing practices (Kleiser et al. 2003). Yet ideologies have since long been documented in psychology literature as largely affecting behaviour. For instance, ideological-based discrimination was documented in the 1950’s as eliciting behaviour ranging from avoidance, antilocution, differential allocation of outcomes, physical attacks, hate crimes, and even extermination (Allport 1954). One can postulate that if ideologies can push that far, they are certainly likely to potentially also affect consumer behaviour.

As mentioned, one ideology that has been widely studied in consumer behaviour is that of ethnocentrism, largely documented as affecting consumer behaviour towards foreign and domestic shops, products, and/or services (Balabanis and Diamantopoulos 2004). Psychologists recently postulated ethnocentrism to be positively associated with other domination ideologies such as nationalism, xenophobia, social dominance orientation, and racism (Lea 1996; Pratto et al. 2000, Sidanis et al. 1997). Provided the influence of ethnocentrism is largely documented, such a positive association with racism should suggest an influence of the latter also and warrant exploratory investigation. This article thus aims at exploring the concept of racism and some of its potential effects on consumer behaviour.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE
Racism was defined by Wilson (1973, p. 32) as “an ideology of racial domination or exploitation that 1) incorporates beliefs in a particular race’s cultural and/or inherent biological inferiority, and 2) uses such beliefs to justify and prescribe inferior or unequal treatment for that group.” Contemporary authors however concur that the original biological foundation of racism has given way to bases characterized by real or imagined differences between ethnic groups in terms of their languages, cultures, customs and life-styles (Taguieff 1988). “Neo-racism”, or “modern racism,” has thus apparently shifted its object from race to culture, or ethnic belonging (Gilroy 1991).

Racism, ethnocentrism, and animosity
Racism is often the reaction of ethnically dominant groups to the “imposition” by ethnic minorities of their unassimilable cultures, which would undo the accomplishments of history, the order of things, national identity, or its supposed unity (Potvin 2000). It is always made up of two major functions—that is, demarcation and legitimation of domination (Memmi 1994, p.106). It is thus by definition always directed from an ethnically dominant group towards one or more (but not all) minority groups. For instance, in the U.S., research has suggested that because it is threatening to White hegemony for Blacks to have influence and authority, many Whites are either consciously or unconsciously motivated to find ways to perpetuate the existing imbalance of power by reacting negatively towards Blacks in high status positions (Dovidio & Gaertner 1981; Knight, Giuliano, and Sanchez-Ross 2001).

By definition, consumer racism is thus in essence different from a variety of other constructs, including that of consumer ethnocentrism, defined and largely operationalized as the beliefs held by consumers about the appropriateness, indeed morality, of purchasing foreign-made products (Shimp and Sharma 1987), or shops, products, and/or services originating from a different ethnic group. The latter construct is valid for all countries of origin or ethnic origins, potentially moderated by cultural proximity with the countries or ethnicities being evaluated (Laroche et al. 2003), and in essence centered on the evaluating consumer’s own national, cultural, or ethnic backgrounds. Racism, on the other hand, is rather centered on the evaluated object’s national, cultural, or ethnic origin, and specifically directed towards it (Memmi 1994). One could thus be ethnocentric (have a tendency to reject shops, products, and/or services other than originating from his/her own ethnic group) and, in addition, exhibit racism towards one minority in particular (have a tendency to even further reject shops, products, and/or services originating from that precise group) while better accepting other minorities. Even though they should share a moderately high amount of variance, separate influences of both ethnocentrism and racism should therefore differ and should be researched as two separate yet potentially combinable constructs as they have been in psychology.

Racism also appears to be different from animosity, introduced and defined by Klein and colleagues (1998) as the remnants of antipathy related to previous or ongoing military, political, or economic events. Feelings of animosity towards a specific country, distinct from consumer ethnocentrism, would affect consumers’ willingness to purchase foreign products rather than their judgment or evaluation of these products. Evidence to support this was found, based on a study of consumers’ willingness to buy Japanese products in the Chinese city of Nanjing, where 300,000 people were massacred by the Japanese in World War II. While Klein found
animosity to a country to affect consumer attitudes and willingness to purchase products in an extreme case, namely, the Chinese in Nanjing, an interesting question raised by Nijssen and Douglas (2004) is whether animosity has the same influence under less extreme conditions.

From a theoretical point of view, animosity differs from racism in that it is on the way toward racism. Animosity, according to Entman and Rojecki (2001), sits on a continuum between racial harmony and outright racism. Racism, in this sense, appears to be animosity taken one step further.

The effects of consumer racism

Overt evidence of racism has decreased in recent years (e.g., Dovidio and Gaertner 1991; 2000) but it remains robust in more subtle forms that individuals may be hesitant to express (Gaertner & Dovidio 1986; McConahay 1986). These subtle forms of racism may be expressed in ambiguous situations where the behaviour can be justified by motives other than racism. For example, the effects of subtle racism have been observed in people’s decisions about whom to hire for employment (Dovidio and Gaertner 2000; McConahay 1983) and how personnel evaluations are conducted (Knight et al. 2003). Researchers thus generally believe racism is manifesting itself more indirectly, in more symbolic ways (Myers 1993; Potvin 2000).

One potential instance of such indirect and symbolic way of expressing racism is through attitudes towards shops, products, and/or services. Although not documented in the scope of racism nor through evaluations of shops, products, and/or services per se, academic literature provides hints of the influence of racism on evaluations of shops, products, and/or services. Following a review of the literature and after acknowledging methodological limitations, Whittler (1991) concluded that some White viewers were not affected by the presence of Black actors in advertisements (as measured by a number of factors, including brand name recall, attitude towards the product and brand, and purchase intentions) while others were not as positive to Black actors as they were to White actors. Influence of racism is also hinted by the principles regarding transfer of meaning (McCracken 1989): if one does not like a specific ethnic group, theory suggests that he/she should not like its products either.

Previous research however fails to demonstrate the role of racism in the above-mentioned results, which could otherwise be explained by ethnocentrism. For example, if consumers of ethnicity $x$ were found to discriminate more actively against products displayed as originating from ethnic group $y$ than against products perceived as originating from ethnic groups $a$, $b$, and $c$, then consumers of ethnicity $x$ could be hinted as exhibiting racism towards ethnicity $y$ and not just ethnocentrism in favour of their own ethnicity $x$. Yet previous research has not included evaluations of advertisements, shops, services, nor products originating from more than two ethnic groups, usually Blacks and Whites in the U.S., nor has it included measures of racism.

The Canadian setting

According to cited definitions of racism, for the phenomenon to take place requires the presence of a majority ethnic group alongside an unassimilatable ethnic minority. Because of its linguistic duality and within-country differences, Canada was deemed to be an appropriate society for this investigation. Prior research in marketing provides strong evidence of the existence of two distinct ethnic groups within Canada, an English majority and a dominant French minority (e.g., Kim et al., 1989; Kindra et al., 1994; Heslop et al., 1998; Plummer, 1977; Schaninger et al., 1985). It is widely recognized that English and French Canadians possess different cultural traits, customs, language, and traditions subsequently yielding differences in their consumer-related behaviour (Laroche et al. 2000). Most importantly, research has demonstrated that some English Canadians did exhibit a certain level of racism towards French Canadians (Potvin 2000).

The Province of Quebec provides an interesting setting for this study as English Canadian and French Canadian groups can be perceived by their members as either the majority or the minority groups depending on either they adopt a province-wise point of view or a nation-wise point of view. Racism is therefore likely to occur both ways. In addition, Canada has a number of other ethnic minorities that allow for comparison and validation with additional ethnicities. In the Montreal metropolitan area, aside from the English and French communities, important ethnic minorities include Italian, Arabic, Spanish, and Chinese groups (Statistics Canada 2001). Provided racism is postulated to negatively influence racist consumers’ evaluations of shops, products, and/or services originating from ethnic groups against which they exhibit racism, we postulate the following proposition: “The more one exhibits racism towards an ethnic group, the less positive his/her attitudes towards products and services perceived as originating from that group will be.”

METHODOLOGY

Design

A 5 (French/English, Italian, Arabic, Spanish, and Chinese) x 4 (product class) design was developed and intended for French Canadian and English Canadian respondents. Varied stimuli in terms of product classes were believed necessary as research has consistently shown that country stereotypes tend to be product class-specific (Kaynak and Cavusgil, 1983), likely ethnic stereotypes also are. In order to fully control for factors other than racism, product classes were selected to control for product-based stereotypes on ethnic groups’ abilities and competence in providing said shops, products, and/or services. For instance, jewellery shops were not considered likely to be owned by Italians nor Arabs in Montreal. In a pre-test, 34 business school students (17 English and 17 French) had rated the degree to which they thought each product class was specifically associated with one or more (but not all) of French Canadian, English Canadian, Italian, Arabic, Spanish, and/or Chinese communities (1=not at all; 7=very much). Four classes of retail and services were selected: auto repair, flowers, landscaping, and convenience stores, all of which scored low on the ethnic dominance and competency scales (Ms<1.6) conferring them ethnically neutral status. Retailing and services were chosen as, in a pre-test, respondents confirmed they found more credible a scenario in which immigrants would be providing services or owning shops than manufacturing goods.

Participants

With the implicit assumption that geopolitical boundaries inadequately represent ethnic groups, the populations targeted for the current study consisted of adult English and French Canadians residing in the same city, the Montreal metropolitan area, as previous research has demonstrated appropriate (Laroche et al. 2003; Schaninger et al., 1985). French and English groups were of interest in this study due to their majority statuses. In order to ensure a representative sample of both ethnic groups, given the multicultural character of the population of Montreal, participants were recruited in various city sites known as ethnic English or ethnic French-dominant. These sites were
defined according to Census of Canada data about the mother tongue of residents. Respondents were recruited through random mall or street intercept procedures.

A total of 394 respondents were submitted to a screening questionnaire that aimed at evaluating their belonging to either the French or English group. The latter was assessed through a multidimensional index of ethnicity (Kim et al. 1989), which uses as reliable measures of the strength of ethnic affiliation dimensions of language usage and ethnic identification.

A certain number of acculturated Canadians were expected (Laroche et al. 2003), as well as respondents indicating use of a language other than French or English. All were turned away, leaving a total of 319 completed questionnaires. Three were eliminated for incompleteness, thus leaving a final set of 316 questionnaires, 160 completed by English Canadians, and 156 by French Canadians.

### Stimuli

Short descriptive ads for all four selected shop and services categories were developed to be identical in structure (image colour and size, length of descriptive text, brand name size, etc.) and contents (message style, benefits advertised, etc.). For each category, 48 advertisements were designed to describe and depict the exact same offering. Ads varied in the language they were written in (French or English) and in the ethnic connotation of brand names. Attitudes towards messages and brand names were also pre-tested with a sample of 34 business school students (17 English and 17 French). Names denoting high (Ms>5.9) ethnic affiliation in both ethnic groups were selected based on a scale of 1 (not specifically ethnic-sounding) to 7 (very specifically ethnic-sounding). Brand names including family names were the highest scoring and thus were selected (see table 1).

Ethnicity of selected names could also be correctly identified in 97.1% of cases and no significant difference was found between French and English in the pre-test. Use of brand names was randomized across the study so that respondents would see a randomized brand name for each category, and so that participants would not see twice the same brand name in two different categories. Attitudes towards the messages did not significantly differ among them, nor across ethnic groups.

### Procedure

A self-administered, computer-based questionnaire was used to gather data for this project. The questionnaire was originally developed in English and translated into French using a translate/back-translate procedure. A short introductory note provided background information and informed participants they were going to be shown, for 4 product categories, a total of 5 short ads (one for each ethnic group except the respondent’s own) of shops or services companies located in Montreal. The computer instructed participants to take a thorough look at each of the 4 product descriptions they were going to be shown in order to provide their evaluations of the companies afterwards. One at a time, ads were then shown, for which respondents had to provide store or service brand appreciation directly on the computer. To make sure respondents processed ethnic origins for each brand, they were instructed, upon providing ratings, to enter the brand name. After each brand for each shop and service company had been evaluated, socio-demographic data and information on racism were finally gathered.

### Measures

The independent variable of theoretical interest in this study was respondents’ level of racism. It was assessed using an adapted version of Saucier and Miller’s (2003) Racial Argument Scale (RAS). Although the older Modern Racism Scale (McConahay et al. 1981) has achieved widespread use in the measurement of racism since its creation, recent findings suggest that it is now correlated with social desirability (Dunton and Fazio 1997; Fazio, Jackson, Dunton, and Williams, 1995)—that is, respondents now bias their answers in order to hide what they consider a socially undesirable sentiment. The RAS measures racial attitudes through an indirect path, measuring how individuals believe that arguments support positive and negative conclusions related to Blacks. Individuals will not report how much they personally agree with the arguments, only how much the arguments support the conclusions. Alpha reliabilities of the scale were shown to range from .67 to .74, and the scale has been demonstrated not to correlate with social desirability while still significantly explaining racism (Saucier and Miller 2003).

Adapted versions of the scale were developed to include 8 statements and conclusions on which respondents had to express how much statements did support positive and negative conclusions related to studied ethnic groups. The scale was pre-tested on a sample of 63 business students (26 English and 37 French) and interestingly showed internal reliability scores that were quite more favourable than those noted by Saucier and Miller (2003) at .933 (Cronbach alphas for each ethnicity were .932 (English Canadian), .936 (French Canadian), .931 (Italian), .934 (Arabic), .930 (Spanish), and .932 (Chinese)).

The dependent variable was global product attitude and was measured along a three-item (bad/good; unfavorable/favorable;
unsatisfactory/satisfactory) seven-point semantic differential scale (Cronbach alpha=0.967).

**ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

Table 2 provides racism scores for both the French Canadian and the English Canadian samples. Pairwise comparisons across both samples indicate some differences in overall racism of French Canadians and English Canadians against each other. A first look at the data shows that English Canadians exhibit more racism towards French Canadians than vice versa. However, both groups do not appear to differ in their racism towards other ethnic groups.

**Racism and shops evaluations**

The results of this study provide support to our hypothesis. Correlations between racism scores and shops/services brand evaluations were assessed. As results in table 3 depict, racism scores of respondents are inversely correlated (r<0.01) with attitudes towards products originating from the ethnicity that is the object of racism. Moreover, aside from 6 exceptions noted hereafter, no other significant correlations were found between racism towards a specific ethnic group and attitudes towards products originating from other ethnic groups.

Weaker and less significant correlations have also been found between some racism scores towards one ethnicity in particular and attitudes for 1 or 2 brands originating from another ethnicity than that targeted by studied racism scores. These results, although isolated, are nonetheless intriguing since no significant correlation has been found between scores of racism towards ethnic groups except for a slight relationship (Pearson correlation=0.118) between racism towards ethnic Arabic and Chinese groups (r<0.05 (2-tailed)). Out of 6 unsuspected correlations, 2 are related to racism towards Chinese and attitudes towards Arabic products. The 4 other unsuspected correlations could be the effect of a statistical bias as there is nothing in the literature that would suggest why consumers exhibiting racism towards Spanish ethnic groups would less positively favour landscaping services from Arabic groups. This thus generally tends to confirm that attitudes towards products and services are indeed affected by racist sentiments thus supporting our hypothesis.

**DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

The research objective of this study was to examine whether racist sentiments of consumers could influence their attitudes towards products of different ethnic origins. A descriptive look at the results indicates that, in the samples examined, a racist-based influence does exist. The results indeed highlight the existence of racist and non-racist consumers as well as the direct relationship the construct has on product evaluations: racist English Canadians and French Canadians both exhibit less favourable attitudes towards products originating from ethnic groups towards which they exhibit racism, as general racism literature suggests (Myers 1993; Potvin 2000). No study had so far directly established relationships between a measure of racism in consumers and their attitudes towards products.

This study suggests that marketing practitioners carefully review their options before making a decision on the ethnic image they are to give their products or services, especially if the considered image is that of an ethnic minority. This is obviously most especially true if marketers’ target consumers are of a local or regional ethnic majority. The results also raise concerns for policy makers, who should question whether they should provide assistance to help entrepreneurs from ethnic minorities enjoy similar chances of commercial success than majorities despite apparent negative racist effects on their business.

For academic researchers, research implications of this study are three-fold. First, findings in this study suggest racism as a key construct for future academic research involving consumer behaviours across ethnic groups and in relation with each other. Furthermore, this investigation also highlights the importance and, at least, relevance of conducting cross-cultural or cross-ethnic research within countries as opposed to just between countries (Laroche et al. 2003). Finally, this investigation has shown how racism may impact consumer attitudes towards products of different ethnic origins in within country settings.

The main limitation of this study however is its limited number of participants and the local, Montreal-related scope of the study. Although targeted phenomena were demonstrated as statistically significant and in line with expectations based on the literature, other studies involving different ethnic groups elsewhere in the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Racism targeted at</th>
<th>(standard deviation)</th>
<th>(Pairwise comparisons)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Each other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian ethnicity</td>
<td>1.99 (1.51)</td>
<td>3.47 (2.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic ethnicity</td>
<td>2.07 (1.18)</td>
<td>2.20 (1.59)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish ethnicity</td>
<td>2.61 (1.54)</td>
<td>2.75 (1.95)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese ethnicity</td>
<td>2.11 (1.20)</td>
<td>2.26 (1.63)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.37 (1.43)</td>
<td>2.32 (1.63)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>t</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-7.73</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-8.2</td>
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<td>0.21</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>155b</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>155b</td>
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<td></td>
<td>155b</td>
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</table>

Items measured on a seven-point Likert scale (“does not support at all” to “strongly supports”).

aSignificant at r<0.001.
bNot significant.

**TABLE 2**

English and French Canadians’ levels of racism by ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Racism targeted at</th>
<th>MEAN (standard deviation)</th>
<th>T tests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>French Canadiens</td>
<td>(n=156)</td>
<td>English Canadians (n=160)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Each other</td>
<td>1.99 (1.51)</td>
<td>3.47 (2.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian ethnicity</td>
<td>2.07 (1.18)</td>
<td>2.20 (1.59)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic ethnicity</td>
<td>2.61 (1.54)</td>
<td>2.75 (1.95)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish ethnicity</td>
<td>2.11 (1.20)</td>
<td>2.26 (1.63)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese ethnicity</td>
<td>2.37 (1.43)</td>
<td>2.32 (1.63)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
world should be undertaken before confidently concluding in the existence and influence of racism on consumer attitudes and behaviour. Another limitation is the rather indirect applicability of the racism scale used in the context of consumer research. In this sense, one important avenue for further research is certainly the creation of a consumer racism scale, similar to the CETSCALE used to measure consumer ethnocentrism, which would be more directly appropriate for use in marketing than Saucier and Miller’s (2003) Racial Argument Scale (RAS). Finally, our study used the perceived ethnic character of brand names as a cue indirectly signalling ethnic origin of products. Further research should try to clarify more directly how racism and actual ethnic origins of products combine in influencing consumer attitudes across different ethnic groups.

**REFERENCES**


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**TABLE 3**

Correlations between racism scores and global product attitude

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitudes towards products of ethnic origin…</th>
<th>French scores towards…</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Italian</th>
<th>Arabic</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>French / English Auto repair shop</td>
<td>-.597&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florist</td>
<td>-.647&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landscaping services</td>
<td>-.585&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>Convenience store</td>
<td>-.601&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>-1.138&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Italian Auto repair shop</td>
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<td>a</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>-.424&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>a</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>-.120&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>a</td>
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<td>a</td>
<td>-.467&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>Arabic Auto repair shop</td>
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<td>Spanish Auto repair shop</td>
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<td>a</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>-.531&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scores showed are Pearson correlation coefficients.

<sup>a</sup>Not significant.

<sup>b</sup>Correlation is significant at the .01 level (two-tailed).

<sup>c</sup>Correlation is significant at the .05 level (two-tailed).


