

# Perceived discrimination among Muslims and its correlates. A comparative analysis

Anaïd Lindemann & Jörg Stolz

To cite this article: Anaïd Lindemann & Jörg Stolz (2020): Perceived discrimination among Muslims and its correlates. A comparative analysis, Ethnic and Racial Studies, DOI: [10.1080/01419870.2020.1729389](https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2020.1729389)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2020.1729389>



Published online: 25 Feb 2020.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



# Perceived discrimination among Muslims and its correlates. A comparative analysis

Anaïd Lindemann  and Jörg Stolz 

Institut de Sciences Sociales des Religions, University of Lausanne, Lausanne, Switzerland

## ABSTRACT

Many studies have found that Muslims in Western countries perceive more discrimination than most other religious groups. However, less attention has been paid to the life domains and correlates of this perceived discrimination. The aim of this study is to determine the scope of perceived discrimination among Muslims and to test hypotheses regarding how their perceived discrimination is correlated with socio-structural disadvantages and ingroup identification in comparison to other religious groups. We use a representative cross-sectional sample of 12,241 residents in Switzerland that has a very fine measure of perceived discrimination. Our study yielded three main findings. First, there is a much higher level of perceived discrimination among Muslims across all life domains and attributes. Second, socio-structural disadvantages do *not* correlate with perceived discrimination among Muslims. Third, perceived discrimination is significantly higher among Muslims who have a higher level of ethno-religious ingroup identification and who do voluntary work in associations.



**ARTICLE HISTORY** Received 5 September 2019; Accepted 30 January 2020

**KEYWORDS** Ingroup identification; islamophobia; migration; muslims; perceived discrimination; religious minority

## Introduction

Anti-Muslim discrimination is a challenge for most Western countries marked by religious and ethnic diversity, and is a phenomenon that has increasingly gained attention over the last few decades, be it from politicians and institutional actors, or from social scientists. Many recent reports have revealed a general perception of discrimination among Muslims across various countries in Europe and North America (2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 24). Switzerland is no exception, since hostility toward Muslims was among the most frequently reported “racist incidents” in 2017 (Sutter, Brogini, and Wiecken 2018).

Actual discrimination against Muslims has been shown to exist in various life domains, such as labour markets (Adida, Laitin, and Vafort 2010; Widner

**CONTACT** Anaïd Lindemann  [anaid.lindemann@unil.ch](mailto:anaid.lindemann@unil.ch), [linkedin.com/in/anaid-lindemann-406b2654](https://www.linkedin.com/in/anaid-lindemann-406b2654)  
 @AnaïdLindemann

© 2020 Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

and Chicoine 2011; Connor and Koenig 2015; Weichselbaumer 2016; Valfort 2017; Lindemann and Stolz 2018), prisons (Marcus 2009), and in everyday life situations such as having the courtesy to send back a lost letter (Helly 2004; Ahmed 2010). There is now a large body of sociological literature that tries to account for such discriminatory behaviour at both an individual and a structural level (for an overview, see (Helbling 2012, 99–161).

A different question is how Muslims *perceive* discrimination in Western societies. Studies on perceived discrimination are just as necessary as those on actual discrimination, since perceived discrimination has important effects both on society and on the perceiving individuals – for example, on their self-esteem (Bourguignon et al. 2006; Ghaffari and Çiftçi 2010) and health (for a literature review, see (Williams, Neighbors, and Jackson 2008).

The handful of quantitative studies that describe the different domains and correlates of perceived discrimination among Muslims (Zainiddinov 2016; Yazdiha 2019) do not compare perceived discrimination among Muslims with perceived discrimination among other religious groups, which leaves unclear whether other social or religious groups would have reported similar or even higher levels of perceived discrimination in similar life domains. We therefore investigate our question by comparing perceived discrimination among Muslims to perceived discrimination among other religious groups.

Previous research has shown that perceived discrimination may be influenced by cumulative socio-structural disadvantages (Olson, Herman, and Zanna 1986; Moore 1990; Alanya et al. 2015, 195) and by ingroup identification (Crocker, Major, and Steele 1998). We apply these theories to the case of Muslims in Switzerland.

Our key questions are: (1) What is the extent, and what are the life domains and attributes, of perceived discrimination among Muslims compared to other groups in Switzerland? (2) What important correlates does perceived discrimination among Muslims have compared to other religious groups? More specifically, to what extent is perceived discrimination correlated with socio-structural disadvantages and religious/ethnic ingroup identification?

It is important to note that our analysis is not causal, but only descriptive. We aim to describe relationships between variables, but, because of limitations to our data, we cannot claim that one variable has causally influenced another. Nevertheless, we believe that providing a sociological description of correlates of perceived discrimination is a valid enterprise, since doing so may, for example, establish the explanandum for future work.

## Background

In what follows, we first define perceived discrimination and discuss its links to attribution theory. We then present the state of the art concerning perceived

discrimination among Muslims. Finally, we establish a theoretical framework to explain the link between perceived discrimination and socio-structural disadvantages and ingroup identification, with a testable hypothesis being deduced each time.

### ***Defining perceived discrimination***

We define perceived discrimination as a person's subjective and self-assessed experience of obstacles when it comes to accessing any aspect of social life, with these obstacles being attributed by the person to the discriminatory actions or structures in the social environment – regardless of whether this attribution is factually correct or not (compare to Schmitt and Branscombe 2002). Discriminatory actions can be defined as actions that create distinctions based on individual or group characteristics, correctly or wrongly attributed, resulting in any form of exclusion of the targeted individual or group of individuals.

Our concept of perceived discrimination is influenced by attribution theory that discusses how individuals give causal explanation to events, and more specifically to the behaviour of other individuals by attributing understandable causes to them. Crocker, Major, and Steele (1998) applied these principles to stigmatization. In fact, people may attribute negative outcomes or situations either to discrimination (which is what we mean by *perceived* discrimination) or to personal faults.

Discrimination can take place in different *life domains* and can be seen as the result of different *attributes*. In our study, we will distinguish four of them: the workplace, state institutions, the healthcare system, and culture. Furthermore, a person may experience discrimination on the basis of different attributes, and we distinguish four different such attributes: religious affiliation, name or accent,<sup>1</sup> physical appearance or skin colour, and ethnic, cultural or national origins.

Note that, unlike Gianni et al., who specifically asked different questions to gauge personal experiences on the one hand, and a general feeling of discrimination against the group on the other (Gianni, Giugni, and Michel 2015), we understand perceived discrimination here not as the perception of group discrimination in general, but as an *individual* experience.

### ***Perceived discrimination among Muslims***

Several reports point out a high degree of perceived discrimination among Muslims in Europe. The Runnymede Trust, a UK think tank, published a report that addresses the inequalities faced by Muslims in the UK (2017a). Similarly, a CNCDH publication reported that Muslims remain among the most rejected minorities in France (2017b), while the Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey has shown that four out of ten

Muslims in the EU felt that they had been discriminated against in the previous four years (2017c, 24). Finally, in Switzerland, the study by Gianni et al. revealed that non-Swiss Muslims report high levels of individual and group discrimination, irrespective of their ethnic origins (Gianni, Giugni, and Michel 2015).

One possible reason that scholars give for the comparatively high level of perceived discrimination is the fact that Muslims are currently the most negatively viewed religious group in Europe. The findings of the Pew Global Attitude Project revealed highly negative attitudes towards Muslims in five European countries (2008). In Switzerland, Muslims are the most negatively viewed group along with Blacks (2019). Finally, a recent study in Switzerland on how the media report on Muslims has highlighted that the media treatment of related issues is negative and distant (Ettinger 2018). Such negative sentiments towards Muslims have usually been attributed to international events (Ettinger 2008; Allen 2010) and to more general xenophobic attitudes (Helbling 2012). We deduce from this state of the art the following hypothesis:

H1: Muslims will perceive more discrimination than any other religious group.

Since previous studies on perceived discrimination among Muslims have not yet identified the different life domains and attributes particularly subject to discrimination, we do not formulate any specific hypotheses with respect to domains and attributes.

### ***Cumulative socio-structural disadvantages***

A number of studies have shown that individuals subjected to socio-structural disadvantages are more likely to perceive themselves as being the objects of discrimination (Olson, Herman, and Zanna 1986; Moore 1990). We define socio-structural disadvantages here in a broad way, seeing them as positions with less power in different social areas such as gender relations (being female), the educational and professional system (being unemployed, being less educated), citizenship (not having citizenship, being a recent immigrant), everyday resources (having language difficulties), and health (being in poor health) (compare to Bakouri and Staerklé 2015).

Several possible mechanisms link structural disadvantages to perceived discrimination. First, attribution theory would argue that discrimination can be correctly attributed to disadvantages, but that it can also be both overestimated and underestimated (Crosby 1984, 377; Crocker, Major, and Steele 1998, 517). Second, Goffman's self-fulfilling prophecy theory would argue that disadvantaged individuals could fear discrimination and therefore act in a defiant way, which in turn triggers negative or discriminatory reactions from their surroundings (Goffman 1963). While these mechanisms may well sometimes be at work, we assume instead that individuals in structurally

disadvantaged positions are actually more likely to face discrimination (Olson, Herman, and Zanna 1986; Moore 1990; Alanya et al. 2015, 195), which leads to a higher rate of perception of such discrimination. We also suspect that individuals who cumulate disadvantaged positions (for example, being a foreign female Muslim) will perceive more discrimination than others.<sup>2</sup>

Of course, as the literature review reveals, being a Muslim in Western Europe is itself a socio-structurally disadvantaged position. What we are interested in here, though, is whether Muslims with additional socio-structural disadvantages feel more discriminated against than Muslims with fewer or no such additional disadvantages. We cannot rely on the state of the art to form clear expectations here as to whether the influence of socio-structural disadvantages on perceived discrimination is similar or different for Muslims and other groups. We nonetheless speculate that the effect will be similar, and deduce from this the following hypothesis:

H2: Muslims who have and cumulate structural disadvantages are more likely to feel discriminated against than Muslims with fewer or no socio-structural disadvantages. The influence of socio-structural disadvantages is similar for both Muslims and other religious groups.

### ***Ingroup identification***

A number of studies have shown that ingroup identification may be associated with perceived discrimination (Tajfel and Turner 1986; Crocker, Major, and Steele 1998). We define ingroup identification as how, and how far, individuals categorize themselves through group belonging (compare to (Gaertner et al. 1993). In this study, we will focus on ethno-religious identification – namely, on people's identification with an ethno-religious group. The latter is understood as an ethnic group whose members “entertain a subjective belief in their common descent” because there are similarities of customs, language, physical traits or history (Weber 1978, 389) and that shares a common religious background.

Different mechanisms may lead to such an association between ethno-religious identification and perceived discrimination. First, individuals who identify more strongly with their own ethno-religious group may be more visible and thus more likely to be singled out for discrimination (Crocker, Major, and Steele 1998). One obvious example is the effect of wearing a religious symbol, which may then trigger discrimination (Berger and Berger 2019). In this sense,

[s]alience of the stigmatized group identity, and the degree to which stigmatized individuals are highly identified with their group, are also likely to affect the extent to which these individuals perceive themselves as targets of discrimination based on their group membership. (Crocker, Major, and Steele 1998, 523)

Second, the relationship can work the other way around: namely, perceived discrimination may increase ingroup identification (Tajfel and Turner 1986). Research has documented how, when faced with perceived threats such as

social exclusion, individuals accentuate group identification and solidarity (Holtz, Dahinden, and Wagner 2013). This phenomenon, framed in the rejection-identification hypothesis, has been called “reactive ethnicity” (Branscombe, Schmitt, and Harvey 1999; Portes and Rumbaut 2001, 148) and “reactive religiosity” (Peek 2005; Haddad 2007; Connor 2014).

Third, there may be combinations of the mechanisms mentioned. For example, actual discrimination may lead to a stronger identification with the ingroup, which in turn increases visibility and triggers new discrimination, etc. (Operario and Fiske 2001, 555).

We can formulate from these theoretical propositions the following expectations:

H3: Muslims who have a higher level of ethno-religious ingroup identification and/or are active in ethno-religious associations are more likely to feel discriminated against.

Again, it will be interesting to analyze how (and whether) the effects of these correlates on Muslims differ to their effects on other religious groups.

## Methodology

### *Data and analytical strategy*

We use the dataset provided by the 2014 Language, Religion and Culture Survey (ELRC). The data were collected by the Federal Statistical Office (FSO), which used telephone interviews and then self-reported written questionnaires in all cantons of Switzerland. The survey comprised a sample of 16,487 permanent residents aged 15 and above. The response rate was 46.6%. We excluded from our study people who had not answered the question in the survey on their religious affiliation, and also people who had not answered the paper-based questionnaire. We used weights provided by the FSO to calibrate socio-demographic variables. We also used straightforward multiple OLS regressions.

Our sub-sample has  $N = 12,241$  (Muslims,  $n = 546$ ; majority Christians,  $n = 8,359$ ; minority Christians,  $n = 357$ ; nones,  $n = 2,979$ ). We used multiple imputation (MI) (Schlomer, Bauman, and Card 2010), and imputed between 0% and 1.5% of missing data for different independent variables. We did not impute values to our dependent variables, resulting in the loss of only 6.5% of the data. We made systematic use of the pooled dataset.

## Measures

### *Perceived discrimination*

Our dependent variable is perceived discrimination. Respondents were asked in the written questionnaire whether they had personally perceived in the past year obstacles in four life domains (work; state institutions;

healthcare system; culture)<sup>3</sup> based on four attributes (religious affiliation; name or accent; physical appearance or skin colour; ethnic, cultural or national origins). The respondents could choose between four modalities: very significant obstacle; quite significant obstacle; relatively insignificant obstacle; not an obstacle. This results in 45 possible combinations. We added up the items to create an index of ethno-religious perceived discrimination. The index ranges from 1 to 4 and has a high level of reliability ( $\alpha = 0.932$ ). We refer to this index in the following with the shorthand “perceived discrimination”.

### **Religious belonging**

Our independent variables are grouped together in a religion variable and three different sets of predictors. Religious belonging is captured by a four-step variable that distinguishes self-identified Muslims, majority Christians (Protestants and Roman Catholics), minority Christians, and nones. It makes sense to have the second category, since the two denominations are publicly recognized (to varying degrees) in all cantons, and together account for the majority of the population.<sup>4</sup>

### **Cumulated disadvantages**

*Cumulated disadvantages* can be conceptualized as the accumulation of underprivileged socio-structural positions. For us, being a Muslim, being unemployed, having only a basic level of schooling, having poor or very poor health, belonging to the first generation of migrants, being foreign, being non-European, having language difficulties, and being female are all disadvantaged positions.

Professional insertion is a three-step variable distinguishing employed, unemployed, and not on the labour market. This variable is captured by two dummies (reference: employed).

Education is measured with a five-step variable with the options basic level of schooling, vocational secondary education (apprenticeship), general secondary education (high school), higher professional training, and university. We created a dichotomous variable distinguishing between having a basic level of schooling and having a higher level of schooling.

Self-assessed health is measured with a five-step self-rating scale ranging from very poor to very good.

The following variables capture migratory background and gender: generation (first generation as having arrived after the age of 11; second generation as having arrived before the age of 12; no migratory background); naturalization (naturalized, foreign, Swiss-born); origins (European vs. non-European); language difficulties (no difficulty, at least some difficulty noticed by the telephone interviewer); gender (male, female).



### ***Ingroup identification***

Ingroup identification is operationalized through religious identification, ethnic identification, and voluntary activity in an association. For the first two, we ran an Exploratory Factor Analysis with oblimin rotation (Costello and Osborne 2005) on seven items. The pattern matrix clearly showed one factor capturing ethnic identity and one factor capturing religious identity. We then collapsed them into the following indexes.

Religious identification is captured by an additive index (1 to 4) including four items: “My religion characterizes me” (four-step), “Frequency of prayer” (seven-step), “Frequency of attending a religious service” (seven-step), and “I consider myself religious” (four-step). This index has a level of reliability of  $\alpha = 0.793$ .

Ethnic identification is measured by an additive index (1 to 4) made up of three items: “My origins characterize me” (four-step), “My language characterizes me” (four-step), “My nationality characterizes me” (four-step). This index has an alpha of 0.762.

Voluntary activity in an association is captured by two variables: a dummy variable that is coded 1 for when an individual is active in at least one association, and 0 for when an individual is not active in any association; a more detailed (three-step) variable captures the type of association, and distinguishes ethno-religious associations, other types of associations, and no activity.<sup>5</sup>

We tested whether activity in certain types of associations was another dimension of ethnic and/or religious identification. The factor analysis revealed that this was not in fact the case, as three different factors emerged, with each capturing voluntary activity (all types of associations included), ethnic identification, and religious identification separately.

## **Results**

### ***Descriptive information***

Table 1 gives some descriptive information on our dependent variable and predictors. We first highlight four important points of our predictors; this will inform our later analyses.

First, Muslims differ from the other religious groups in terms of sociodemographic features. They are more likely to be male and young. This is explained by recent migratory processes: Muslims are majoritarily (94.7%) first- or second-generation individuals.

Second, Muslims are sociodemographically disadvantaged in that they comprise a comparatively high percentage of individuals who have only had a basic level of schooling, who are unemployed, and who are in poor or very poor health. Indeed, Muslims on the labour market are more likely to be unemployed than any other group.

**Table 1.** Descriptives of independent variable.

	Muslims	Majority Christians	Minority Christians	Nones	$\chi^2$
<i>N</i> = 12,241	<i>n</i> = 546	<i>n</i> = 8359	<i>n</i> = 357	<i>n</i> = 2979	
Perceived discrimination (index from 1 to 4)	1.51 <sup>a</sup>	1.09	1.12	1.07	
Perceived ethno-religious discrimination in at least one of four life domains	39.7%	7.7%	14.2%	10.1%	***
Female	42.0%	51.7%	49.9%	47.4%	***
Age	35*	49*	44	43	
Working	73.8%	67.6%	72.5%	76.7%	***
Basic level of schooling	32.2%	14.0%	15.4%	9.6%	***
Unemployed	9.3%	2.0%	3.1%	2.3%	***
Poor or very poor health	5.1%	3.2%	2.0%	3.0%	***
Swiss-born	4.9%	71.2%	66.2%	62.5%	***
Naturalized	32.7%	9.5%	14.1%	11.8%	***
Foreign	62.4%	19.3%	19.7%	25.7%	***
Of European descent	77.1%	97.0%	92.1%	96.0%	***
No migratory background	5.3%	72.5%	67.0%	63.7%	***
First generation (arrived after the age of 11)	62.2%	19.9%	23.2%	27.2%	***
Second generation (arrived before the age of 12)	32.5%	7.6%	9.8%	9.1%	***
Minor or significant language difficulties	34.5%	5.6%	9.8%	5.9%	***
At least one voluntary activity	59.3%	64.2%	81.9%	55.6%	***
Ethnic identity (index from 1 to 4)	3.35*	2.98*	2.85*	2.66*	***
• Self-characterized by origins	85.7%	69.8%	63.6%	55.0%	***
• Self-characterized by nationality	82.8%	69.5%	62.6%	48.3%	***
• Self-characterized by language	88.0%	78.8%	74.7%	69.6%	***
Religious identity (index from 1 to 4)	2.39*	2.22*	3.06*	1.42*	***
• Self-characterized by religion	73.4%	44.0%	82.1%	17.6%	***
• Self-defined as religious	62.4%	47.9%	75.5%	6.3%	***
• Prays at least once a month	46.4%	54.1%	84.5%	14.7%	***
• Attends a religious service at least once a month	19.8%	24.4%	75.7%	2.1%	***

<sup>a</sup>Averages with a non-overlapping c.i. (cultural identity?) are marked with a (\*). For proportions, all Pearson  $\chi^2$  are  $p < 0.001$ .

Third, Muslims are disadvantaged with regard to immigration. Over 60% do not have Swiss citizenship, a high percentage that is explained by the fact that the nationality law in Switzerland is based on *jus sanguinis*. The majority of Muslims belong to the first generation of immigrants. More than a third have minor or significant language difficulties (four to seven times more than the other groups), which is also explained by migratory factors.

Fourth, in terms of ethnic and religious identification, Muslims are highest when it comes to ethnic identification, while minority Christians are highest when it comes to religious identification. However, this does not tell us anything about *how* they actually differ, which is the reason that we broke the indexes down into their different components.

Muslims are more likely than the three other groups to identify with their ethnic origins, which can be explained by their stronger migratory background and the identification processes presented in the theoretical framework. However, minority Christians are more likely to characterize

themselves according to their religion, pray and attend religious services more often, and are more likely to define themselves as religious. In fact, most minority Christians are Evangelicals, who are known for their strong religiosity.

Finally, Muslims are less active in associations than Christians, with minority Christians being the most active. We ran more detailed analyses of the types of voluntary activity, which showed that Muslims are usually active in ethnic/national associations, while minority Christians are more active in religious associations. However, religious and ethnic associations may overlap for Muslims, as mosques or “Islamic centers” are often formed according to national or ethnic attributes.

### ***The extent of perceived discrimination among Muslims***

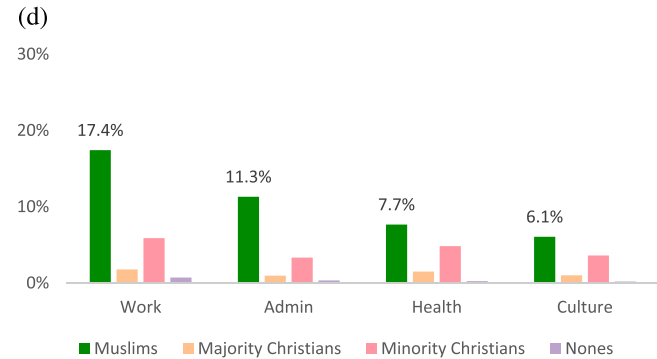
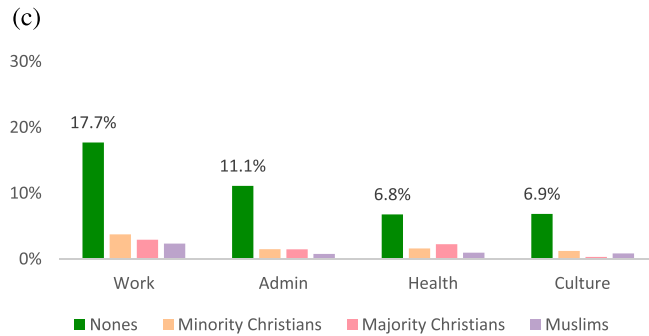
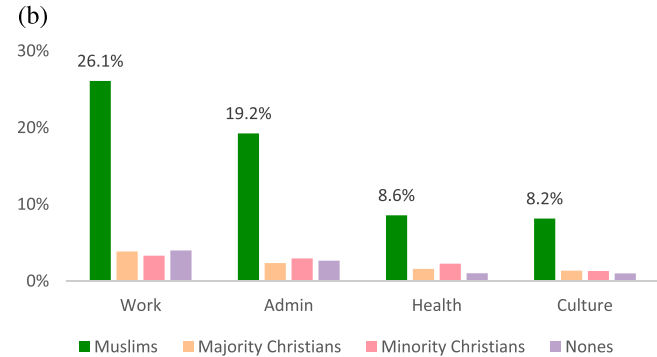
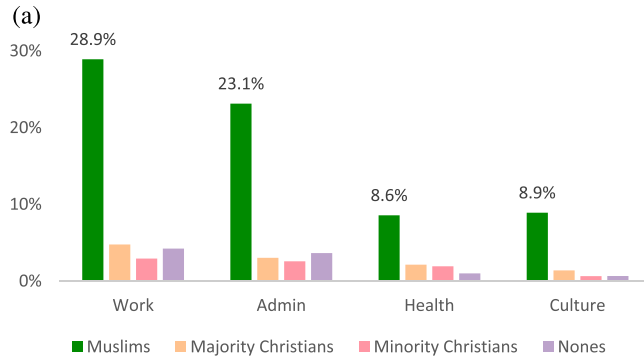
Our first hypothesis stated that Muslims would be the group with the highest level of perceived discrimination. As [Table 1](#) shows, this hypothesis can be verified. Almost 40% of Muslims report having experienced some kind of ethno-religious discrimination (in one or other of the four life domains), as opposed to 7.7%, 14.2%, and 10.1% for majority Christians, minority Christians, and nones respectively. Muslims are therefore between 2.8 and five times more likely to report discrimination than the other groups.

This finding remains highly significant when we control for other variables, and it confirms the Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey (2017c), which had the same proportion of Muslims reporting experiences of discrimination in the EU. The second group who perceive discrimination are Christians from minority denominations, but they do so to a much lesser extent than Muslims (Muslims are more than twice as likely to report discrimination than minority Christians).

### ***Life domains and attributes of perceived discrimination***

A number of observations can be made concerning the life domains and the grounds of perceived discrimination among Muslims as compared to other groups ([Figure 1](#)). For one thing, the higher level of perception of discrimination among Muslims is general: it occurs regardless of life domain (work, state institutions, healthcare system, or culture) and attribute (religious affiliation, name or accent, physical appearance or skin colour, or origins).

The patterns of discrimination vary among the groups, but especially in terms of “Muslim/non-Muslim”, as the group of minority Christians do not feel more discriminated against than the other groups. In this sense, we can say that perceived discrimination is not a function of religious-minority status, but is particularly strong among Muslims.



**Figure 1.** Proportions of individuals who perceived discrimination, by attributes and life domains among all groups (C.I. do not overlap) (a) Perceived discrimination based on **name / accent**; (b) Perceived discrimination based on **origins**; (c) Perceived discrimination based on **physical appearance / skin colour**; (d) Perceived discrimination based on **religion**.

For another, there seems to be a relatively stable hierarchy of perceived discrimination in different life domains. Individuals perceive most discrimination in the domain of work, followed by state institutions, the healthcare system, and culture. However, this hierarchy is more pronounced among Muslims.

The labour market appears invariably to be the area that is most subject to perceived discrimination among Muslims, which may partly be explained by the high percentage of Muslims on the labour market who face unemployment (Lindemann and Stolz 2018). Another hypothesis is that they may face discrimination not only in obtaining a job, but also while they are employed. This could take multiple forms (which we cannot verify with our data), such as proscribing the wearing of the hijab for women, refusing to allow time for prayers or adapting the work schedule accordingly, verbal intimidation, and racist jokes in the workplace.

Second most frequently evoked by Muslims as the life domain in which they perceive discrimination is that of state institutions, which may be due in part to the fact that almost two thirds of the Muslim population have a migratory background, resulting in administrative difficulties in different aspects of life. We tested for this relationship and found that Muslims with language difficulties and first-generation women report significantly more discrimination in administrative procedures.

Finally, we find an interesting and Muslim-specific hierarchy of attributes. In fact, Muslims do not mention religion as the first ground. Rather, they more often mention their name or accent, followed closely by ethnic, national, or cultural origin, and only in third place (and practically *ex aequo*) religion and physical appearance or skin colour. While it is often said that being a Muslim is currently the most “othering” marker, our findings show that Muslims often perceive that they are discriminated against due to other attributes.

The reason for this may be either that being a Muslim is actually not the strongest marker, or that religion is often simply not visible in everyday life situations, whereas name, accent, or non-autochthonous ethnicity are somewhat more visible. Furthermore, we need to temper this finding in the light of how difficult it actually is for people to rank or distinguish the attributes involved in an experience of discrimination. Although respondents mention religion less often than name or origins as possible reasons for discrimination, it is certainly difficult for people to disentangle these attributes, a difficulty that the quantitative data can obviously not reveal.

### ***Cumulated socio-structural disadvantages***

Our multiple regressions test our hypotheses concerning the correlates of perceived discrimination. We systematically compare the adjusted  $R^2$  to assess

the contribution of each block of indicators. We also run a comparison with the other groups in order to reveal specificities or regularities among Muslims.

Hypothesis 2 states that cumulated socio-structural disadvantages will lead to a higher level of perceived discrimination. Since the minority status of being a Muslim can itself be seen as a disadvantaged position, low SES or unemployment can create an accumulation of disadvantages. The main effects of, and interactions between, SES and migration can therefore be seen as capturing cumulated disadvantages.

In model 1, we enter gender and SES variables. We find that, in contrast to the other groups, SES and gender do not account for perceived discrimination among Muslims, which therefore contradicts our second hypothesis for Muslims: gender and SES explain less than 1% of the variance, and neither is significant. In other words, whatever their gender, employment situation, level of education, or health, Muslims have the same average level of perceived discrimination. On the other hand, these factors are important to explain perceived discrimination among Christians and nones (they account for between 2.73% and 7.71% of the variance).

Interestingly, women of all groups are actually less likely to report perceived discrimination than men, which could be due to the fact that we measure ethno-religious perceived discrimination and not gender-based discrimination (Table 2).

Model 2 adds migration variables. For Muslims, perceived discrimination only increases with regard to the first generation. Surprisingly, none of the usual disadvantageous characteristics (being foreign, being of non-European descent, having language difficulties) impact on their perception of discrimination, a finding that largely contradicts our third hypothesis. Similar comments can be made for minority Christians, for whom only language difficulties worsen perceived discrimination. For majority Christians and nones, however, being European diminishes perceived discrimination, and the usual disadvantageous characteristics do worsen perceived discrimination. These factors account for twice the explained variance among majority Christians and nones than among the other groups.

Model 3 includes interaction terms between gender and other disadvantageous characteristics to test our second hypothesis (cumulative disadvantages) further. The interaction terms are either not significant, or significant but in the opposite direction to the hypothesis (unemployed Muslim women feel a little less discriminated against than other Muslims). The interactions raise explained variance only slightly among all models.

To recap the main results concerning socio-structural disadvantages: for Muslims, the cumulation of being a Muslim with low SES or with usually disadvantageous migratory characteristics do not worsen perceived discrimination. In short, Muslims feel equally discriminated against no matter what their socio-structural position.

**Table 2.** Predictive models of perceived ethno-religious discrimination: Standardized Regression Coefficients among groups ( $N = 12,241$ ).

Predictors	Muslims ( $n = 546$ )					Majority Christians ( $n = 8,359$ )				
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5
<i>Gender</i>										
Female	-0.181	-0.108	-0.130	-0.142	-0.104	-0.042***	-0.030**	-0.042***	-0.043***	-0.050***
<i>SES</i>										
Unemployed (ref: employed)	0.068		0.061		0.074	0.056***		0.034**		0.039***
Not on job market (ref: employed)	0.108		0.073		0.09	0.004		0.020		0.012
Only completed compulsory school	-0.013		-0.061		-0.124	0.163***		0.117***		0.121***
Health	-0.183		-0.170		-0.226*	-0.121***		-0.106***		-0.109***
<i>Migration</i>										
European		3.586 <sup>E-5</sup>	0.003		0.01		-0.114***	-0.126***		-0.113***
Foreign (ref: Swiss born)		-0.152	-0.126		-0.12		0.038	0.037		0.030
Naturalized (ref: Swiss born)		-0.295	-0.285		-0.225		-0.041*	-0.033		-0.032
1st generation (ref: no migr.)		0.444*	0.435*		0.527**		0.135***	0.103***		0.117***
2nd generation (ref: no migr.)		0.022	0.009		0.057		0.067***	0.052**		0.059**
Linguistic difficulties		-0.101	-0.134*		-0.130*		0.095***	0.067***		0.070***
<i>Ingroup identification</i>										
Assoc. volunteering				0.457***	0.486***				-0.013	0.036**
Ethnic identity				0.222*	0.271*				0.095***	0.075***
Religious identity				0.331**	0.291**				0.075***	0.028*
<i>Interactions</i>										
Female – unemployed			-0.126*		-0.129**			-0.010		-0.009
Female – low education			0.022		0.001			-0.017		-0.024*
Female – 1st generation			0.156		0.09			-0.002		-0.013
Female – linguistic difficulties			-0.076		-0.061			0.017		0.008
Constant	1.084***	0.995***	1.034*	0.967***	0.608	-0.009	-0.009***	-0.009	-0.036**	-0.011
Adjusted $R^2$	0.58%	3.09%	4.63%	8.90%	14.11%	4.73%	6.87%	9.77%	1.77%	10.57%

Predictors	Minority Christians ( <i>n</i> = 357)					Nones ( <i>N</i> = 2,979)				
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5
<i>Gender</i>										
Female	−0.064	−0.106*	−0.084	−0.083	−0.089	−0.027*	−0.034**	−0.039**	−0.034**	−0.045***
<i>SES</i>										
Unemployed (ref: employed)	0.076		−0.012		−0.011	0.033**		0.025*		0.023
Not on job market (ref: employed)	−0.017		−0.080		−0.089	0.022		0.028		0.028
Only completed compulsory school	0.216***		0.194***		0.188***	0.083***		0.074***		0.073***
Health	−0.159*		−0.168**		−0.172**	−0.057***		−0.063***		−0.068***
<i>Migration</i>										
European		−0.084	−0.086		−0.08		−0.010	−0.008		−0.007
Foreign (ref: Swiss born)		0.059	−0.113		−0.125		−0.076**	−0.071**		−0.065*
Naturalized (ref: Swiss born)		−0.036	−0.095		−0.107		−0.032	−0.029		−0.026
1st generation (ref: no migr.)		0.122	0.151		0.155		0.179***	0.180***		0.178***
2nd generation (ref: no migr.)		0.015	0.060		0.07		0.094***	0.090***		0.089***
Linguistic diffc.		0.104*	0.207***		0.219***		0.085***	0.074***		0.070***
<i>Identification</i>										
Assoc. volunteering				−0.076	−0.042				0.012	0.029*
Ethnic identity				0.067	0.064				0.049***	0.041**
Religious identity				0.072	0.027				0.041*	0.045*
<i>Interactions</i>										
Female – unemployed			−0.008		−0.014			−0.005		−0.006
Female – low education			−0.107*		−0.103*			−0.044**		−0.044*
Female – 1st generation			0.005		0.006			−0.020		−0.022
Female – linguistic difficulties			−0.248***		−0.243***			−0.023		−0.021
Constant	0.044	0.000	0.033	−0.018	0.017	−0.080***	−0.125***	−0.101***	−0.052*	−0.047*
Adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	7.71%	9.04%	20.20%	1.28%	19.90%	2.73%	6.78%	9.36%	1.23%	10.07%

Note: All models control for gender, marital status, and age.

\**p* < 0.05, \*\**p* < 0.01, \*\*\**p* < 0.001.



### **Ingroup identification**

Our third hypothesis stated that the higher the level of ethnic and religious identity, the more individuals will perceive discrimination.

Model 4 adds the identification factors. This model shows one of the most interesting findings of our study: namely, that perceived discrimination among Muslims is strongly determined by dimensions of identification, which is not the case for non-Muslims. Muslims who have a high level of ethnic/religious identity and who are voluntarily active in associations are more likely to feel discriminated against. Ethnic and religious identities, coupled with voluntary activities in associations, account for almost 9% of our dependent variable for Muslims, but less than 2% for the other groups.

Even though ethnic and religious identification have significant coefficients for nones and majority Christians, their effect sizes are four to eight times smaller than they are for Muslims.

Interestingly, religious identification has no effect among minority Christians, although it is especially high among Muslims. This seems to challenge a relatively new theory, which sees discrimination against Muslims as an expression of a generalized anti-religiosity and not of “Islamophobia” (Berger and Berger 2019). If this were the case, though, then we could expect highly religious Christians also to perceive discrimination.

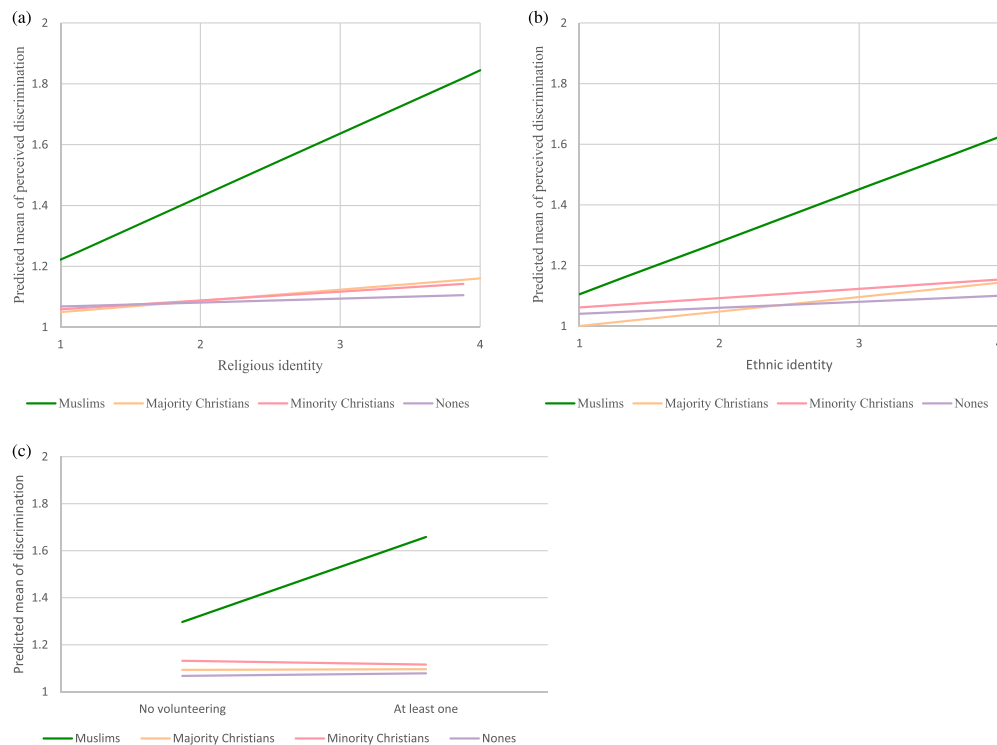
These correlations are particularly striking in Figure 2, which show the predicted mean of perceived discrimination for the different groups according to religious and ethnic identification. As we can see, the more a Muslim identifies with an ethnic group or religion, or becomes involved in an association, the more he or she perceives discrimination. This correlation barely exists for the other groups. The actual direction in which the correlation runs is open to debate.

We also tested the different types of associations (ethno-religious vs. other types) in *ad hoc* regression models, and controlled for gender, age and marital status. We highlight two main findings.

First, and very clearly, Muslims who are active in an ethno-religious association feel more discriminated against than those who are active in other types of associations. This result is highly significant ( $p > 0.001$ ), and the effect size of the coefficient is important ( $\beta = 0.280$ ). Second, this is particular to Muslims, since ethno-religious associations are either not significant or the effect sizes are small ( $\beta < 0.080$ ) among the three other groups.

To conclude, model 5 enters all the blocks of indicators and interaction terms. As we can see in these complete models, the significant coefficients observed in the separate models stay significant. We can therefore reasonably consider our results to be robust.

To sum up the main results for our ingroup identification hypotheses, we can argue that perceived discrimination among Muslims is strongly



**Figure 2.** Proportions of individuals who perceived discrimination, by attributes and life domains among all groups (C.I. do not overlap) (a) Predicted mean for discrimination according to **religious identity**; (b) Predicted mean for discrimination according to **ethnic identity**; (c) Predicted mean of perceived discrimination according to **voluntary activity**.

determined by ethno-religious identification. The more Muslims identify with their ethnicity or religion, and the more they are active in associations linked to these identities, the more they feel discriminated against. As already noted, our findings do not permit us to tease out the causality, however.

## Conclusion

Muslims perceive greater discrimination than most other groups. This fact is now well-documented by studies and reports across the world (2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 24). What the present study adds is an investigation of the life domains and correlates of this perceived discrimination among Muslims in comparison to other groups.

Our analyses have yielded three main findings. First, Muslims perceive considerably more discrimination than majority Christians, minority Christians, and nones. They are between 2.7 and five times more likely to perceive discrimination, and almost 40% say that they have experienced some kind of ethno-religious discrimination in the past year. This higher level of perceived discrimination is present in all life domains and all attributes.

Second, the analysis of the link between socio-structural disadvantages and perceived discrimination among Muslims produces surprising findings: in contrast to the majority groups, gender, unemployment, and education have no significant effect among Muslims, while health only has an effect when controlling for other variables (models 4 and 5). There is no significant effect of being foreign and not naturalized, but there is a clear effect of being of the first generation. The cumulation of disadvantages does not lead to a higher level of perceived discrimination, and sometimes the opposite is in fact the case. Overall, the effect of cumulated disadvantages is different for Muslims compared to the other groups – namely, it is null for Muslims and strong for the others.

A possible interpretation of this finding may be found in the notion of “master status” (Becker 1963, cop. 1973; Backman 1981), which argues that being a Muslim can be seen as a master status, i.e. a social identity that in the eyes of society becomes the unique definition of an individual, as this identity “tends to overpower, in most crucial situations, any other characteristics which might run counter to it” (Hughes 1945). Thus, regardless of their educational level, their Swiss citizenship, their language abilities, and their European background, Muslims still experience a high level of discrimination. This finding also correlates with studies that have shown a clear dissociation between socio-economic attainments and perceived discrimination among minority members, be they second-generation Muslims (Alanya et al. 2015) or Blacks (Feagin and Sikes 1994).

Third, we find relatively strong and highly significant correlations between ingroup identification and perceived discrimination, with Muslims who

identify more closely with their religion and with their ethnicity perceiving significantly more discrimination. This finding could be explained either by the theory of “reactive ethnicity” (namely, that Muslims who perceive a threat to their social inclusion or identity will intensify ingroup solidarity), or by the fact that individuals with a high level of identification are simply more visible. The nature of our data does not permit us to discern the direction of causality here. Furthermore, Muslims who are voluntarily active in ethno-religious associations feel more discriminated against, which again could be explained by several mechanisms, where it is difficult to discern the direction of causality.

First, researchers have suggested that joining associations or collective actions represent coping strategies in the face of social exclusion (Outten 2012; Holtz, Dahinden, and Wagner 2013). Thus, Muslims who are more aware of discrimination may be more likely to join ethno-religious groups in order to find solidarity and support. This may be called a mechanism of self-selection. Second, Muslims who are active in associations may become more visible and hence more exposed to discrimination. Third, discrimination may be an issue that is often discussed in associations, be it through informal discussions among pairs or through formal workshops, roundtables, and focus groups. If this is the case, then Muslims might be more aware of discrimination and hence perceive discrimination more often. Such mechanisms may indeed exist, but the hypotheses would need further empirical testing.

One limitation of our contribution is that we are not able to disentangle the causal relationships at work. Due to the cross-sectional and observational nature of our data, we cannot identify the precise factors that have caused the phenomena that we have established. We welcome future research with possibly longitudinal research designs or qualitative investigations that would help push this research agenda forward.

## Notes

1. We concede that combining these two characteristics is unfortunate, but the questions asked in the ELRC questionnaire merged them and it is no longer possible to disentangle them.
2. How we framed this research made it difficult to integrate and test intersectionality theories, although the question of “being a foreign female Muslim”, for example, could be treated in the light of intersectional assumptions. For an in-depth discussion of these methodological and theoretical challenges, see (Bowleg 2008).
3. “For the past 12 months, how far have the characteristics listed below been an obstacle in the context of ... your work or potential job search? ... contacts with health staff (doctors, nurses, assistant nurses, etc.)? ... administrative tasks conducted face-to-face or by phone? ... your access to culture? Think about going to exhibitions, to festivals, the theatre or concerts, watching cultural

programmes or movies on TV, reading a book, accessing cultural sites on the Internet, going to the movies or to a nightclub to listen to a DJ" (our translation)."

4. Source: <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/fr/home/statistiques/population/langues-religions/religions.html> (accessed 27 August 2019).
5. The original variable distinguished seven types of associations: origin-based, religious, cultural, social/charitable, political, sporting, and others. We collapsed the first three into one, since religious and origin-based associations frequently overlap for Muslims (mosques and "Islamic centers" are often based on national or ethnic attributes).

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## ORCID

Anaïd Lindemann  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2200-1528>

Jörg Stolz  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3849-7812>

## References

2008. "Unfavorable Views of Jews and Muslims on the increase in Europe." In *The Pew Global Attitudes Project*. Washington: Pew Research Center.
- 2017a. *Islamophobia. Still a Challenge for Us All*. Edited by Farah Elahi and Omar Khan. London: Runnymede.
- 2017b. *Rapport sur la lutte contre le racisme, l'antisémitisme et la xénophobie*. Paris: Commission Nationale Consultative des Droits de l'Homme CNCDH.
- 2017c. "Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey. Muslims – Selected findings." In *EU-MIDIS II*. Luxembourg: European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights.
2019. "Survey on Diversity and Coexistence in Switzerland (VeS): Results 2018." In *01 Population*. Neuchâtel: Office fédéral de la statistique.
- Adida, Claire L., David D. Laitin, and Marie-Anne Vafort. 2010. "Identifying Barriers to Muslim Integration in France." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 107 (52): 22384–22390.
- Ahmed, Ali M. 2010. "Muslim Discrimination: Evidence From Two Lost-Letter Experiments." *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 40 (4): 888–898.
- Alanya, Ahu, Marc Swyngedouw, Veronique Vandezande, and Karen Phalet. 2015. "Close Encounters: Minority And Majority Perceptions Of Discrimination and Intergroup Relations in Antwerp, Belgium." *International Migration Review* 51 (1): 191–217.
- Allen, Chris. 2010. *Islamophobia*. London: Routledge.
- Backman, Carl W. 1981. "Attraction in Interpersonal Relationships." In *Social Psychology. Sociological Perspectives*, edited by Morris Rosenberg and Ralph H. Turner, 235–268. New York: Basic Books.
- Bakouri, Mouna, and Christian Staerklé. 2015. "Coping with Structural Disadvantage: Overcoming Negative Effects of Perceived Barriers Through Bonding Identities." *British Journal of Social Psychology* 54: 648–670.
- Becker, Howard S. 1963, cop. 1973. *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*. London: The Free Press.

- Berger, Roger, and Joël Berger. 2019. "Islamophobia or Threat to Secularization? Lost Letter Experiments on the Discrimination Against Muslims in an Urban Area in Switzerland." *Swiss Journal of Sociology* 45 (1): 83–105.
- Bourguignon, David, Eleonore Seron, Vincent Yzerbyt, and Ginette Herman. 2006. "Perceived Group and Personal Discrimination: Differential Effects on Personal Self-esteem." *European Journal of Social Psychology* 36: 773–789.
- Bowleg, Lisa. 2008. "When Black + Lesbian + Woman  $\neq$  Black Lesbian Woman: The Methodological Challenges of Qualitative and Quantitative Intersectionality Research." *Sex Roles* 59 (3): 312–325.
- Branscombe, Nyla R., Michael T. Schmitt, and Richard D. Harvey. 1999. "Perceiving Pervasive Discrimination among African Americans: Implications for Group Identification and Well-being." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 77 (1): 135–149.
- Connor, Phillip. 2014. *Immigrant Faith. Patterns of Immigrant Religion in the United States, Canada, and Western Europe*. New York: New York University Press.
- Connor, Phillip, and Matthias Koenig. 2015. "Explaining the Muslim Employment Gap in Western Europe: Individual-level Effects and Ethno-religious Penalties." *Social Science Research* 49: 191–201.
- Costello, Anna B., and Jason W. Osborne. 2005. "Best Practices in Exploratory Factor Analysis: Four Recommendations for Getting the Most From Your Analysis." *Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation* 10 (7): 1–9.
- Crocker, Jennifer, Brenda Major, and Claude M. Steele. 1998. "Social Stigma." In *Handbook of Social Psychology*. 4th ed., edited by D. Gilbert, S. T. Fiske, and G. Lindzey, 504–553. Boston: McGraw-Hill.
- Crosby, Faye. 1984. "The Denial of Personal Discrimination." *American Behavioral Scientist* 27 (3): 371–386.
- Ettinger, Patrik. 2008. "The Problématisation of Muslims in Public Communication in Switzerland." Etude Qualitative et Quantitative - MCA Conference Representing Islam, Comparative Perspective, Panel 8: Islam in Political Discourse, Zürich.
- Ettinger, Patrik. 2018. *La qualité de la couverture médiatique des musulmans de Suisse*. Bern: CFR.
- Feagin, Joe R., and Melvin P. Sikes. 1994. *Living with Racism: The Black Middle-class Experience*. Boston: Beacon.
- Gaertner, Samuel L., John F. Dovidio, Phyllis A. Anastasio, Betty A. Bachman, and Mary C. Rust. 1993. "The Common Ingroup Identity Model: Recategorization and the Reduction of Intergroup Bias." *European Review of Social Psychology* 4 (1): 1–26.
- Ghaffari, Azadeh, and Ayse Çiftçi. 2010. "Religiosity and Self-esteem of Muslim Immigrants to the United States: The Moderating Role of Perceived Discrimination." *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 20 (1): 14–25.
- Gianni, Matteo, Marco Giugni, and Noémi Michel. 2015. *Les musulmans de Suisse. Profil et intégration*. Lausanne: Presses polytechniques et universitaires romandes.
- Goffman, Erving. 1963. *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.
- Haddad, Yvonne Yazbeck. 2007. "The Post-9/11 'Hijab' as Icon." *Sociology of Religion* 68 (3): 253–267.
- Helbling, Marc, ed. 2012. *Islamophobia in the West. Measuring and Explaining Individual Attitudes, 1st Edition*. London: Routledge.
- Helly, Denise. 2004. "Are Muslims Discriminated Against in Canada Since September 2001?" *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 36 (1): 24–47.

- Holtz, Peter, Janine Dahinden, and Wolfgang Wagner. 2013. "German Muslims and the 'Integration Debate': Negotiating Identities in the Face of Discrimination." *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science* 47 (2): 231–248.
- Hughes, Everett Cherrington. 1945. "Dilemmas and Contradictions of Status." *American Journal of Sociology* 50 (5): 353–359.
- Lindemann, Anaïd, and Jörg Stolz. 2018. "The Muslim Employment Gap, Human Capital, and Ethno-religious Penalties: Evidence from Switzerland." *Social Inclusion* 6 (2): 151–161.
- Marcus, Kenneth. 2009. "Jailhouse Islamophobia: Anti-Muslim Discrimination in American Prisons." *Race and Social Problems* 1 (1): 36–44.
- Moore, Dahlia. 1990. "Discrimination and Deprivation: The Effects of Social Comparisons." *Social Justice Research* 4 (1): 49–64.
- Olson, James M., C. Peter Herman, and Mark P. Zanna. 1986. *Relative Deprivation and Social Comparison*. Vol. 4. *The Ontario Symposium*. New York: Psychology Press.
- Operario, Don, and Susan T. Fiske. 2001. "Ethnic Identity Moderates Perception of Prejudice: Judgments of Personal Versus Group Discrimination And Subtle Versus Blatant Bias." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 27 (5): 550–561.
- Outten, H. Robert. 2012. "To Engage or Disengage? How Group-based Coping Options Explain the Relationship between Group Identification and Well-being for Disadvantaged Groups." PhD. Department of Psychology, Simon Fraser University.
- Peek, Lori. 2005. "Becoming Muslim: The Development of a Religious Identity." *Sociology of Religion* 66 (3): 215–242.
- Portes, Alejandro, and Rubén G. Rumbaut. 2001. *Legacies. The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation*. Berkley: University of California Press.
- Schlomer, Gabriel L., Sheri Bauman, and Noel A. Card. 2010. "Best Practices for Missing Data Management in Counseling Psychology." *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 57 (1): 1–10.
- Schmitt, Michael T., and Nyla R. Branscombe. 2002. "The Meaning and Consequences of Perceived Discrimination in Disadvantaged and Privileged Social Groups." *European Review of Social Psychology* 12 (1): 167–199.
- Sutter, Alex, Giulia Brogini, and Alma Wiecken. 2018. *Incidents racistes recensés par les centres de conseil*. Bern: CFR & Humanrights.ch.
- Tajfel, Henri, and John C. Turner. 1986. "The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior." In *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, edited by S. Worchel and W. Austin, 33–48. Chicago: Nelson-Hall.
- Valfort, Marie-Anne. 2017. "Has France a Problem with Muslims? Evidence from a Field Experiment in the Labour Market." IZA/CREST/OECD Workshop: Recent Advances in the Economics of Discrimination, Paris, OECD Conference Center, July 6–7.
- Weber, Max. 1978. *Economy and Society. An Outline of Interpretative Sociology*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Weichselbaumer, Doris. 2016. Discussion paper series, Bonn.
- Widner, Daniel, and Stephen Chicoine. 2011. "It's All in the Name: Employment Discrimination Against Arab Americans." *Sociological Forum* 26 (4): 806–823.
- Williams, David R., Harold W. Neighbors, and James S. Jackson. 2008. "Racial/Ethnic Discrimination and Health: Findings From Community Studies." *American Journal of Public Health* 98 (9 Suppl): S29–S37.
- Yazdiha, Hajar. 2019. "Exclusion Through Acculturation? Comparing First- and Second-generation European Muslims' Perceptions of Discrimination Across Four National Contexts." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 42 (5): 782–800.
- Zainiddinov, Hakim. 2016. "Racial and Ethnic Differences in Perceptions of Discrimination among Muslim Americans." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 39 (15): 2701–2721.