

# Chapter 6

## Consequences of and Responses to Discrimination



After having discussed the main conceptual and methodological tools for analysis and described the forms and extent of discrimination, this chapter turns to the impact of discrimination – for economy and society, but mainly focusing on the consequences of discrimination for the targeted individuals and groups. The chapter also addresses responses to experiences of exclusion and disadvantage by reviewing recent research of how awareness of the repercussions of unfair treatment lead both individuals and groups to protect themselves and seek strategies for overcoming future barriers.

### 6.1 Costs of Discrimination

What is the economic costs of discrimination in the labor market? Taste-based discrimination – employers’ willingness to hire a less productive employee because of ethnic or racial bias – provokes a suboptimal allocation of resources and leaves unexploited potentially valuable human resources. Theoretically, in competitive markets, such inefficient practices are likely to lower productivity and increase the risk of economic failure (Becker 1957). Because discrimination is difficult to measure directly (see Chap. 4) few empirical studies have tested this important assumption, however. A notable exception is a recent study by Pager (2016), which takes as its starting point a field experiment of discrimination in New York City, conducted in 2004. The field experiment recorded discriminatory recruitment in 24% of the tested enterprises. By matching the tested enterprises with business register data in 2010, Pager examined whether business survival during the troubled economic crisis of 2008 differed according to recruitment practices. The study shows that business failure concerned 17% of non-discriminatory firms and 36% of discriminatory companies. The findings clearly support the theoretical assumption of an association between discrimination and firm survival, as the “likelihood of going out of

business for an employer who discriminated appears more than twice that of its non-discriminating counterpart” (Pager 2016: 852).

Some efforts have also been made to assess what society would gain from a reduction in discrimination. A recent French study (Bon-Maury et al. 2016), for example, aims at assessing the economic gains of eliminating discrimination in employment. The study first demonstrates considerable residual gaps in employment between men and women and French-born individuals with and without a migration background, after controlling for all available productivity-relevant factors. By simulating the effects of bringing the employment situation of discriminated persons in line with the average situation observed in the rest of the population of the same age group, the authors are able to estimate the economic gains expected from a reduction in discrimination. The study shows that a convergence in employment rates would increase the employed working population by 3% and the GDP by 3.6%.

Discriminatory practices and decisions have not only negative implications for businesses or the economy. Discrimination impacts the whole society as it may foster social exclusion by restricting full participation in the educational, economic, political, and social institutions of society. It may undermine confidence in the meritocratic system of distribution of rewards for school and professional achievement. It may jeopardize the job search process and may provoke withdrawal from the labor market which results in poverty and causes social costs due to payment of benefits. The gap between the lived reality and the expectations of equal participation may nourish frustrations and erode identification with the country and its social system. Urban residential segregation due to ethnic discrimination may further undercut minority integration. Consequently, discrimination may reinforce social inequalities in society and sharpen group cleavages and intergroup conflict, thus threatening social cohesion.

## 6.2 Minorities’ Life Chances Reduced

Considering targeted individuals and groups, the literature on the consequences of discrimination builds on studies of experiences (see Chap. 4), which necessarily comprise different forms of unfair treatment, notably discrimination and stigmatization. Lamont et al. (2016) differentiate *discrimination* (i.e., being deprived of resources) from *stigmatization*, which refers to the experience of being disrespected, ignored, assigned a low status, or racialized. While discrimination is closely associated with stigmatization, the latter is often experienced without discrimination: incidents of stigmatization are more frequent than incidents of discrimination.

Discrimination effectively reduces a person’s life chances across many domains, as aptly pointed out by Goffman (1963). It generally translates into lower attainment and unfavorable positioning for minority group members compared to the majority group. A few examples will suffice here to illustrate this point by giving a sense of

the affected outcomes in education, employment, housing, life satisfaction, and health.

Discrimination in the educational field can be analyzed as the practice of individual actors. Examining the impact of teachers' expectations, Sprietsma (2013) asked primary school teachers to grade essays that had been randomly assigned to Turkish and German named pupils. The experiment reveals an ethnic bias in evaluation: the quality of the essays assigned to a Turkish name received a small yet significant 12 lower grade. The assessment of the perceived lower quality of the texts is also reflected in the teacher's secondary school recommendation for the pupil. The study thus uncovers the mechanism of the self-fulfilling prophecy, well-known as the Pygmalion effect (Rosenthal and Jacobson 1968) or its opposite, the Golem effect, which is more pertinent for the case in point.

In this social domain emblematic for "systems of equality" (see Chap. 5), alternative approaches stress the role of institutional structures and practices in generating and reproducing ethnic inequality. Gomolla and Radkte (2009) empirically backed their argument for institutional discrimination (see Chap. 3) on their study of delayed school entry for children of immigrants in comparison to children of native-born parents. Tuppatt and Becker (2014) revisit these early educational disadvantages for children of immigrants, diagnosed as not ready for school. The authors compare the impact of conventional and reformed school entry procedures on delayed school entry for all children and for Turkish-origin children in a German region. The reformed method lowers the overall proportion of delayed school entry recommendation; the percentage for Turkish-origin children, although still significantly differing from majority children, reduces from 10.2 to 5.8. The authors thus demonstrate how institutional contexts shape ethnic educational inequalities already at school start.

In a somewhat similar vein, Borgna and Contini (2014) provide the most encompassing assessment of the importance of general institutional arrangements in producing social and ethnic inequalities in education. Based on the 2006–2009 waves of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey, they estimate migrant-specific penalties in educational achievement across Western European countries: "In ten countries, the average second-generation migrant child lies below the 35th percentile of the distribution of natives with the same socioeconomic resources" (Borgna and Contini 2014, 677). Cross-country migrant-specific educational achievement penalties are not explained by compositional characteristics. Late school entry and high marginalization in low-quality sectors of secondary school systems are singled out as the institutional features determining migrant-specific inequalities, distinct from those affecting class-driven educational disadvantage.

As for unemployment, the French Trajectories and Origins study shows that being a descendant of Maghrebi parents increases by six points the probability of being unemployed and decreases by five points the probability of being in full-time employment in comparison to the majority population, all other things (educational level, age, and health) being equal (Meurs 2018). To investigate the relation between perceived and actual discrimination, the author first calculates an individual

indicator measuring the difference between each respondent' expected position given his personal characteristics and his actual position, providing an objective measure of the gap. By relating this indicator to perceived discrimination, she shows that what people say about their experiences of discrimination in access to employment corresponds to the "objective" measure of the injustice of their current situation.

An investigation of the rental housing market in the Flemish region reports that in almost 20% of the cases, ethnic minority members were discriminated against by not being invited to visit the property. Moreover, access to cheaper properties appear more affected by discrimination, a fact that increases housing costs for ethnic minorities at the bottom of the rental housing market (Van der Bracht et al. 2015, 172). Similarly, a Swiss study finds evidence of ethnic discrimination concerning people with Kosovar or Turkish names applying for viewing a housing accommodation: they have 3 and 5% lower response rates, respectively, than majority applicants. Whether those interested with foreign-sounding names were foreign permanent residents or Swiss citizens made hardly a difference (Auer et al. 2019).

Research has also enlarged its focus on other spheres impacted by discrimination and stigmatization. Safi's study of an encompassing dimension like life satisfaction among immigrant-origin populations in Europe starts by observing their significantly lower life satisfaction in comparison to natives (Safi 2010). Moreover, relative dissatisfaction does not diminish across time and generations; despite an average higher level of educational attainment of the younger group, the latter are more likely than their parents to consider their situation as unfair.

A vast literature analyses the relationship between discrimination and health outcomes. Discrimination is a chronic and multidimensional stressor producing harmful effects on various aspects of health: psychological and physical, as well as on health-related behavior among minority groups. Numerous studies document the adverse impact of discrimination, both in its everyday or in its acute forms, on health. Perceived discrimination is a risk factor (e.g., for cardiovascular disease) among African American men as well as for breast cancer young black women in the US (DeLilly and Flaskerud 2012). Risk factors linked to perceived racial discrimination affect health even after controlling for socioeconomic status (Williams and Mohammed 2009). Recent meta-analyses (Carter et al. 2017; Paradies et al. 2015; Pascoe and Smart Richman 2009) indicate that exposure to discrimination seems to have a stronger effect for mental health compared with physical health: it generates depression and anxiety as responses to severe stress among stigmatized, racial, and immigrant groups. Greater racial discrimination is associated with greater psychological distress. Racial discrimination has also a negative impact on cultural variables such as collective self-esteem and identity, compromising individuals' sense of self and group-based identity. Men are more affected by racial discrimination than women are (Carter et al. 2017).

In Europe, this new strand of research investigating the impact of discrimination on health is best established in the UK. To determine the causal link between the two variables, Johnston and Lordan's (2012), for example, study the health records of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis before and after the September 11th, 2001 attacks,

which caused a sharp increase of anti-Muslim discrimination in the UK. The health indicators of these groups are compared to the ones of the control group, non-Muslim Indians. Analyzing changes in health indicators between 1999 and 2004, the authors evaluate the worsening of the general health of Muslim Pakistanis and Bangladeshis relative to the general health of the control group, concluding that “the probability of bad or very bad health increased by 3.0 percentage points, and the probability of poor health limiting normal activities increased by 5.2 percentage points.” (2012, 15). Johnston and Lordan further assess that discrimination exerts an indirect detrimental impact on health, by negatively affecting notably employment and perceived social support and by reducing health-related behaviors.

Moreover, perceived discrimination is negatively associated with health care service utilization, concludes another meta-analysis (Ben et al. 2017). Those who experienced discrimination have 2 or 3 times higher probability of reporting lower trust in healthcare systems, lower level of satisfaction with health services and lower quality of communication with healthcare professionals. Experiences of discrimination also increase the risks of delayed care and of non-compliance with the recommended treatment.

Most studies analyze the relation between perceived interpersonal discrimination and health while there is a lack of studies exploring the link between structural discrimination and health inequalities (Krieger 2014). Yet recent research (Paradies et al. 2015) investigates the impact of cumulative discrimination and institutional racism (see Chap. 3) on health outcomes by taking into consideration the larger environment in the belief that health equity is influenced by the place where people live and work. Sociological research emphasizes residential segregation as the key institutional mechanism and fundamental cause of health disparities (Massey 2004). The neighborhood is a critical factor mediating access to social, economic, and human capital, reflected in the strong association between segregation and poverty (Wilson 1987). The theoretical explanation of the link between segregation and detrimental outcomes in educational achievement, employment, incarceration, and welfare dependency rests on social mechanisms like peer influences, cultural diffusion, role models, and access to networks. This literature thus echoes the environmental explanation of health disparities advanced at the end of the nineteenth century by W. E. B. Du Bois (1899).

### 6.3 Responses to Discrimination and Stigmatization

Discrimination and stigmatization affect the life chances of the targeted persons and groups and are a source of stress affecting their well-being. Yet individuals and groups that are victims of discrimination react by elaborating response strategies. The step from discriminatory experiences and response strategies is filtered by the way those experiences are lived and unraveled. Perception is driven by the actual existence of inequality: those who are disadvantaged are usually likely to feel discrimination. For instance, visible minorities who experience greater disadvantages

also perceive more discrimination than their majority counterparts do (Andriessen et al. 2014). Yet appraisal is a matter of interpretation attributing (e.g., a negative outcome in the labor market) to lack of personal skills or ascribing it to the targeted group's prejudice and unfair treatment. Individual differences impinge upon the perception of discrimination. Therefore, long-term immigrants in Canada are more likely to perceive discrimination than new immigrants (Banerjee 2008). Similarly, as children of immigrants have larger opportunities of establishing equal contact with majority members than first-generation immigrants, they may perceive less discrimination (André and Dronkers 2017). However, better-educated children of immigrants tend to have an enhanced awareness of discrimination in comparison to the previous migrant generation (Borrell et al. 2015), because of higher expectations for fair treatment. International evidence assesses "that more discrimination is found in the lower segments of the labor market" (Andriessen et al. 2012, 256; Carlsson 2010) so that higher educated minority members appear less exposed to discrimination than lower educated ones. Nevertheless, perceived discrimination seem to be higher among better-educated immigrant minority members (Diehl and Liebau 2017; De Vroome et al. 2014): this "paradox of integration" is partially explained by a heightened sense of relative deprivation; that is, the feeling of being illegitimately disadvantaged in comparison to majority members (Steinmann 2018). Moreover, ethnic identification is positively associated with perceived racial discrimination (Sellers and Shelton 2003; Verkuyten 2005).

Many studies assess that respondents perceive a higher level of discrimination directed at their in-group than at themselves as members of that group. This discrepancy may be due to the difficulty of detecting discrimination as the source of personal disadvantage in individual cases, in comparison to reliance on public measures of discrimination at the group level. On the other hand, exaggerating discrimination at the group level can be used as a claim argument for promoting the improvement of the minority group.

Furthermore, perception of discrimination is driven by targeted people's awareness of their rights and their sensitivity to unfair treatment, therefore it depends also on the prevailing social norms in a certain place and point in time. The establishment of equality norms increases the perception of discrimination: a treatment that used to be accepted as normal may be (re)qualified as unfair and become untenable. In a recent meta-analysis of US studies on the impact of workplace discrimination, Triana et al. (2015) find that the well-documented negative relation between perceived ethnic discrimination and job attitudes (e.g., withdrawals, efforts, etc.) was stronger after the adoption of the Civil Rights Act of 1991, reflecting a keen demand for fair treatment and implementing a stronger commitment to equality.

Perceiving discrimination, individuals and groups react to it in order to maintain self-esteem, a sense of control over the world around them and to seek ways out of the deadlock. They can act on the present, weigh up the alternatives in order to achieve the desired outcomes and project themselves into the future (Bandura 2001, 2006). The range of reactions and responses may differ in many regards, according to the actor's level, to the perception of the stressing factor, to the types of action

and/or reflection, to the aim pursued by the response, as well as to the socio-historical and cultural context.

### ***6.3.1 Coping and Identity Strategies***

Individual-level responses to interpersonal forms of discrimination and stigmatization may be subsumed under the general concept of coping. Coping is stress-buffering answers aiming at reducing the effects of discrimination and stigmatization (Brondolo et al. 2009), notably on mental and physical health. Murray and Ali (2017) provide examples of such responses in a qualitative study on how senior professional Muslim women in the UK and Australia live, adapt, and react to discrimination in the workplace. They find two kinds of responses: the first type aims at modifying the source of stress and seeking social support (problem-focused coping) while the second one aims at reducing the distress associated with stigmatization (emotion-focused coping; see also Folkman and Lazarus 1984). Responses tend to vary according to the way the stress is perceived: when individuals see the situation as a challenge, they tend to resort to active problem-solving responses, like discussing concerns openly or referring to a supervisor. When they perceive the stress as a threat, they seek protection in emotion-focused responses, like learning to accommodate the values of their host society or looking for comfort in religion by seeking God's help. Actions take place largely on an individual level, while support from groups is sought in situations deemed threatening. Testing the buffering effects of coping responses among black women, Krieger (1990) finds that those who take a problem-solving approach are less likely to have a hypertension diagnosis than those who take an emotion-focused coping response.

A large body of literature focuses on the impact of discrimination and stigmatization on social identity. Since people have the general desire to establish a positive social identity, a disadvantaged in-group targeted by discrimination results in a negative social identity (Tajfel and Turner 1979). To pursue status improvement despite this unsatisfactory situation, minority members anticipating discrimination may respond individually or as a group. The choice among strategies rests on an evaluation of their feasibility. If group boundaries are deemed permeable, then members of minority groups will attempt to enhance their identity by “walking out” of their in-group and by identifying with and joining the majority group. Indeed, Hirschman (1970) names this strategy “exit,” when applying it at a macro systemic level of analysis. Moreover, assimilation can be considered as a strategy to enhance individual position (Berry 1984).

Studies on labor market discrimination pinpoint minority job seekers' strategies to enhance individual chances to gain access to the workplace. In Sweden, taking advantage of institutionally provided support facilitating such response, minority job seekers adopt a Swedish-sounding name in public, while retaining their ethnic name and identity in the private sphere (Bursell 2012). Similarly, according to Kang et al. (2016), African and Asian-American students often “whitewash” their



résumés by concealing their origin when applying for work. In order to be seen as a member of the dominant group, they present themselves omitting their minority-sounding first name or using an additional majority-sounding name or spending their middle name. Another way of whitening job applications is limiting information on aspects of one's curriculum that might be the basis for stigmatization. Applicants will then omit some engagements or modify the account of their involvement in ethnic experiences or mention "white" activities to show an assimilated profile. Concealing and downplaying their stigmatized identity strongly remind of Goffman's strategies of "passing" and "covering" for the management of stigmatized identities (Goffman 1963). Whitening a résumé proves an effective strategy: it generally enhances callbacks in comparison to unwhitened applications and nearly doubles the callback rate for Asian applicants in Kang et al.'s (2016) correspondence test. Such individual mobility strategy allows successful members of a minority group who pursue their career while the status relations between majority and minority remain unchanged.

Sonia Kang et al.'s study "Whitened Résumés: Race and Self-Presentation in the Labor Market", published in *Administrative Science Quarterly* in 2016, is a prime example of how racialized minorities may act when anticipating discrimination. It is also an innovative study, methodologically speaking: Combining qualitative interviews, a laboratory experiment and a field experiment, the authors examine racial minorities' attempts to avoid discrimination in labor markets by concealing or downplaying racial cues in job applications, a practice they refer to as "résumé whitening." Besides documenting that résumé whitening is a widespread practice which increases the possibilities of receiving call-backs for job interviews, the study shows that minorities are less inclined to "whitewash" their CVs when confronted with employers that present themselves as pro-diversity. However, the field experiment suggests that organizational diversity statements are not associated with reduced discrimination against unwhitened, leading to the paradoxical conclusion that minorities may be particularly likely to experience disadvantage when they apply to allegedly pro-diversity employers.

In contrast, if barriers between groups are perceived as insurmountable, individual strategies prove impracticable. Persons targeted by stigmatization and discrimination may, therefore, resort to collective responses: in an attempt to improve their position, they might seek to modify the relations between majority and minority. Collective responses build on the recognition of one's membership in the group and on a compelling identification to the in-group. Increased identification with the in-group aims at protecting psychological well-being (Branscombe et al. 1999). Having a strong relation to one's ethnic group identity may moderate the stress of discrimination by preventing negative stereotypes from affecting the self-concept. This rejection-identification model is corroborated by numerous empirical studies



(Schmitt et al. 2014). In research among young Turkish-Dutch and Dutch persons of similar educational backgrounds in the Netherlands, Verkuyten (2008), for example, observes that the higher the perceived discrimination among Turkish-Dutch, the stronger their Turkish group identification. In turn, this enhances their psychological well-being, partly restoring the damage inflicted by the discrimination.

Moreover, when the disadvantaged position is deemed illegitimate, it may give rise to a feeling of injustice and dissatisfaction. Collective mobilization is mostly based on relative deprivation, that is, the subjective perception of disadvantage and its illegitimate character rather than on the objective circumstances (Walker and Smith 2002). Collective mobilization is more likely to occur when a window of opportunity arises. The 1983 French March for Equality and Against Racism is an example in this regard. The March from Marseille to Paris, often known as “*Marche des Beurs*,” was a reaction against stigmatization and racial inequalities faced by children of Maghrebi immigrants, after the 1981 election of the first socialist president, François Mitterrand, which had stirred high expectations. French second-generation individuals mobilized as an actor in a social movement calling for equal rights based on the recognition of their French citizenship. This movement’s attempt to modify their unsatisfactory situation illustrates the “voice” option, among the famous triad of strategies outlined by Hirschman (1970).

### 6.3.2 *Reactive Ethnicity*

In the sociology of integration literature, the link between disadvantaged positions and ethnic group identification is often understood as an expression of the immigrant population’s alleged limited willingness to integrate (Heath 2014), raising anxiety among majority group members. This common assumption in public debates disregards the well-established relation between perceived discrimination and a response strategy of stigmatized groups to protect their well-being, known in the literature on second-generation incorporation as “reactive ethnicity.” When confronted with a hostile reception environment, children of immigrants develop a defensive identity reactivating their origin, in order to reinforce the collective worth of their in-group (Portes and Rumbaut 2001).

Qualitative studies deliver penetrating insights into the logics of such identification reactions. Mey and Rorato (2010), for example, interviewed children of immigrants in Switzerland before and after their transition from compulsory school to vocational training. They document how those youngsters who repeatedly fail in their efforts to find an apprenticeship increasingly develop a strong identification with their origin group. Çelik’s (2015) previously cited study among Turkish school dropouts in their vocational preparation program in Germany points in a similar direction. Observing their teachers’ differential treatment of pupils, Çelik shows that the students in his study develop a deep sense of discrimination targeting especially groups singularized along ethnic and religious boundaries, like Turks, Kurds,

and Arabs in contrast with other immigrants of Christian background (see Chap. 5). Far from displaying a hyphenated identity, the informants exhibit a strong commitment to their Turkish identity as a response to their experience of discrimination and their perception of blocked social mobility. Çelik argues that when perceived discrimination is linked to stigmatization (i.e., rejection of the minority culture by the majority group), reactive ethnicity turns into the adoption of an oppositional identity (see also Ogbu 1991). Minorities refuse symbols and behaviors of the majority, discredited as a form of “acting white” and develop an “alternative cultural frame of reference” (i.e., different antithetical values to the dominant culture).

### 6.3.3 *Socio-Cultural Embedding of Minority Responses*

While in most studies, analyses are confined to one single national context, the comparative and multilevel research by Lamont and her colleagues (2016) allows for an exploration of the variability of subjective interpretations and the responses to perceived stigmatization in relation to the historical and social context. The authors analyze how middle- and working-class African Americans in the US, black Brazilians in Brazil, and Arab Palestinians in Israel interpret the discrimination and stigmatization they experience. They develop a five-category classification of narratives of incidents as well as of actual and normative responses. The most frequent responses are confronting the stigmatizer (i.e., challenging the perpetrator); managing the self (i.e., weighing the personal costs of responding) and not responding (i.e., regularly avoiding responding). Less common responses are focusing on hard work and competency (i.e. acquiring credentials and credit) and engaging in the group’s isolation.

Lamont et al.’s (2016) comparative analysis reveals interesting cross-country differences. While African Americans predominantly react on discrimination by confrontation, black Brazilians hesitate between confronting, managing the self, and non-responding. Arab Palestinians, by contrast, opt most often for ignoring their experiences and retreating in isolation. The authors explain those cross-country variations by referring to the cultural repertoires available in each specific national context. Such repertoires are “cultural frames they [minorities] mobilize to make sense of their experience and to determine how to respond” (Lamont and Mizrachi 2012, 365). The ways minorities live and interpret their situations in each country are shaped by the historical place of the group in the country (past slavery and today’s racism in American society, the myth of racial democracy in Brazil, and the Zionist national ideology in Israel), by institutional dimensions (e.g., the legal culture built on the Civil Rights Acts in the US and the legal and spatial segregation in Israel) and finally by the strength of a perceived minority group identity. Those features represent enabling and constraining forces that shape the actions of individuals and groups when addressing stigmatization.

## 6.4 Conclusion

Discrimination and stigmatization are costly for the society by lowering economic growth, by reinforcing ethnic inequalities, by fueling political conflicts and by jeopardizing social cohesion. Moreover, victims of unfair treatment pay a high price as discrimination and stigmatization reproduce the privilege of the majority, perpetuate their own disadvantaged status by eroding their life's chances in many social domains. Far from being passive victims, however, many members of minority groups develop and deploy individual and collective strategies to meet such challenges. Responses vary according to their perception of the discrimination, the resources they can activate in their struggle, their evaluation of the chance to change their inequitable condition, and the rhetorical and strategic tools they can mobilize.

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