

## **ABSTRACT**

This study is an exploration into the subjective meanings attached to Muslim social identity amongst a sample of Muslim South Africans residing in Johannesburg (n = 40). Firstly, this study aimed to understand how Muslims subjectively represent and understand their Muslim identity. Secondly, the study aimed to explore the degree to which the negative perceptions of Islam have shaped Muslim social identities. Thus, Q methodology was used to research the subjectivity and diversity of meanings attached to Muslim social identity. Four distinct accounts of Muslim identity emerged in the analysis. The first account (Factor A) was a dominant identification with one's Muslim identity that was steeped in Islam. The second account of Muslim identity (Factor B) was tainted by the negative representations of Muslims, and as a result of this, was experiencing some tension between the need to belong to the larger Muslim community with the need to be seen as distinct from other Muslims. The third account of Muslim identity (Factor C) alluded to differences among men and women in terms of their interpretation of a woman's role within Islam, with men believing that women were given many rights within Islam, whilst women did not feel that this was so. The final account of Muslim identity (Factor D) brought forth a more conservative mainstream view of identity that alluded to a struggle to balance the dictates of one's religion with that of other identities. The key illumination from this study was that the Muslim identity was perceived to be under threat from negative representations and this coloured people's interpretation of their identities.

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