THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN PERCEIVED DISCRIMINATION PROFILES AND CAREER ASPIRATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstract

Career development literature suggests that perceived discrimination may influence the career choices of individuals from diverse backgrounds (e.g., racial minorities) (Swanson & Fouad, 2020). More specifically, perceptions of both overt and covert discrimination could lead to the elimination of career options (Poon, 2014; Schneider & Dimito, 2010), limiting perceptions regarding career opportunities (Conkel-Ziebell et al., 2019) and attenuated career expectations (Abrahamsen & Drange, 2015). However, perceptions of discrimination are rarely systematically measured in these studies and their association with individuals from diverse backgrounds' career choices seems to be overlooked. Therefore, the study aims to 1) identify profiles of perceptions of discrimination and 2) examine how profile membership relates to key sociodemographic characteristics as well as limiting perceptions regarding career plans, educational aspirations and expectations. Thus, a sample of 756 Canadian high school students (M = 16.3 years old; SD = 0.9) completed an online survey from May 2022 to February 2023. Among them, 52% identified as female, 46% identified as male and 2% identified differently. It is also important to note that the sample is made up of a majority of racialized students (72%) and over a third of immigrant students (38%). Latent profile analyses revealed three distinct perceived discrimination profiles, across which proportions of females, racial minorities and Indigenous people, as well as mean levels of limiting perceptions regarding career plans varied. The conclusion highlights appropriate courses of action to counter the potential adverse effects of perceived discrimination on career aspirations and expectations.

Keywords: High school students, perceived discrimination, latent profiles, career aspirations, career expectations.

1. Introduction

Career development literature suggests that perceived discrimination may influence the career choices of individuals from diverse backgrounds (e.g., racial minorities, LGBTQ2A+) (Schneider & Dimito, 2010; Swanson & Fouad, 2020). More specifically, perceptions of both overt and covert discrimination (i.e., microaggressions) could lead to the elimination of career options (Poon, 2014; Schneider & Dimito, 2010), limiting perceptions regarding career opportunities (Conkel-Ziebell et al., 2019) and attenuated career expectations (Abrahamsen & Drange, 2015). However, perceptions of discrimination are rarely systematically measured in these studies and their association with individuals from diverse backgrounds' career choices seems to be overlooked in Canada and elsewhere.

2. Objectives

Therefore, the current study proposes a quantitative approach to systematically and thoroughly measure perceptions of discrimination and their association to career choices. More specifically, the study aims to identify profiles of perceptions of discrimination based on the frequency of overt (e.g., threat and aggression, exclusion) and covert dimensions (e.g., environmental invalidations, assumptions of inferiority) of discrimination. Another objective is to examine how profile membership relates to key sociodemographic characteristics (e.g., racial minority, immigrant, and LGBTQ2A+ status, gender) as well as limiting perceptions regarding career plans, educational aspirations and expectations.

3. Methods

3.1. Participants and procedure

The sample included 1056 Quebec (Canada) high school students, among which 756 of them (M = 16.3 years old; SD = 0.9) completed an online survey. Among them, 52% identified as female, 46% identified as male and 2% identified differently. The sample is made up of 72% of racialized students and 38% of immigrant students. From May 2022 to February 2023, students from selected high schools were invited to complete the survey on a voluntary basis in class or at home via an email sent by their school. In order to obtain free and informed consent from participants, a consent form preceded the online questionnaire. The study has been approved by the ethics committee of the researcher's university.

3.2. Measures

3.2.1. Perceived discrimination. Items (16) measuring overt dimensions of perceived discrimination were selected and adapted from the *Lifetime Brief Perceived Ethnic Discrimination Questionnaire-Community Version* (Brondolo et al., 2005). Items (18) measuring covert dimensions of perceived discrimination were selected and adapted from two existing scales: the *Racial Microaggressions Scale* (Torres-Harding et al., 2012) and the *Revised 28-item Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions Scale* (Forrest et al., 2015). Participants indicated how often each of the described situations occurred because of their distinctive characteristics using a five-point Likert scale (0 = never, 4 = very often).

3.2.2. Limiting perceptions regarding career plans. Participants were asked to indicate their degree of agreement towards seven statements regarding their perceptions of accessible career options, barriers (e.g., anticipation of discrimination) and potential for professional achievement in relation to their distinctive characteristics using a five-point Likert scale (0 = strongly disagree, 4 = strongly agree). An average score of limiting perceptions regarding career plans was generated for the analyses.

3.2.3. Educational aspirations and expectations. Educational aspirations were measured in terms of the highest level of diploma sought given ideal conditions (1) High school diploma, vocational diploma or less; 2) College degree; 3) Bachelor's degree; 3) Master's degree; 4) Doctorate degree). Educational expectations were identified in terms of the highest level of diploma likely to be attained.

3.2.4. Sociodemographic information. Participants answered questions pertaining to their age, gender, sexual orientation, Indigenous status, racial minority status, disability status and country of birth.

3.3. Statistical analyses

All analyses were conducted using Mplus 8.10. Factor scores for perceived discrimination were generated using exploratory structural equation modeling (ESEM) (Marsh et al., 2014). Estimations of covert discrimination frequency were based on a bifactor ESEM model that included a global factor (global microaggressions) and four specific factors (assumptions of inferiority, environmental invalidations, assumptions of criminality, invisibility). Estimations of overt discrimination frequency were based on a ESEM model that included four specific factors (threat and aggression, exclusion and injustice, threat and stigmatization, and stigmatization at work). Using factor scores obtained from measurement models, latent profile analyses (LPA) were conducted in order to identify the optimal profile solution based on theoretical implications and fit indices (Morin et al., 2016). Based on the retained solution, the BCH procedure was used to compare means of limiting perceptions regarding career plans across profiles. The DCAT procedure was also used to compare the distribution of gender, racial minority status, immigrant status, sexual orientation, disability status, Indigenous status, as well as educational aspirations and expectations across profiles.

4. Results

LPA with one-to-five-profile models were tested, for which fit indices are presented in Table 1. The three-profile solution was retained revealing three distinct perceived discrimination profiles (see Figure 1). Profile 1 (low frequency; 21% of the sample) includes participants reporting relatively low frequency for global microaggressions, threat and aggression, exclusion and injustice, as well as stigmatization at work. Profile 2 (moderate frequency; 43% of the sample) characterizes participants reporting moderately low frequency for global microaggressions and the four factors of overt discrimination. Profile 3 (high frequency; 36% of the sample) includes participants reporting relatively high frequency for global microaggressions and the four factors of overt discrimination. Profiles were then contrasted on six sociodemographic characteristics as well as limiting perceptions regarding career plans, educational aspirations and expectations (see Tables 2 and 3). Results showed that Indigenous people were more likely to belong to the Moderate profile. Both Moderate and High profiles included the

highest proportions of racial minorities. In addition, both Low and High profiles included the highest proportions of females. The effect size for these differences was small. Results also showed that participants belonging to the Moderate and High profiles reported higher levels of limiting perceptions than participants from the Low profile. The effect size of these differences varies from moderate to large. Finally, no differences were observed across profiles for educational aspirations and expectations.

Table 1. Results from latent profiles analyses (N = 832).

Model	LL	#fp	Scaling	AIC	BIC	ABIC	Entropy	aLMR	BLRT
1 profile	-9447.37	18	1.44	18930.73	19015.76	18958.60	N/A	N/A	N/A
2 profiles	-7014.63	37	1.64	14103.26	14278.04	14160.54	.93	<.001	<.001
3 profiles	-6134.01	56	1.45	12374.03	12636.56	12460.72	.93	<.001	<.001
4 profiles	-5603.22	75	1.48	11356.45	11710.73	11472.56	.93	.010	<.001
5 profiles				Did not converge					

Note. LL: Model LogLikelihood; #fp: Number of free parameters; Scaling: Scaling factor associated with MLR loglikehood estimates; AIC: Akaïke Information Criteria; BIC: Bayesian Information Criteria; ABIC: Sample-Size Adjusted BIC; aLMR: Adjusted Lo, Mendell, and Rubin's Likelihood Test; BLRT: Bootstrap Likelihood Ratio Test.
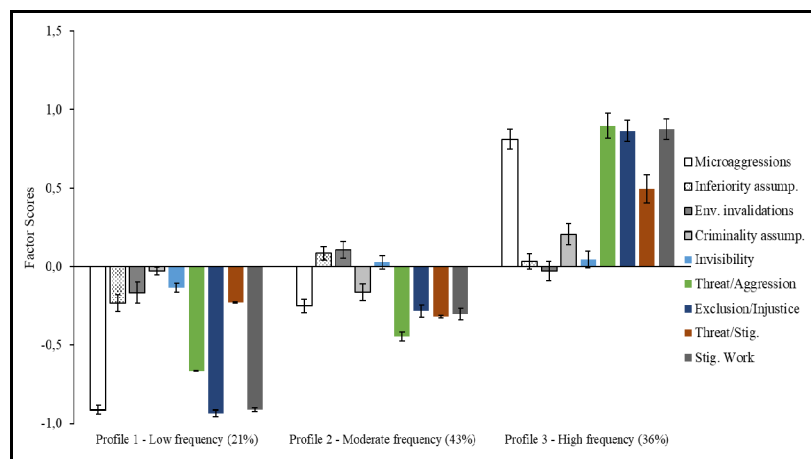
Figure 1. Final latent profile solution (N = 832).

Table 2. Standardized profile means/proportions and standard error of covariates (N = 832).

	Standardized means and proportions (standard error)		
	Profile 1 Low frequency	Profile 2 Moderate frequency	Profile 3 High frequency
Gender (Female)	52,2% (0.04)	46,8% (0.04)	59,0% (0.03)
Racial minority status	63,6% (0.04)	73,5% (0.04)	75,0% (0.03)
Immigrant status	35,3% (0.04)	33,2% (0.03)	41,5% (0.03)
Sexual orientation			
(Homosexuality)	8,0% (0.02)	9,0% (0.02)	9,2% (0.02)
(Other)	5,9% (0.02)	8,8% (0.02)	6,4% (0.01)
Disability	2,2% (0.01)	5,1% (0.01)	3,6% (0.01)
Indigenous status	1,2% (0.01)	4,5% (0.01)	0,0% (0.00)
Limiting perceptions regarding career plans	0.95 (0.06)	1.64 (0.05)	1.26 (0.04)
Educational aspirations			
(High school diploma, vocational diploma or less)	7,1% (0.02)	6,6% (0.02)	9,6% (0.02)
(Doctorate degree)	39,9% (0.04)	40,6% (0.03)	42,0% (0.03)
Educational expectations			
(High school diploma, vocational diploma or less)	12,1% (0.03)	7,8% (0.02)	12,7% (0.02)
(Doctorate degree)	35,2% (0.04)	29,3% (0.03)	26,6% (0.03)

Table 3. Comparing profiles on demographic variables and educational aspirations and expectations.

	Effect sizes values for profile comparisons		
	1 vs 2	1 vs 3	2 vs 3
Gender	.13*	.07	.14**
Racial minority status	.10*	.11*	.02
Immigrant status	.02	.05	.07
Sexual orientation	.05	.02	.04
Disability	.08	.04	.04
Indigenous status	.10*	.04	.13**
Limiting perceptions regarding career plans	.87***	.41***	.47***
Educational aspirations	.03	.06	.07
Educational expectations	.11	.08	.09

Note. Size of differences between profiles are measured by Cohen's *d* (Limiting perceptions regarding career plans) and Cramer's *V* (gender, racial minority status, immigrant status, sexual orientation, disability, Indigenous status, educational aspirations and expectations) effect size. Cohen's *d* effect size = .2 (small), .5 (moderate), .8 (large). Cramer's *V* effect size = .1 (small), moderate (.3), and large (.5). *$p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, ***$p < .001$

5. Discussion

The research results first showed that the perceived discrimination profiles stood out not so much in terms of the frequency of specific forms of microaggressions, but the addition of these microaggressions. It is important to highlight this observation as it is hypothesized that repeated microaggressions experiences may lead to cumulative harm (Evans & Mallon, 2020). The results also shed some light on specific groups at risk of perceiving discrimination. Consistent with the observation that racial minorities generally perceive more discrimination than their peers (e.g., Boulet, 2022), racial minority students were more likely to perceive different forms of discrimination than non-racialized youth. It is also important to note that the High profile included a higher proportion of female and racial minority students, which raises the relevance of adopting an intersectional perspective in the study of discrimination (Harnois, 2014). As expected, higher frequency of perceived discrimination was associated with a higher level of limiting perceptions regarding career plans, which includes the perceptions of limited accessible career options and the anticipation of discrimination on the labour market. Career development literature suggests that these limiting perceptions could lead to the elimination of career options deemed as inaccessible (e.g., Poon, 2014) and attenuated career expectations (Abrahamsen & Drange, 2015). However, the absence of differences in terms of educational expectations across profiles is notable in the present study. It is likely that educational expectations vary more according to specific overt and covert dimensions of perceived discrimination rather than profile membership.

6. Conclusions

A majority of the participating high schools implements an intercultural policy, which could potentially explain the relatively low frequency of perceived discrimination in the sample. Among other things, this intercultural policy aims to 1) promote the academic and social integration of students from immigrant backgrounds and 2) ensure staff development on interculturalism (Commission scolaire de la Pointe-de-l'Île, 2009). It would be relevant to first assess the impact of such a policy on inclusion, and then consider its implementation in other high schools if deemed appropriate. As for educational practice, avenues of intervention with youth from immigrant backgrounds should focus on assessing barriers to career choices, examining experiences and anticipation of discrimination, re-examining eliminated career options on the basis of perceived barriers and examining potentially attenuated career expectations (Fouad & Kantemnni, 2020). In light of the social cognitive career theory, it would also be relevant to assess and modify the unfavourable self-efficacy beliefs of students from immigrant backgrounds regarding career domains that they deem inaccessible, notably by identifying role models in these domains (Sheu & Wang, 2021). Some limitations of this study should be noted. First, in light of the participating high schools composition, racialized and immigrant students are overrepresented in the sample. It is reasonable to assume that the results would vary with a more representative sample. Second, it is also possible that the measure of a general form of discrimination as opposed to a specific form of discrimination may have influenced the frequency of perceived discrimination among the participating students. Finally, seeing as both career aspirations and expectations are relatively high among the participating students and that they are mostly congruent, one wonders to what extent students were able to distinguish between them. We may also wonder how this influences the association with the perceived discrimination profiles. Future research should focus on gathering data using a more representative sample, enhancing the measure of career aspirations and expectations and measuring a specific form of discrimination.

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