

INPLASY PROTOCOL

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Protocol: Discrimination attributions in the workplace – a scoping review of causes and correlates

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None declared.

Rationale: Altogether, previous research attests to the importance of multiple factors that refer to personal characteristics (either of those being targeted by, or witnessing discriminatory behavior), situational factors that are inherent to the discriminatory event as well as contextual features that exert influence on discrimination attributions. However, a clear overview of this research field is lacking, which makes it difficult to grasp which factors have been studied – either in isolation or jointly with other factors - to understand discrimination attributions, how robust the existing evidence is and where future research is needed. With this scoping review, we aim to systematically synthesize the existing evidence and identify the state of knowledge on the correlational and causal impact of different factors on discrimination attributions, building on and extending the reviews of Major and Sawyer (2009) and Barreto and Ellemers (2015). Additionally, this scoping review includes more modern forms of discrimination, such as microaggressions or workplace incivility as well (Marchiondo et al., 2018), allowing us to draw general conclusions about whether the same determinants and correlates have been studied in relation to modern forms of discrimination.

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INTRODUCTION

Review question / Objective: We systematically review studies on discrimination attributions in organizational settings, addressing three main research questions: 1) How have discrimination

attributions been studied in previous research? We aim to give an overview of this research field, particularly striving to understand which factors have been studied in relation to discrimination attributions. We adapt the approach of

Sawyer and Major (2009) and focus on characteristics of the person making attributions, of the discriminatory event, and of the context in which discrimination occurs. 2) How robust is the evidence? In other words, how strong and generalizable is the current knowledge on the influence of personal, situational and contextual factors on discrimination attributions? To answer this question, we look at the use of different research designs (causal vs correlational studies), countries and groups studied, and on the kinds of concepts employed to assess discrimination (e.g. microaggressions, modern discrimination, incivility etc. - for an overview, see Marchiondo et al., 2018)). Importantly, since this is a scoping review, we abstain from including meta-analytical statistical estimates and primarily focus on the relationships the authors explicitly hypothesized and draw more general comparisons of the statistical significance of the studied factors on discrimination attributions. 3) To what extent do the factors studied in relation to discrimination attributions vary depending on the type of discrimination studied? We aim to identify whether the factors relate differently to various concepts used to study discrimination (e.g. modern discrimination, microaggressions, workplace incivility- see Marchiondo et al., 2018)).

If the identified studies allow us to investigate the following question, we furthermore aim to understand 4) To what extent do the factors influencing discrimination attributions vary depending on the actor? Discriminatory situations involve multiple actors, and we strive to also assess possibly varying influences of the factors/characteristics depending on the actor making the attribution. However, this is only feasible if discrimination claims have been studied from multiple perspectives, which we can only know once we rigorously reviewed the existing body of research.

Following the PRISM-ScR guidelines for scoping reviews, we systematically search and analyze relevant empirical peer-reviewed articles in English. Altogether, this review sets out to map the existing body of research on discrimination attributions,

allowing us to assess the robustness of the evidence and formulate avenues for future research.

Background: Discrimination - may it be on the grounds of ethnicity, gender, religion, etc. - is pervasive in the labor market (Fibbi et al., 2021). Not only does it undermine optimal organizational functioning (Hirsh & Cha, 2008), it also amplifies social inequalities between groups, for instance by creating structural barriers to access employment or impeding mobility within organizations. On an interpersonal level, discrimination can leave victims feeling excluded, incompetent, unworthy, ignored or belittled (Kaiser & Miller, 2003). It is therefore not surprising that discrimination carries various negative consequences for the psychological wellbeing of its targets, such as decreased levels of life satisfaction and self-esteem, and puts them at an increased risk of anxiety, depression and psychological distress (Schmitt et al., 2014).

These negative implications of discriminatory treatment highlight the need to tackle discrimination. To do so, it is crucial that discrimination is perceived in the first place. However, this is not an easy endeavor for multiple reasons. Due to blurry definitional boundaries and oftentimes subjective evaluation, discrimination is hard to prove. Additionally, discriminatory acts are becoming less overt and blatant, shifting to more subtle, low-intensity behaviors (e.g. contact avoidance, nonverbal behaviors; Marchiondo et al., 2018). Furthermore, targets might perceive legitimate acts as discriminatory in some situations (i.e., a vigilance bias), while they may ignore discriminatory acts and dismiss them in others (i.e., a minimization bias; Kaiser & Major, 2006; Major et al., 2002). And lastly, mismatches between different actors in attributing situations to discrimination often arise - that is, targets and bystanders can differ in the extent to which they consider the same situation as discriminatory (Light et al., 2011). This can pose a major challenge to tackling the problem, as experiences perceived similarly by others are more likely to be

considered legitimate and therefore reported (Jones et al., 2017, Light et al., 2011). Altogether, the attributional ambiguity of discriminatory events can leave people uncertain as to whether discrimination has actually occurred (Jones et al., 2017; Stangor et al., 2003), which makes it challenging to tackle it. This highlights the need for a better understanding of how discrimination attributions are made.

Previous research has identified a range of personal, situational and contextual factors that shape whether people judge an event to be discriminatory or not (Major & Sawyer, 2009). First, different individual characteristics have been found to influence discrimination attributions. For instance, endorsing views that justify hierarchical relationships between groups (e.g., just-world beliefs) can hinder the detection of discrimination (Hirsh & Cha, 2008). Second, previous research found that people appear to have expectations about what types of situations constitute discrimination, often referred to as “prototypes” (Baron et al., 1991; Major & Sawyer, 2009). The more features that are considered prototypical for discrimination a situation carries, the more likely the same event is judged as discriminatory. For instance, incidents that entail intentional, blatant and harmful behaviors are more likely to be labelled as discrimination than more subtle, personal and unintentional acts (Jones et al., 2017). Discrimination is a changing concept, and the awareness of modern forms of discrimination that are characterized by more subtle, unintentional acts is raising (Marchiondo et al., 2018), leading to shifts in the discrimination prototype. Third, also contextual features, such as specific policies enacted in the workplace, can influence attributions to discrimination. For example, the presence of pro-diversity policies may signal equitable employment practices and suggest a fair, inclusive and diversity-supportive work environment (Dover et al., 2020) in which discrimination becomes, somewhat paradoxically, harder to detect (Dover et al., 2020, Hirsh & Cha, 2008).

Rationale: Altogether, previous research attests to the importance of multiple factors that refer to personal characteristics (either of those being targeted by, or witnessing discriminatory behavior), situational factors that are inherent to the discriminatory event as well as contextual features that exert influence on discrimination attributions. However, a clear overview of this research field is lacking, which makes it difficult to grasp which factors have been studied – either in isolation or jointly with other factors - to understand discrimination attributions, how robust the existing evidence is and where future research is needed.

With this scoping review, we aim to systematically synthesize the existing evidence and identify the state of knowledge on the correlational and causal impact of different factors on discrimination attributions, building on and extending the reviews of Major and Sawyer (2009) and Barreto and Ellemers (2015). Additionally, this scoping review includes more modern forms of discrimination, such as microaggressions or workplace incivility as well (Marchiondo et al., 2018), allowing us to draw general conclusions about whether the same determinants and correlates have been studied in relation to modern forms of discrimination.

METHODS

Search strategy: Since discrimination attributions have been studied across different disciplines, we conduct the literature search in the multidisciplinary database SCOPUS. We approach the document search in different stages:

1. Developing the Search String

In order to come up with the keywords that will allow us to find the articles that meet the defined eligibility criteria, we selected relevant terminology from the key literature in the field of discrimination attributions. Since the focus of this review is to understand discrimination attributions in organizational settings, we include a range of relevant settings previous studies refer to (e.g. workplace, job market etc). As we are interested in “traditional” and more modern forms of discrimination, we include

in our search string the terms Marchiondo et al. (2018) identified as key concepts in modern discrimination research (i.e., incivility, microaggressions, modern discrimination, everyday discrimination). Here, we abstain from including concepts that are specific to a ground of discrimination (e.g. sexism or racism). Additionally, we include synonyms for “attributing”, allowing us to access literature that uses a different terminology. Different combinations of search words were tested in SCOPUS, until our search string resulted in a rigorous selection of relevant articles. To assess this, the first and second author reviewed titles and abstracts and adjusted the search string. During this stage, we drew on the expertise of a librarian from Utrecht University to finetune our search string and find the most parsimonious version.

2. Primary Literature Search

The primary literature search takes place in March 2023. Using the search string, the first author and a student assistant will download the titles and abstracts of the identified articles from SCOPUS, remove duplicates and proceed with the screening for eligibility.

3. Additional Literature Search Strategies

The first author and the student assistant will perform forward and backward snowballing of the final sample from the primary literature search, i.e., after the full text screening. This entails checking the references of the eligible articles and looking for studies citing them. This procedure will be extended to theoretical core readings of the field (e.g. Barreto & Ellemers, 2015; Jones et al., 2017; Kaiser et al., 2013; Major et al., 2002; Stangor et al., 2003; Sturdivant et al., 2017)

Final SCOPUS search string : (((TITLE-ABS-KEY ((workplace OR "labo*r market" OR company OR office OR job OR occupation* OR employment OR organi*ation* OR "work environment"))) AND (TITLE-ABS-KEY ((attribut* OR judg* OR perceiv* OR perception* OR recogni* OR detect*) W/2 (discriminat* OR "micro*aggression" OR incivility)))))

Eligibility criteria: The studies included in this review provide correlational or causal

evidence of factors that influence attributions to discrimination. Furthermore, we only consider peer-reviewed, quantitative studies that study individual-level discrimination attributions in organizational settings. More precisely, we are only including articles that study perceptions of/attributions to discrimination as an (intermediate) outcome, and include correlational or causal factors to understand how these judgements come about. Here, we are especially interested in whether a particular event is judged as discrimination. We abstain from limiting the search to a specific form of discrimination, allowing for publications that consider multiple, possibly intersecting grounds of discrimination. Furthermore, we only consider research published in English, but we do not limit the search in terms of time and geographic scope.

Source of evidence screening and selection:

The sample produced by the search string will be downloaded from the databases and duplicates will be removed. Using ASReview, a machine-learning software that supports the identification of the relevant literature, the first author and a student assistant will independently assess the eligibility of the studies in line with the defined eligibility criteria based on a screening of title and abstract. The second and third author will review a sample of 5%.

Subsequently, the first author and the student assistant will perform a full-text screening of the remaining articles and only articles meeting the eligibility criteria will be retained. At all stages, possibly diverging eligibility judgements between the reviewers will be discussed and resolved, and inter-rater reliability will be calculated.

Data management: Data will be managed in line with the regulations of Utrecht University.

Reporting results / Analysis of the evidence:

The final sample, i.e., all studies that meet the eligibility criteria, will be analyzed and coded predominantly by the

first author and the student assistant. The coding process involves multiple calibration meetings in which all authors are involved. The calibration moments decrease in frequency (after 10 coded articles, then after 20 coded articles, etc.) thereby ensuring that all coders operate with the same understanding of the codes and inconsistencies can be cleared early in the process. Coding will be according to the study's characteristics and content relevant to our research questions, namely

- Study Characteristics**
- Author(s)
 - Year
 - Journal
 - Country research institute
 - Geographical scope
 - Sample
 - a. Sample size
 - b. Group (students, employers, etc)
 - c. Representativeness
 - Methodology
 - a. Research methodology/study design
 - b. Estimation procedure/ statistical analysis

Codes relevant to the research questions

- Grounds of discrimination
 - a. (ethnic, gender, religious etc.)
 - b. Intersectional approach
- Operationalization of the outcome measure
 - a. Concept used to assess discrimination
 - b. Validated scale vs random single itemsc. Time-bound (recent past, often)
 - d. What is being asked?
- Setting
 - a. Which aspect of the workplace is studied? Which situations are studied?
- Control variables
- Independent variables
 - a. Characteristics of person, event, or context
 - b. Operationalization
 - c. Main Results
 - d. strength of evidence (causal vs correlational)
- Actor (target, bystander etc.)

The first and second author will develop a codebook with definitions of the codes, to ensure that all reviewers operate with the same understanding of the concepts. This will be continuously updated throughout the process, in particular during the coding

calibration moments of the team. The codebook will be publicly available as part of the supplementary materials.

Presentation of the results: After coding, the authors will analyze the findings and provide a tabular and narrative summary relevant to the research questions.

Language restriction: English publications only.

Country(ies) involved: The Netherlands.

Keywords: discrimination attributions; workplace; scoping review; modern discrimination; discrimination perceptions.

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