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Stroebe, Katherine; Missler, Marjolein

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A Resource Pathway to Action Against Discrimination: How Burnout and Work–Family Balance Form Obstacles to Action

KATHERINE STROEBE^{1*} and MARJOLEIN MISSLER^{2,3}

¹*University of Groningen, Grote Kruisstraat 2/1, Groningen 9712TS, Netherlands*

²*Tilburg University, Tilburg, Netherlands*

³*Free University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, Netherlands*

ABSTRACT

Why is it difficult for targets to act out against individual experiences of discrimination? Whereas prior research focuses on normative concerns or failure to perceive discrimination as determinants of (lack of) action, we hypothesize that perceiving frequent discrimination at work undermines the potential to act out against discrimination because it depletes one's resources. We study a sample that is underrepresented in research on discrimination, yet forms a large percentage of the working population: parents experiencing disadvantage in a working context. We measured self-reported disadvantage because of parenthood, action against disadvantage, levels of burnout and work-home self-efficacy. Results reveal that perceptions of discrimination are related to lower levels of action. Importantly, lack of resources could explain this effect: we found simultaneous (and separate) mediation of the exhaustion (but not distancing) burnout subscale as well as separate mediation of work-home self-efficacy. The implications of these results and the importance of studying potential resources in relation to action against discrimination are discussed. Copyright © 2015 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Key words: discrimination; stigma; action; burnout; work–family domain; work–home self-efficacy; parenthood

INTRODUCTION

When asked whether she had taken action against discrimination, a woman one of us talked to recently responded that she could not bring up the energy to do so, but wanted to put the experience behind her. The woman's response is fairly typical: targets rarely report experiences of discrimination (Boog, Dinsbach, van Donselaar, & Rodrigues, 2009; Kaiser & Major, 2006). This lack of action occurs despite the impact of discrimination

*Correspondence to: Katherine Stroebe, University of Groningen, Grote Kruisstraat 2/1, Groningen 9712TS, Netherlands.
E-mail: k.e.stroebe@rug.nl

on tangible outcomes such as (access to) employment opportunities, health care, housing, and education (see Penner, Albrecht, Coleman, & Norton, 2007; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) and the fact that it is often perceived as illegitimate (Kaiser & Major, 2006).

Why is this the case? The few studies that touch on the relation between discrimination and action focus exclusively on obstacles in acting against discrimination, such as failure to recognize discrimination and fear of the implications of reporting discrimination (e.g. Ellemers & Barreto, 2009; Swim & Hyers, 1999). We argue that it is important to take into account research showing that discrimination undermines well-being and cognitive resources when studying why and how experiences of discrimination may impede, rather than instigate, action against discrimination (e.g. Inzlicht, McKay, & Aronson, 2006; see Major & O'Brien, 2005; Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002 for overviews). Building on this work, we propose a lack of resources explanation for the relation between discrimination and action: Individuals fail to report discrimination because experiences of discrimination negatively affect mental health and feelings of efficacy and thus undermine resources needed to take action. The present study focuses on the experience of disadvantage as a parent at work. It has been demonstrated that being discriminated as a working parent is related to negative stereotyping and to deficits in tangible outcomes such as lower income level (e.g. Crosby, Williams, & Biernat, 2004). This type of discrimination has received surprisingly little attention regarding its psychological consequences for targets even though it not only negatively affects target's perception of their working environment (where discrimination takes place) but also of the home environment (the supposed 'reason' for discrimination). We predict that discrimination will reduce action because it increases levels of burnout and disrupts one's work-family balance, such that targets have lower perceptions of work-home self-efficacy.

Perceptions of discrimination and action

There is considerable evidence that discrimination is rarely responded to with action. For example, a Dutch national survey among ethnic and religious minorities revealed that between 8% (Indonesians) and 50% (Moroccans) had experienced discrimination (Monitor Rassendiscriminatie, 2009). More than 70% of respondents did not report the experienced discrimination to authorities (see Dixon, Storen, & Van Horn, 2002 for similar results in the US). One of the few laboratory experiments confirmed this picture (Swim & Hyers, 1999): When disadvantaged by a sexist person within a group discussion via sexist comments, 45% of participants openly expressed their displeasure about this within the group but *only 16% actually confronted* the sexist person. In light of these results, the question why there is little action against discrimination arises.

The reasons why targets seldomly act against discrimination discussed in the literature focused on perceptions/interpretations of the situation at hand (i.e. not diagnosed as discrimination; Barreto & Ellemers, 2005; Ellemers & Barreto, 2009; feelings of shame; Matheson & Anisman, 2009), the perceived impact of one's action (i.e. social pressure, concern about retaliation; Kaiser & Miller, 2001; Swim & Hyers, 1999); or the perceived pervasiveness of discrimination (e.g. Stroebe, Dovidio, Barreto, Ellemers, & John, 2011). Interestingly, although considerable work has documented the negative impact of discrimination on psychological well-being and health (see Major & O'Brien, 2005; Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009; Schmitt, Branscombe, Postmes & Garcia, 2014, for overviews), this

has not been related to the capacity or potential resources to *act* against discrimination. We propose that one reason action against discrimination is rare is exactly because discrimination undermines resources, such as mental (and physical) health and self-efficacy. Paradoxically, one might thus predict that the more frequently individuals perceive themselves to be the target of discrimination the less likely they are to take action against it.

Perceptions of discrimination, health, and action

A wide range of studies reveals a negative impact of discrimination on psychological well-being and health (e.g. Gee, Spencer, Chen, & Takeuchi, 2007; Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009). A recent meta-analysis (Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009) demonstrated that perceptions of discrimination predicted mental and physical health symptoms ranging from depression or stress to cardiovascular disease or diabetes. This negative relation between discrimination and health is thought to occur via two pathways: increased stress and unhealthy behaviour. In line with the stressor pathway, which is of particular relevance to our reasoning, Gee et al. (2007) have pointed out that discrimination is a stressor 'that when experienced routinely can become a chronic stressor that may erode an individual's protective resources'. Indeed, the more frequent or severe experiences of discrimination are, the less targets may feel they have control over their own outcomes in life (Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002). Taking this a step further, results of a recent meta-analysis reveal that stronger perceptions of discrimination are negatively related to well-being (Schmitt et al., 2014). Building on this work and focusing on mental health, we argue that frequent experiences of discrimination in a work context may affect work-related mental health such as one's perceived ability and motivation to function well in one's work.

In this paper we specifically consider *burnout*, 'a psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who work with other people in some capacity' (Maslach, 1993, p.20). We study the two most central dimensions, emotional exhaustion (EE, feeling overextended and depleted of resources) and distancing (DI, a cynical and distant attitude towards one's work and the people one works with). EE, which some have coined most central to burnout (Shirom & Melamed, 2005), is the individual stress component of burnout that is most related to negative health outcomes (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). DI relates to feelings about one's interpersonal context at work. Burnout has negative effects at an individual (e.g. extreme fatigue, lack of work motivation/commitment) and organizational level (e.g. employee turnover, productivity) (Maslach et al., 2001). Precursors of burnout can lie in the personal (individual differences) or organizational domain (organizational characteristics). It has been argued that the organizational component is the most central predictor of burnout (e.g. Leiter & Maslach, 1988). Regarding the organizational component, perceived unfairness at work is thought to play an important role. Indeed, longitudinal research indicates that unfairness is a precursor of burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 2008; Maslach et al., 2001). Surprisingly, although discrimination can be considered an extreme and structural form of unfairness, the discrimination–burnout relation has received little attention, and no studies relate it to action against discrimination.

The only two studies we are aware of that considered discrimination and burnout provided some support for a relation between perceptions of discrimination and burnout (Dyrbye et al., 2007; Sandfort, Bos, & Vet, 2006). Research by Sandfort et al. revealed that homosexual men, but not lesbian women, who reported high levels of homonegative

experiences (e.g. being made ridiculous) were likely to suffer from burnout. The authors explained these differences as potentially because of the fact that lesbian women suffer from being disadvantaged because of being a woman more than because of being lesbian. This implies that, whereas one might expect questions about disadvantage because of being a woman to be related to burnout, thinking about disadvantage because of being lesbian may be less salient and thus less strongly related to burnout. Dyrbye et al. found higher levels of burnout when comparing minority students who experience discrimination (e.g. isolation, less opportunities during studies) to minority students who did not report such experiences. These results provide initial indications of a positive relation between discrimination and burnout.

There are reasons to believe that in turn, burnout may be related to lower levels of action. Action requires anger and an activation mode (Mendes, Major, McCoy, & Blascovich, 2008; van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008) which seems incompatible with symptoms of (exhaustion) burnout: feeling overextended, depleted, and unable to meet one's commitments. Second, burnout is related to 'symptoms of inaction' such as depression, ineffectiveness at work, and actual turnover which is considered the final step in withdrawal from work (e.g. Maslach et al., 2001; Wright & Cropanzano, 1998).

Consequently, we predict that perceptions of discrimination are positively related to burnout (based on Dyrbye et al., 2007; Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009; Sandfort et al., 2006) and that burnout in turn is negatively related to action against discrimination (H1).

Perceptions of discrimination, self-efficacy, and action

Moreover, we propose that another reason why discrimination may be negatively related to action is because it reduces one's sense of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy refers to individual beliefs that one has the ability to perform certain behaviours, and these beliefs influence coping behaviour, effort, and persistence (Bandura, 1977).

This concept is relevant within our sample of working parents who experience discrimination at work because of parenthood. Working parents can feel discriminated against when, for example, they are not considered for promotion because it is thought that their family may interfere with their work, or when others are unwilling to accommodate to a working parent's request to reschedule an evening meeting (Williams & Segal, 2003). These examples indicate that balancing work and family life is crucial, and the concept of work-family self-efficacy (WSE), the 'belief that a person can effectively balance work and family roles simultaneously' becomes relevant (Basuil & Casper, 2012 p. 630). Perceived competence to combine work and family tasks is an important resource in fulfilling these competing role obligations (Hennessy & Lent, 2008). We propose that when this belief is threatened by discrimination, which may confirm own doubts about one's ability to combine work and family, an essential resource is lost.

Moreover, this may undermine the perceived potential to address one's disadvantage. Although little work has so far considered implications of WSE (Hennessy & Lent, 2008), general self-efficacy is related to the likelihood that one can organize and execute given courses of required action (Bandura, 1977). For example, self-efficacy predicts levels of action for one's union and is related to action against discrimination (Bulger & Mellor, 1997; Stroebe & Otten, 2013, see van Zomeren et al., 2008, for similar results at the group level). Thus we predict that perceptions of discrimination as a working parent

are related to lower levels of WSE which in turn are negatively related to action against discrimination (H2).

Based on the theoretical background outlined above we thus expect the relation between perceptions of discrimination and action to be mediated by burnout and WSE. It is important to note that the cross-sectional nature of our research means that, as is the case with many studies looking at discrimination and health, we cannot test causal hypotheses. We can only assess whether the observed correlations are *consistent with* our causal model (Hayes, 2013).

In the present study we asked working parents to report their experiences of discrimination and their action against it. In addition, we measured levels of burnout and WSE. In line with prior work, we define discrimination as the belief that one has been disadvantaged because of one's category membership (e.g. gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation) and focus on subjective experiences, rather than objective external reports, of discrimination (Kaiser & Major, 2006; Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009).

METHOD

Participants and procedure

Four hundred and thirty-four parents (30 men, 388 women¹; $M_{\text{age}} = 34.40$; $SD = 4.39$) were recruited via four child day care centres as well as websites designed for parents of young children to participate in an online study on parental experiences both at home and at work. Although our questions were phrased to allow parents to be to take part in this study, all participants had at least one child that was between the age of 0 to 4 years (this is not surprising given we largely approached participants via child care centres). The mean number of children was 1.5. 95% of parents lived together with their partner, and the average family income per month was 3,500–4,000. This study was part of a larger scale data collection that included more measures than reported here (e.g. satisfaction with infant day care and parenting role; see also Missler, Stroebe, & Van der Laan, 2013).

Materials

Perceptions of discrimination were measured by asking participants to what extent they, in work situations, felt treated differently because of being, or becoming, a parent. They were then asked to indicate whether they have at times felt disadvantaged because of being a (prospective) parent. Scale responses were 1 (never), 2 (almost never), 3 (now and then), 4 (often), and 5 (very often). Although this item does not directly ask individuals to report discrimination, we find in previous research that participants are wary of labelling incidents as discriminatory, whereas the present item forms less of a barrier to reporting discrimination. It has also been shown to be correlated with items that more directly measure discrimination in a work context (e.g. I am disadvantaged with respect to career opportunities, $r[1388] = .56$; Otten & Stroebe, 2011). In addition, participants were asked to (optionally) briefly describe the event they experienced. One hundred and sixty-four participants described an event, and these were typical of the kinds of events that are given as examples of parental discrimination (Williams & Segal,

¹Sixteen participants did not reach the gender variable.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and correlations for all measures

Measures	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	1	2	3	4	5
1. Perceptions of discrimination	2.09	1.07	340	–	–.18**	.33***	.25***	–.21***
2. Action	2.27	1.30	210		–	–.08	–.19**	.21**
3. Burnout (distancing)	2.35	1.20	320			–	.65***	–.32***
4. Burnout (exhaustion) ^a	2.51	1.08	320				–	–.46***
5. Work–home self-efficacy	3.59	0.75	320					–

^aThe burnout means are comparable to levels of burnout reported in other studies on burnout in the Netherlands (e.g. Langelaan, Bakker, van Doornen, & Schaufeli, 2006; Schaufeli, Bakker, & van Rhenen, 2009).

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

2003), ranging from negative reactions to one's parenthood (e.g. not being seen as equally competent), to inflexible work contexts (e.g. being expected at meetings in the evening), to not being promoted or taken on for a job.

Action (tendency) against discrimination followed upon the perception of discrimination question and consisted of one item 'to what extent did you have the feeling you could take action against this', ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much). We did not administer this measure to participants who scored 1 on perceptions of discrimination ($N = 127$) as this question was not applicable to them. Consequently N varies in the present sample, and action-related analyses were conducted among participants who scored higher than 1 on perceptions of discrimination.² In order to establish validity of the action tendency measure we also included an open question asking people (optionally) to indicate whether and, if yes, what kind of action they had taken. We coded this question into a dichotomous variable (no action versus action described) and found that it indeed correlated with action tendency, $r[130] = .37$, $p < .001$).

Work/home self-efficacy included 5 items (e.g. I am confident that I can achieve a balance in which I can both fulfil work and private commitments; $\alpha = .89$) from Lapierre, Van Steenberghe, Kluwer, and Peeters (2015). The scale is based on items from Hennessy and Lent (2008). Scale endpoints ranged from 1 ('totally disagree') to 5 ('totally agree').

*Burnout*³ consisted of the five item subscale 'Exhaustion' (e.g. at the end of a workday, I feel empty; $\alpha = .90$) and the four item subscale 'Distancing' (e.g. I realize I have gained too much distance with regard to my work; $\alpha = .87$) of the Utrecht Burnout Scale (UBOS-A; Schaufeli & Van Dierendonck, 2000). Scale responses ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

RESULTS

Ninety-four participants (16 of whom did not proceed beyond the first variable) who did not reach the main independent measure (i.e. perceptions of discrimination)⁴ were excluded from analyses, leaving 340 respondents (24 men; 316 women; $M_{\text{age}} = 34.62$;

²This sample consisted of 12 men and 198 women with demographics comparable to the larger sample: mean age = 34.72 ($SD = 4.13$); mean number of children = 1.75 ($SD = .74$).

³Because the current research was part of a larger data set, this variable is also used in a study on the role of the home base as a predictor of burnout (Missler et al., 2013).

⁴There was no drop in participation for this variable compared to the previous, indicating that dropout was not due to having to answer a question about discrimination.

Table 2. Path coefficients and indirect effects for simultaneous mediation by burnout and WSE

	Path coefficients				Indirect effects
	To BD	To BU	To WSE	To A	Bootstrap 95%CI
Mediation route 1 (BD)					
From D	.407 (.093)			-.261 (.120)	
From BD				.152 (.110)	
D->BD->A					[-.021, .189]
Mediation route 2 (BE)					
From D		.284 (.095)		-.261 (.120)	
From BE				-.198 (.116)	
D->BE->A					[-.171, -.001]
Mediation route 3 (WSE)					
From D			-.221 (.090)	-.261 (.120)	
From WSE				.182 (.100)	
D->WSE->A					[-.117, .001]

Note. $N = 202$

BD = burnout; distancing; BE = burnout: exhaustion; D = perception of discrimination, A = action against discrimination; WSE = work-home self-efficacy; CI = confidence interval

SD=4.38) for our main analyses. See also Table 1 for descriptives of the main dependent measures.

To test our prediction that perceptions of discrimination are negatively related to action in response to discrimination, we conducted regression analyses with standardized perceptions of discrimination as predictor variable and action against discrimination as criterion variable. As predicted, higher perceptions of discrimination were related to lower perceived action potential against discrimination (see Table 2).

To test whether perceptions of discrimination are negatively related to action because of higher levels of burnout (H1) and lower levels of self-efficacy with respect to work/family balance (H2), we conducted mediation analyses with perceptions of discrimination as the independent variable, action as the criterion variable and exhaustion/distancing burnout and WSE as the mediators.⁵ We utilized the SPSS Process macro designed by Hayes (Hayes, 2013; model 4). We requested 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals using 50 000 resamples (Hayes, 2013). Mediation is considered significant when the 95% confidence interval of a mediator does not contain zero.

We first considered separate mediation and analysed the individual effects of our mediators on action. For burnout, results partially confirmed hypothesis 1. Counter to hypothesis 1, the indirect effect of perceptions of discrimination on action through the *distancing* subscale of burnout was not significant (95% confidence interval [-.09, .06]). Although perceptions of discrimination were related to higher levels of distancing, distancing was not related to action against discrimination. Yet, conform hypothesis 1, the indirect effect through the *'exhaustion'* subscale of burnout was significant (95% confidence

⁵We also ran regression analyses with potential control variables on all variables in our model. These were not included in our model due to statistical concerns: it would have led to a doubling of the number of variables in the model and decreased our sample size as not all participants completed these measures ($N = 171$). *Control variables* were income (above/below median Dutch income), family status (living alone/with partner), number of children (1/more than 1) and number of children under 4 (1/more than one under 4). Regression analyses revealed no significant effects on independent, mediating, or dependent measures, $\beta_s < .13$, $t_s < 1.72$, $p > .09$.

interval $[-.15, -.01]$). Higher perceptions of discrimination were negatively related to action via higher levels of exhaustion.

As predicted (H2), the indirect effect of perceptions of discrimination on action against discrimination through *work-home self-efficacy* was significant (95% confidence interval $[-.13, -.01]$). Perceptions of discrimination were related to lower levels of WSE which in turn were associated with lesser perceived ability to take action against discrimination.

We also conducted simultaneous mediation analyses to assess the relative strength of each mediator. In these analyses confidence intervals varied. This is normal in bootstrapping procedures to assess mediation and is more likely to happen when mediators are fairly highly correlated ($r = -.46$) (Hayes, 2013). Consequently, it was not possible to reach a definite conclusion regarding which mediator was stronger as results varied regarding which mediator was significant. Nevertheless, analyses in which all three potential mediators were included indicated no indirect effects of perceptions of discrimination through the *distancing* subscale of burnout (95% confidence interval $[-.02, .19]$) or through work home self efficacy (95% confidence interval $[-.12, .001]$). The indirect effect of perception of discrimination through '*exhaustion*' was significant (95% confidence interval $[-.17, -.001]$) (see Table 2).

*Alternative models*⁶. Given that our data are cross sectional in nature, it is important to examine alternative causal models. We first tested for reverse mediation: It seemed possible that burnout and WSE affect perceptions of discrimination, which in turn reduces action tendencies. Results provided support for an indirect effect of both burnout and WSE through perceptions of discrimination on action (95% confidence interval $[-.10, -.004]$ and $[.004, .09]$, respectively), indicating that burnout and lower levels of WSE are related to higher levels of perceptions of discrimination and in turn lower levels of action.

Second, because job resources and perceived control have been considered as both mediators and moderators of the link between stressors (e.g. discrimination) and burnout (e.g. Taris, Bakker, Schaufeli, Stoffelsen, & van Dierendonck, 2005), we also tested whether the relation between perceptions of discrimination and the burnout exhaustion dimension was mediated or moderated by work-home self-efficacy. There was no evidence of mediation of WSE of the relation between discrimination and exhaustion (95% confidence interval $[.05, .17]$) or of moderation by WSE of the discrimination-exhaustion relation (interaction of self-efficacy and perceptions of discrimination on burnout: $\beta = -0.07$, $t(316) = -1.34$, n.s.).

A final possibility is that action tendency moderates the relation between perceptions of discrimination and burnout or WSE. Prior research has shown that among targets who perceive discrimination as pervasive, those who take action against discrimination have higher levels of well-being (e.g. Foster, 2009, 2014). The idea underlying this work is that taking action against discrimination is empowering and consequently a boost to well-being. Therefore, one might also predict a moderation of perception of discrimination by action on burnout and WSE. This model was not supported as the interaction effect of perceptions of discrimination and action on both burnout and WSE was not significant, $\beta = .01$, $t(198) = .11$, n.s. and $\beta = -.08$, $t(198) = -.96$, n.s.

⁶Potentially a third variable might be associated with discrimination perception and burnout, such as neuroticism. Although it is impossible to fully rule out alternative variables, our data set included a measure of negative affect (associated with neuroticism) which did not mediate the perception of discrimination-action relationship (95%CI $[-.07$ and $.01]$).

These alternative analyses reveal that, although we can rule out a number of alternative causal models, we cannot statistically rule out the possibility that participants who suffer from burnout and have low levels of work-home self-efficacy are more likely to perceive themselves a target of and take less action against discrimination. We come back to this in the discussion section.

DISCUSSION

The present work stresses the importance of considering a resource approach in studying action in response to experiences of discrimination. In doing so we extend prior approaches that have focused on how the context of discrimination (e.g. perceived ambiguity; Barreto & Ellemers, 2005) affects action against discrimination to study whether being the target of discrimination undermines action because it impacts the mental resources of working parents. Perceived discrimination as a working parent has received relatively little research attention, yet this group is particularly interesting as the disadvantage experienced refers to two domains, work and family, which are central to individuals.

Indeed, in line with predictions, results revealed that the exhaustion dimension of burnout and work-home self-efficacy separately mediated the relation between perceptions of and actions against discrimination. The distancing dimension of burnout did not mediate. It is possible that exhaustion burnout is the more direct stress response, whereas distancing represents the interpersonal context in which burnout occurs, also referring to quite personal work judgments (e.g. 'I have doubts about the usefulness of my work') that may be less relevant to actual action against persons/an organization. Overall our results indicate that exhaustion burnout and work-home self-efficacy may be important ingredients in understanding why working parents may fail to act against discrimination.

When interpreting the results of the present study it is important to note that mediations became weaker when we included both burnout and WSE in the analyses. In the present analyses, exhaustion continued to mediate whereas WSE became non-significant. Yet, as described in the results section, confidence intervals varied for these mediators across analyses, indicating that both mediators are central. Thus one should be wary of concluding which is strongest. This is not surprising given the relatively high (negative) correlation between exhaustion burnout and WSE, which seems to indicate that work-home self-efficacy and feelings of exhaustion burnout are intricately linked. Indeed, perceived ineffectiveness at work is mentioned as one of the dimensions of burnout that could also relate to exhaustion burnout (Maslach et al., 2001). Possibly, for working parents, the feeling one lacks efficacy, not just at work but also at home, may constitute part of the symptomatology of burnout. Research on work-family conflict reveals that perceived problems in combining work and family impact performance in a work context, *as well as* behaviour in the family domain (e.g. Greenhaus & Powell, 2003). Thus, it may be important to also pursue implications for the family domain such as the potential impact of discrimination on investment in one's family.

Our research also contributes to the collective action literature regarding action by structurally disadvantaged groups (van Zomeren et al., 2008). The finding that discrimination reduces action likelihood is interesting in light of collective action research revealing that (collectively) experienced disadvantage can increase, rather than decrease, action on behalf of one's group (e.g. Mendes et al., 2008; van Zomeren et al., 2008). The present research

concerns individual experiences of injustice that are due to being part of a collective/group. Ironically, the higher perceptions of discrimination, the greater should be the necessity of reporting discrimination. Indeed, this might also be predicted by perspectives that link failure to act out against discrimination to lack of perception of discrimination (e.g. Ellemers & Barreto, 2009). Yet, we find it decreased action likelihood. As Mendes et al. (2008) outline, although discrimination may induce short-term activation responses, in the long term it becomes a chronic stressor that undermines well-being. As we argue, this is because being exposed to discrimination over and over again potentially undermines the resources to engage in action (see also Branscombe et al., 1999; Stroebe et al., 2011). Underlying the exhaustion and lack of action relation may be the feeling that, in the face of frequent discrimination, one has little control over one's life, and that society is apparently not the just place one had hoped it was (e.g. Branscombe et al., 1999; Inzlicht et al., 2006; Stroebe et al., 2011).

Despite this support for our theorizing we acknowledge conceptual and methodological limitations of our work. The cross-sectional nature of our study does not allow us to make causal statements. Although we could rule out a number of possibilities, the fact that we also found reverse mediation indicates that WSE or burnout might increase perceptions of discrimination rather than the opposite relation. This is an interesting alternative that intuitively makes sense. However, from a theoretical perspective, it is less supported than our proposed causal model for a number of reasons. Generally, targets are often less rather than more likely to report discrimination—and when they report discrimination their reports are fairly accurate and do concern discrimination (e.g. Crosby, 1984; Stroebe, Barreto, & Ellemers, 2010). Also, individuals who are more vulnerable, as may be the case when suffering from burnout and low levels of WSE, are likely to make more self-directed attributions, blaming themselves rather than, as in the case of discrimination, someone else (Cihangir, Barreto, & Ellemers, 2010). Moreover, in assessing causality, perceptions of unfairness at work have, also in longitudinal research, been shown to be a precursor rather than an outcome of burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 2008; Maslach et al., 2001). Based on this reasoning, studies that have looked at burnout and discrimination so far have considered the burnout to discrimination pathway. From a theoretical point of view there was good reason to test the present causal model (see also Hayes, 2013). Yet we note that future research is needed that considers this question longitudinally.

In addition, it is important to realize that our sample consisted of few men ($N=30$), many of who reported no discrimination experiences. This could indicate that men experience less discrimination as a parent at work than women. It would be consistent with research that shows that working mothers are held to stricter standards than working fathers and the idea that women may experience a 'maternal wall' in pursuing their careers (Crosby et al., 2004; Fuegen, Biernat, Haines, & Deaux, 2004). Yet, such a conclusion requires future research with a larger sample of men.

In addition we had to rely on one item measures of perceptions of and action in response to discrimination which may be less reliable than scales using multiple items (but see Burisch, 1997). Yet our action against discrimination item was correlated with a dichotomous action measure in which people did or did not describe action taken ($r=.37$). Furthermore, our perception of discrimination item was highly correlated with other discrimination measures in previous research (Otten & Stroebe, 2011).

One might wonder how 'big an issue' being disadvantaged as a parent is, with a 2.1 mean on a 5 point scale of perceptions of discrimination. Yet, as noted above, targets are generally

conservative in their reports of discrimination, and mean level responses were comparable to those looking at many types of perceived disadvantage in a large organization in the Netherlands (Stroebe & Otten, 2013). Furthermore, as outlined in the method section, incidents of disadvantage listed by participants were not negligible and corresponded to incidents that have been labelled as discrimination (e.g. Williams & Segal, 2003).

From a practical perspective the present study has interesting implications for interventions to bolster resources and potentially increase action tendencies in response to disadvantage. In studying the effectiveness of interventions, Maslach et al. have argued that it is important to not only focus on changing the individual (addressing individual burnout, coping strategies) but also the organizational context such as the values communicated by the organization. The (lack of) values employees perceive in an organization, rather than actual work circumstances, may affect burnout. Consistent with this assumption, interventions that have been successful in reducing burnout over time were those in which employees came together in weekly sessions within their company and discussed how to reduce perceived inequity within their company (Van Dierendonck, Schaufeli, & Buunk, 1998). The knowledge that perceptions of disadvantage because of parenthood are related to burnout may provide a potential to intervene both at the company and the individual level. At the company level, companies that show that they value parenthood and translate this into actual policy such as flexibility in working times or no evening meetings—some of the experiences of disadvantage that were mentioned by our sample—may alleviate some of the problems experienced by working parents and possibly reduce levels of exhaustion burnout. At the same time, such an intervention carries the danger of legitimizing other potential disadvantages (e.g. failure to grant promotion), as communicating fair policies may blind people to other injustices taking place in their company (e.g. Jackman, 1994; Saguy, Tausch, Dovidio, & Pratto, 2009).

At an individual level one might help parents reframe the situation, moving away from a focus on failure and perceived shortcomings as a parent or employee. Here the knowledge that perceptions of discrimination can impact perceived WSE may provide an important ground for intervention. Research on work family conflict reveals that family life can also facilitate performance at work and give energy (Van Steenbergen, Ellemers, & Mooijaart, 2007). Focusing parents on the advantages of having a family for work performance, and possibly offering time management/coaching to deal with potential family constraints (e.g. having to leave work at set times), may increase feelings of WSE and empower individuals to deal with the disadvantages they experience at work.

In conclusion, the present work illustrates the importance of understanding the disadvantages that parents experience at work, as well as their ability to take action against them. Practically, this work suggests interventions to increase action against discrimination (e.g. by increasing WSE). Theoretically, it suggests a new route, the resource route, to understanding the relation between perceptions of and action against discrimination.

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