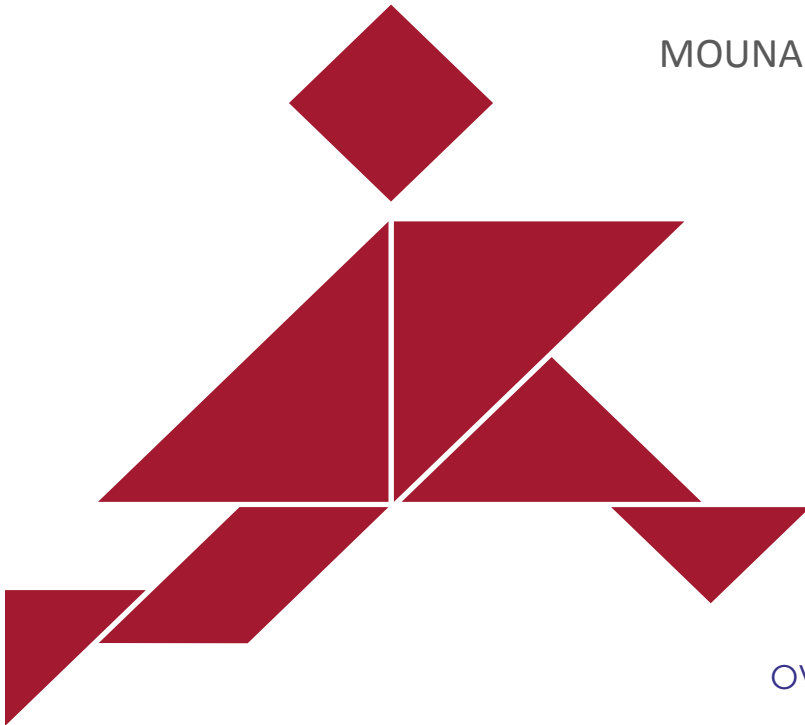


COPING WITH STRUCTURAL DISADVANTAGE: OVERCOMING NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF PERCEIVED BARRIERS THROUGH COLLECTIVE SELF-DEFINITIONS

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OVERCOMING VULNERABILITY: LIFE COURSE PERSPECTIVES

WHAT WE DO, HOW WE DO IT, WHY WE DO IT THIS WAY?

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What? The study of coping with structural disadvantage: socially-induced, but, personally-felt “stressors”.

How?

- From the perspective of the disadvantaged themselves.
- Focusing on the role of collective identities (subjective experiences as group member).

Why?

- “Certain kind of life exigencies seem to be particularly resistant to individual coping effort...” Pearling (1991:267)
 - Subjective experience as group member changes the stress experience (Outten et al., 2009, Haslam & Reicher, 2006).
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MEMBERSHIP AS A SOURCE OF SYSTEMATIC STRESS & ITS PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Higher likelihood of being target of social devaluation and discrimination (Turner et al., 1995)

➔ From a looking glass approach to the self (Cooley, 1956): risk of internalizing the negative view held by society.

Prediction: adverse consequences on self-esteem.

During critical life transitions: structural restriction of choices and opportunities (McWhirter & Luzzo, 1996; McWhirter, 1997)

➔ From an efficacy based approach to the self (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983) :
Pervasive barriers to one's plans ➔ sense of efficacy ➔ self-esteem.

(GENERAL & SPECIFIC) RESEARCH QUESTION

But : Exposure does not need necessarily to vulnerability!

General RQ: What helps members of such groups to overcome negative psychological implications?

From a group-based approach to coping (Haslam, et al., 2005, Haslam & Reicher, 2006):

- Subjective experience as a group member can buffer negative effects of stressors on psychological well-being.
- Common identities provide a basis for group members to receive and benefit from social support.

Specific RQ: Can collective-identities (membership as “identity”) help coping with socially-induced stressors? (and if yes, how?)

COLLECTIVE-IDENTITIES AS A BUFFER AGAINST GROUP'S DEVALUATION/ DISCRIMINATION

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Threat-protection Perspective:

- *Rejection-identification hypothesis* (Branscombe, et al., 1999): Rejection → threat → more identification with those who afford a sense of protection and acceptance.
- *Discounting Hypothesis* (Crocker & Major, 1989): centrality of group membership → more attribution to discriminations → protects from self-blame by blaming an external agent.

Challenge-Agency perspective:

- *Identification as empowerment*: Prior identification helps **not to feel threatened** when facing group devaluation (Leach, et al., 2010) and allows to consider **more active coping options** (Leach, et al., 2010; Outten, et al., 2009, Mummendey, et al., 1999).
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ONE STEP FURTHER...

Focus only on reaction to actual group-devaluation or discrimination.

While:

- Membership in a socially disadvantaged group has direct and lasting effects on life trajectories and opportunities.
 - The hypothesized psychological processes can operate also when coping with those less obvious manifestations of structural disadvantage.
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GOALS OF THIS STUDY

Combining the group-based approach of coping with a life course perspective.

Further explore psychological processes behind this buffering effect, specifically, from the emerging agentic perspective.

How?

- Follow adolescents and young adults from modest socio-economic background during their transition to adulthood.
 - Explore their personal projects (Little, 1983; Little, Salmela-Aro, & Phillips, 2007), perception of barriers to those projects (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2000; McWhirter, 1997), and its psychological consequences.
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HYPOTHESIS

- H1: The more participants perceive barriers to their life project, the lower their self-esteem will be
 - Perception of barriers negatively affects self-esteem.
 - H2: Collective self-definitions, when available, buffer the negative effect of perceived barriers on self-esteem
 - The negative effect of barriers on self-esteem is stronger when collective self-definitions are not available.
 - H3: The moderation effect of collective self-definitions is mediated by protecting one's sense of efficacy to overcome one's problems.
 - Perceived barriers exert a negative effect on self esteem through lowering one's sense of efficacy to cope, but only when collective self-definitions are not available.
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METHOD – PARTICIPANTS

	COFOP	ML
Sample size	137	228
Age: M (SD)	18.22 (1.97)	24.65 (4.01)
Women	39%	49%
Swiss nationality	49%	86%

Centre d'Orientation et de formation Professionnelle (COFOP): vocational school.
Municipality of Lausanne (ML): young employees (<30) or apprentices affiliated to the municipality of Lausanne.

METHOD – MEASURES

- Self-esteem

5 items scale, adapted from the Rosenberg Global Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1979). Typical Item: “I feel that I have a number of good qualities”

Items combined on a scale ($\alpha = .80$).

- Appraised Coping Efficacy

Single-item “I have confidence in my ability to overcome the problems in my life”.

- Perceived barriers to one’s project

Personal Project Analysis (Little, 1983)

List of 3 projects → circle the most important one to you.

While thinking about this project, to which extent: “Despite my best efforts, there are a lot of barriers that might prevent me from achieving this project”.

METHOD – MEASURES

Who I am? Categories used in Self-Definitions

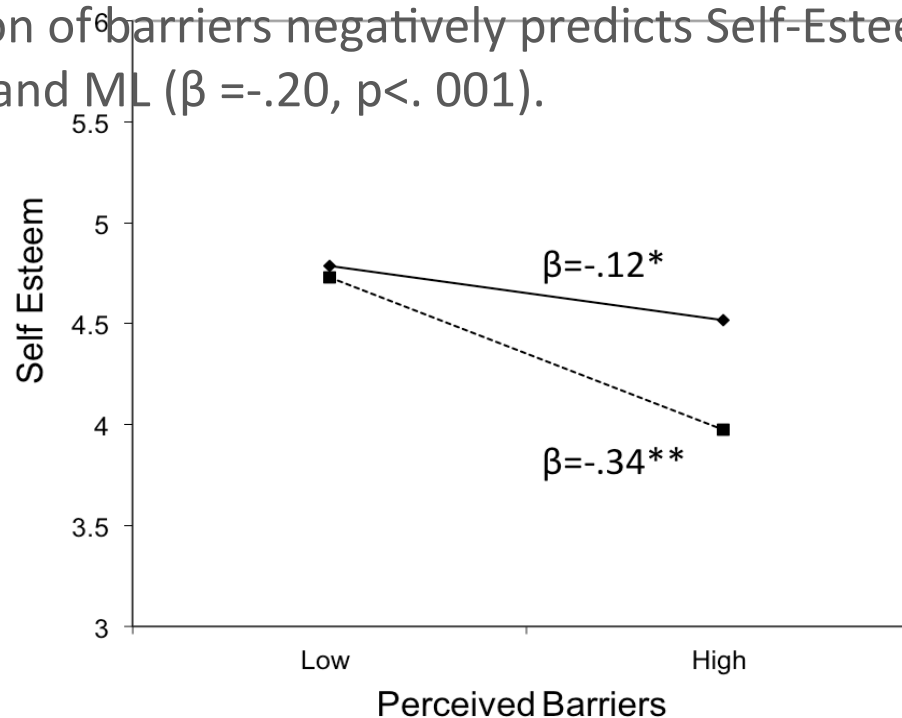
Structural/relational Self-Definitions	Ethno-national, eg. « Portugais », « étranger » Vocational-Professional: « Apprenti », « mécanicien » Relational, eg : « membre de ma famille », « mes amis »
Personal Self-Definitions	Personal attributes: eg. “attentive”, “ouvert” Personal activities: eg. “J’aime le foot”, “danseuse”

➔ Level of Self Definition (LSD)

- LSD= Collective when the most important self-definition is a structural or relational group.
 - LSD=Personal when the most important self-definition is a physical or personal attribute or activity.
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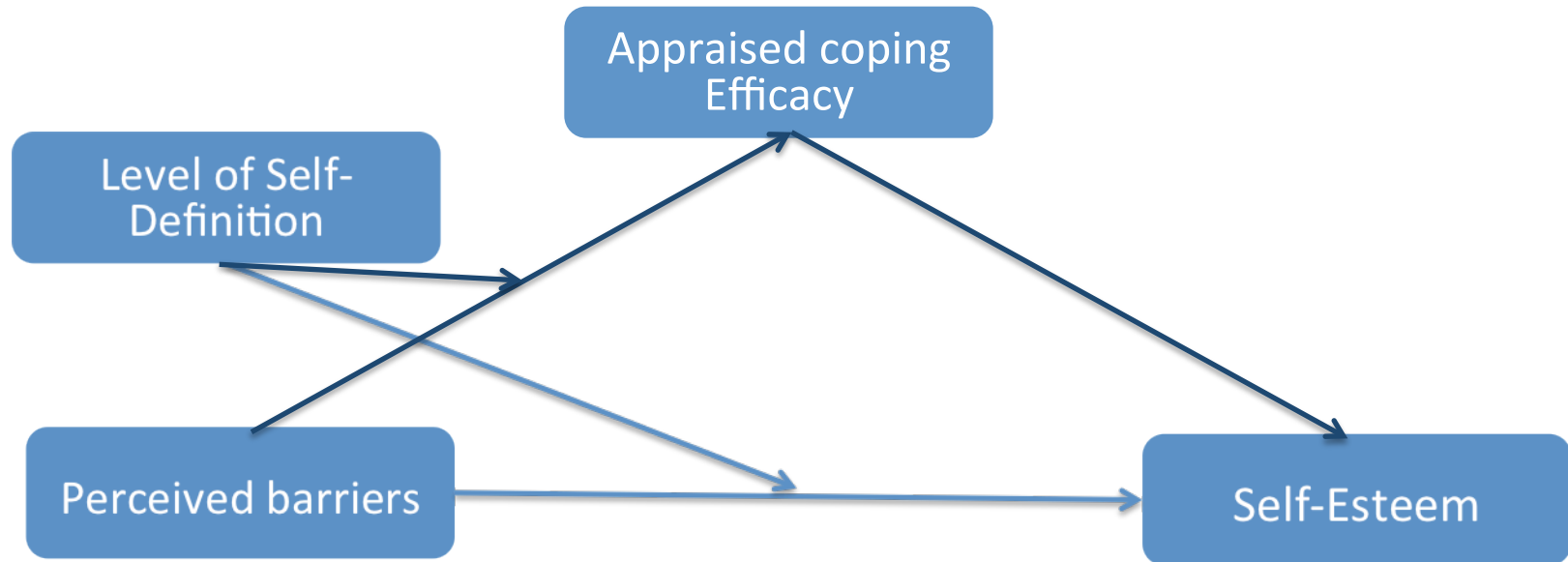
RESULTS

Perception of barriers negatively predicts Self-Esteem: COFOP ($\beta = -.22$, $p < .001$) and ML ($\beta = -.20$, $p < .001$).



The effect of perceived barriers on Self Esteem according to the two levels of Self-Definition (Solid Line= Collective, Dotted line=Personal. $^ < .05$, $^{**} < .001$)*

MEDIATED MODERATION: THE MODEL



Model for testing mediation of the buffering effect of collective self-definitions on self-esteem through appraised coping efficacy

MEDIATED MODERATION: RESULTS

Significant indirect effect of the interaction term (indirect effect= .11) → the moderation is mediated.

Conditional indirect effect		
	<i>Indirect effect</i>	<i>95% bootstrap confidence interval</i>
LSD=Personal	-.1139	-.2209 to -.0292
LSD =Collective	0.0002	-.0594 to 0.0608

→ Perceived barriers exerts a negative effect on self esteem through lowering one's sense of efficacy to cope, but this indirect effect exist only for participants who self-define themselves at a Personal-level.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

- The more our participants perceived barriers to their life projects; the lower was the self-esteem they reported.
 - Collective self-definitions moderate the negative effect of perceived barriers on self-esteem.
 - When collective definitions are available, even if participants recognize high barriers, this does not lower their sense of efficacy, and hence, less harm their self-esteem.
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DISCUSSION

- Collective identities seem to be particularly relevant for coping with group devaluation (previous studies) but also with structural constraints on the life-course choices (current study).
 - Usually: group-based processes are studied **as base for exclusion, conflicts and inequalities**, this trend should not hide their role **as base for empowerment, specifically** for the most disadvantaged.
 - When not available, it seems to be a higher risk factor for members of socially disadvantaged groups, given that they are more exposed!
 - Need for further exploration of the conditions under which a **protective/empowering sense of belonging** develops (or fails to develop) giving the low social status of the group → longitudinal and qualitative explorations.
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FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Buffering effect of collective identities

- Replications of the effect with other populations
- Specifically: role of ethnic identity for immigrants and vocational identity for apprentices

Further explore status effect (Immigrants Vs Swiss, low Vs high material-status & educational-status (apprentices Vs students))

On two levels:

- Perception of barriers
 - Role of collective self-definitions on overcoming negative effects of perceived barriers
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THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND ATTENTION

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