

Policewomen Acting in Self-Defense: Can Psychological Disengagement Protect Self-Esteem From the Negative Outcomes of Relative Deprivation?

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The role of 2 components of psychological disengagement (discounting and devaluing) in the relation between personal relative deprivation and self-esteem was explored in 3 samples of policewomen. Path analyses conducted with the 3 samples revealed that stronger feelings of personal relative deprivation resulted in stronger discounting of work evaluations, which in turn led to devaluing the importance of police work. A negative relation between discounting and self-esteem was observed in all samples. Other related outcomes of disengagement, professional withdrawal and stress, were also evaluated.

Keywords: relative deprivation, psychological disengagement, self-esteem

Employment equity in Canada and affirmative action in the United States have facilitated the access of women into traditionally male-dominated jobs. This change in the composition of the workforce is still met with some resistance on the part of men. The case of women in the police force is of particular interest. Police work has been considered a man's job because of its heavy emphasis on physical strength and danger (Brodeur, 2003; Gerber, 2001). The idea of women doing such work challenges the masculine image of the job. Dealing with violence and criminals is not considered "feminine" in our society (Hunt, 1990). In fact, Canadian women had to force their entry into police work through the court (Beauchesne, 2001). Harassment, discrimination, and exclusion from certain tasks associated with masculinity were part of the daily lives of the female pioneers in law enforcement (Beauchesne, 2001).

Thirty years after their forced entry into law enforcement, the situation of women has changed. For example, Canadian policewomen have made substantial gains in terms of numerical representation: Their presence in this field of work increased from 0.6% in 1965 to 15.3% in 2002 (Statistics Canada, 2002). This mirrors the progression of women in law enforcement in the United States, where they now account for 14.8% of officers (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2003). Despite this progress, the police milieu remains a

challenging work environment for women. Women are still under-represented (Centre Canadien de la Statistique Juridique, 2000) and concentrated in traditional and dead-end sectors of the police force (Gerber, 2001). Other expressions of resentment toward women in blue are manifested in sexual harassment (Alvesson & Billing, 1997), discrimination in job conditions, assignments, evaluations of performance (Linden & Fillmore, 1993), and promotions (S. G. Walker, 1993).

What price do policewomen have to pay to remain in a work environment where they are endured after not being welcomed? What is the toll of harassment and sex discrimination? This article addresses these questions in two ways. First, we identify and evaluate strategies women use to feel good about themselves when their competence is often challenged by their male colleagues and superiors. This is achieved in light of two concepts associated with the self-esteem of individuals placed in disadvantageous situations on account of their group membership: personal relative deprivation and psychological disengagement. The integration of knowledge generated by research on these two concepts is the basis of a predictive model designed to determine whether psychological disengagement can protect the self-esteem of those experiencing discrimination. Second, we explore the related outcomes of discrimination beyond self-esteem by taking into consideration professional withdrawal and stress.

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Relative Deprivation

The concept of *relative deprivation* was the first step for our investigation of the outcomes of personal disadvantage based on group membership. This concept was developed to account for the reactions of those placed in disadvantageous situations (Runciman, 1966). At the personal level, it is defined as a feeling of dissatisfaction experienced following negative comparisons of one's situation with that of others (Crosby, 1976). According to this definition, personal relative deprivation includes two components. The

cognitive component refers to personal comparisons with similar or dissimilar others. The *affective* component includes dissatisfaction due to perceived differences between the self and others, in this case male colleagues. For example, a policewoman may feel discontent after recognizing that her male colleagues have better job assignments and evaluations of performance.

Personal relative deprivation was associated with lowered self-esteem in both experimental (I. Walker, 1999) and correlational (Lagacé, 2003; Tougas, Lagacé, de la Sablonnière, & Kocum, 2004) studies. For example, a recent study revealed that personal relative deprivation resulted in lowered self-esteem among young retirees who reported experiencing age discrimination at the end of their careers (Tougas et al., 2004). This is congruent with research relating experiences of discriminatory treatment to poor self-esteem (for a review of research in this area, see Major, Quinton, & McCoy, 2002).

Psychological Disengagement

Whereas studies on relative deprivation show a direct negative link between discrimination and self-esteem, those on psychological disengagement suggest a more complex course that engenders positive effects on self-regard. Psychological disengagement was proposed to explain why people maintain positive self-esteem in degrading circumstances (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998; Major & Schmader, 1998, 2001; Major, Spencer, Schmader, Wolfe, & Crocker, 1998; Schmader, Major, Eccleston, & McCoy, 2001; Schmader, Major, & Gramzow, 2001). *Psychological disengagement* refers to a dissociation of self-esteem from feedback received in domains (i.e., education, work, or sports) where a person is discriminated against because of membership in a devalued group (Crocker et al., 1998). Through psychological disengagement, individuals protect themselves from threats or blows to their self-esteem.

Psychological disengagement can be attained via two roads (Crocker et al., 1998; Major & Schmader, 1998, 2001; Schmader, Major, & Gramzow, 2001). The first pathway to psychological disengagement is the devaluation of an activity such as work. Devaluation is more likely to occur when individuals believe that their performance evaluation is based on the reputation of their in-group rather than merit. By devaluing the activity, it becomes less important in the definition of individuals. For example, pervasive negative views of the role and contribution of women in the police force may render the job less important in the self-appraisals of policewomen. Psychological retreat from socially valued domains such as education and work may produce negative consequences, because this devaluation could reinforce the reputation of the already disadvantaged group (Croizet & Martinot, 2003).

Another, perhaps less radical, path to disengagement is discounting the validity of feedback received altogether. This may occur when it is perceived that the putative standing of the group plays a central role in one's evaluation (Major & Schmader, 1998; Schmader, Major, & Gramzow, 2001). By attributing no validity to feedback received or performance appraisals, for example, individuals protect their self-esteem from discriminatory evaluations. By discounting opinions of others, whether colleagues or superiors, evaluations become less relevant to feelings of self-worth. This pathway has the advantage of protecting self-esteem without

reducing the value of socially important domains such as work (Croizet & Martinot, 2003).

According to some analysts, psychological disengagement is a temporary strategy used in response to individual threats, such as poor feedback, and personal experiences of prejudice and discrimination (Crocker et al., 1998; Major et al., 1998; Major & Schmader, 1998; Schmader, Major, & Gramzow, 2001). When people receive poor feedback because of their gender or race, they are inclined to turn to discounting and devaluing strategies to protect themselves (Schmader, Major, & Gramzow, 2001). Major and Schmader (1998) also suggested that both psychological disengagement strategies would have a positive effect on self-esteem. However, correlational studies did not produce consistent results (Major & Schmader, 1998, 2001; Schmader, Major, & Gramzow, 2001). Among African Americans, for example, personal outcomes, as measured by college grade point average, were not associated with strategies of disengagement (Schmader, Major, & Gramzow, 2001). Among Latinos, grade point average was only associated with devaluing. These findings do not invalidate hypotheses but suggest that a more sensitive measure of the experience of personal discrimination may be required. In previous studies, it was shown that being disadvantaged does not always trigger negative feelings (Crosby, 1982; Olson & Hafer, 2001). Some people accept their situation, whereas others resent it. It is only in the latter case that reactions to differential treatment are observed (Dubé & Guimond, 1986; Guimond & Dubé-Simard, 1983). Personal relative deprivation based on out-group comparisons considers both perception and resentment of differential treatment based on membership in a socially devalued group. As such, it provides a more stringent test of psychological disengagement hypotheses at the personal level.

Overview of Studies

The three studies presented in this article were conducted on groups of active policewomen whose ability to serve and protect was often challenged by male colleagues and superiors. The primary purpose of the first study was to relate the concepts of personal relative deprivation, psychological disengagement, and self-esteem. More precisely, the first study determined whether psychological disengagement acts as a mediator of the relation between personal relative deprivation and self-esteem.

The second study was designed to replicate findings obtained in the first study and to reexamine the relation between relative deprivation and job commitment (Beaton & Tougas, 1997). By considering psychological disengagement and self-esteem, a more complex pathway was evaluated. Women abandon nontraditional jobs or leave the workforce completely at a high rate (Correctional Service of Canada, 1992). It is important to determine whether and how professional withdrawal is related to psychological disengagement and self-esteem when feelings of personal relative deprivation develop.

The third study aimed to replicate the extended model of the second study and to consider another consequence of personal relative deprivation, that is, perceived stress (Beaton & Tougas, 1997). This relation was examined in an attempt to determine whether psychological disengagement and self-esteem can reduce stress by acting as mediators of the relation between personal relative deprivation and perceived stress.

Study 1

The first study provided a further test of the proposed, but not confirmed, link between personal experiences of discrimination and psychological disengagement (Major & Schmader, 2001; Schmader, Major, & Gramzow, 2001). Evaluating both perception and resentment of unequal treatment, as measured by personal relative deprivation, was a way to more accurately test paths leading to the adoption of the two psychological disengagement strategies. Hypotheses derived from the literature on psychological disengagement were included in a predictive model, which predicts that the more women feel personally deprived, the more they become psychologically disengaged through discounting and devaluing. Moreover, the model posits that both discounting and devaluing have a positive effect on self-esteem. As such, the model evaluates whether psychological disengagement protects self-esteem when personal relative deprivation is experienced.

Method

Participants

The participants were policewomen employed by a Canadian municipality. Envelopes containing a questionnaire; a letter cosigned by the researchers, the Chief of Police and the president of the union; and a stamped return envelope were mailed by police representatives to the homes of 237 policewomen. The letter described the goals of the study and assured policewomen of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. A recorded message describing the goal of the survey was left by police representatives on the office voice mail of policewomen on the day questionnaires were mailed. Police representatives also sent a reminder message 2 weeks after the mailing.

In all, 144 policewomen returned the questionnaire. Two questionnaires were eliminated from the sample because more than 75% of the questions were unanswered. On average, the remaining 142 participants were 30.44 years of age and had accumulated 7.72 years of service. A total of 31.2% had a university degree, 68% were married, and 52.7% had one or more children.

Questionnaire

The first section of the questionnaire gathered sociodemographic information such as age, years of service, level of education, and marital status of participants. A focus group was organized prior to the survey to ensure that items included in the questionnaire were well adapted to the situation of policewomen. Eight policewomen were selected by the police authorities to participate in the focus group. The selection was made to include policewomen of different ages and years of service. In light of comments, some questions were reworded and others discarded. In the following, the items included in the questionnaire are grouped according to the concepts they were designed to measure. Some responses, identified by an asterisk, were reverse coded to match the label of the measured concept. Answers were recorded on 5-point Likert-type scales where 1 indicated *not at all* and 5 *absolutely*.

Personal relative deprivation. Measures of personal relative deprivation used in previous studies were adapted to reflect comments of policewomen during the focus group (Beaton & Tougas, 1997; Tougas, Beaton, & Veilleux, 1991). The following four items evaluated the cognitive component of personal relative deprivation: "In comparison with my male colleagues, I am more often left out of certain activities"; "In comparison with my male colleagues, I am more often mocked and the target of sarcastic remarks"; "In comparison with my male colleagues, my abilities are more often questioned"; "In terms of job assignments, I am treated the

same way as my male colleagues."* The affective component was measured by the following item: "I am satisfied with my professional situation."* Responses were added and averaged to form a composite score (Cronbach's $\alpha = .78$).

Psychological disengagement. The measures of psychological disengagement were influenced by previous work (Crocker & Major, 1989; Major & Crocker, 1993). Although the original psychological disengagement measure, the Intellectual Orientation Inventory, referred to academic achievement, many items were adapted to the situation of policewomen. The two scales were designed to measure discounting and devaluing at work in the police force. An exploratory principal-components analysis with a varimax rotation confirmed that these two scales formed two distinct orthogonal factors. These factors accounted for 39.09% of the variance. The 15 items are reproduced in Table 1.¹

Self-esteem. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) was used, and the alpha in this case was .81.

Analyses

Analyses were conducted using the EQS for Windows (Version 5.7b) statistical package (Bentler & Wu, 1995). Model testing was based on raw data and the maximum-likelihood robust estimation method, a technique recommended for smaller samples, that is, less than 250 participants (Hu & Bentler, 1999). As proposed by Bollen and Long (1993) and Hoyle and Panter (1995), the adequacy of the model was based on a variety of indices. The Sattora-Bentler chi-square statistic ($S-B\chi^2$) is a test of the level of discrepancy between the fitted covariance, as specified in the hypothesized model and the sample covariance. A large value of the chi-square statistic relative to its degree of freedom is evidence that the proposed model does not adequately describe the data. However, the chi-square is known for its sensitivity to sample size (Kline, 1998). Therefore, other goodness-of-fit statistics were selected because of their resistance to sample bias (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The goodness-of-fit statistics include the robust comparative fit index (CFI; Bentler, 1990a, 1990b; Bentler & Chou, 1987) and the root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA; Browne & Cudeck, 1993). The values for the CFI can vary between 0 and 1, with values over .90 indicating an acceptable fit of the model (Bentler, 1992). As for the RMSEA, values lower than .08 are considered acceptable (MacCallum, Browne, & Sugawara, 1996).

When the postulated model does not adequately fit the data, EQS provides a Lagrange multiplier test and a Wald test to identify the sources of misspecifications. Modifications to the postulated model that are solely data driven may, however, compromise the generalizability of findings (MacCallum, 1986; MacCallum, Roznowski, & Necowitz, 1992). Theoretical and empirical implications should thus be taken into account when modifications to the model are considered. A two-step technique proposed by MacCallum was used when making the modifications to the model. In the first stage, parameters were added. Once all justifiable parameters were added, nonsignificant links were removed on the basis of the Wald test and theoretical considerations.

Results and Discussion

Preliminary analyses revealed a kurtotic distribution of the variable discounting. This result further supported our decision to rely on a robust estimation procedure to test the path analytic model. Table 2 reproduces descriptive statistics for this sample of participants.

¹ Separate principal-components analyses were also conducted with the samples of Studies 2 and 3. The pattern of results obtained in Study 1 was replicated in both cases.

Table 1
Factor Loadings of the Psychological Disengagement Scale

Item	Factor 1 ^a	Factor 2 ^b
Discounting ($\alpha = .76$)		
The feedback I receive concerning my work is not a good indicator of my performance	.73	.02
Attitudes toward me are biased and discriminatory	.54	-.05
The way others behave toward me has nothing to do with my work	.41	.02
The judgments passed on my work are biased and discriminatory	.64	.14
Attitudes toward me reflect a positive image of myself*	.57	.03
My work is evaluated fairly and reasonably*	.73	.00
The judgments passed on me faithfully reflect who I am*	.53	.13
Performance appraisals are a fair measure of my abilities*	.75	.06
Devaluing ($\alpha = .70$)		
Being a good policewoman is an important part of my self-image*	.09	.40
Being appreciated by my colleagues is not part of my standards of personal success	-.04	.58
Being well evaluated by my bosses is an important criterion of personal satisfaction*	.09	.74
Performance appraisals have a significant impact on me*	-.05	.70
Being successful in the police force is not part of the most important things in my life	.09	.64
Being good or not according to the police force standards doesn't bother me	-.01	.64
I do not give the best of myself in my profession	.35	.41

Note. Items followed by an asterisk were reverse coded. The cutoff component loading selected was .40. Tabachnick and Fidell (2001) contended that a higher cutoff for the loading coefficient can be chosen to help ease the interpretation of the factors.

^a Eigenvalue = 3.30. ^b Eigenvalue = 2.56.

Results of the path analysis revealed that the proposed model did not fit the data adequately, $S-B\chi^2(2, N = 142) = 9.39, p < .01$ (CFI = .95; RMSEA = .15), and an alternative model was proposed. In light of the Lagrange multiplier test, a positive path was added from discounting to devaluing. This new link accounts for the fact that both components are part of the same process, that is, psychological disengagement, and that discounting has been considered by some researchers (Croizet & Martinot, 2003; Major & Schmader, 1998; Peterson, Major, Cozzarelli, & Crocker, 1988; Schmader, Major, & Gramzow, 2001) as a less radical strategy than devaluing. This new link infers a stepwise adoption of psychological disengagement strategies from less to more radical. Finally, in the last step of model respecification, the Wald test was used to detect any nonsignificant paths. Because the link between personal relative deprivation and devaluing as well as the path between devaluing and self-esteem did not reach significance, they were removed from the model. On the basis of these modifications, an alternative model was tested. The indices provided indicate that the modified model fits the data well, and it is thus considered final, $S-B\chi^2(3, N = 142) = 4.24, p = .23$ (CFI = .99; RMSEA = .05). The standardized solution of the final model is illustrated in Figure 1.

In view of the limited number of participants in this study, a bootstrap technique was conducted with the Amos statistical package (Arbuckle, 1999). The bootstrap technique, recommended in the case of small samples (Shrout & Bolger, 2002; Yung & Bentler, 1996), was performed to assess the stability and generalizability of the links included in the final model. By generating 1,000 bootstraps, an average of the standardized regression weights is calculated and compared with the estimators obtained as a result of model testing.

In Table 3, the average standardized weight, the lower and upper bound of standardized weights, and the probability that the average weight exceeds zero are reproduced for each link included in the final model. From this information, it can be concluded that the estimations of the links of the final model were stable and did not seem to be affected by the limited number of participants in this study.

According to the final model, the more policewomen reported feeling personally deprived in comparison with their male colleagues, the more they discounted the feedback received in their line of duty. Contrary to expectations, discounting did not protect the self-esteem of policewomen. Instead, this strategy was accompanied by a reduction of self-esteem. Moreover, the final model revealed an unpredicted positive path between discounting and devaluing. Lastly, the final model showed that devaluing was not associated with self-esteem.

The path analysis has shown that the role of psychological disengagement in the link between discrimination and self-esteem is more complex than predicted. This study suggests that embarking on the road of psychological disengagement through discounting is a first and rather difficult step. Self-esteem is negatively affected by the use of discounting. The negative impact of a disengagement strategy has been documented in a previous study conducted among African American college students (Major & Schmader, 2001). Contrary to our study, it involved devaluing rather than discounting: It was found that the more academic activity was devalued, the lower was self-esteem. The relation between devaluing and lower self-esteem was attributed to the disparity between one's attitude toward academic achievement and the expectations of significant others vis-à-vis one's performance (Major & Schmader, 2001). It thus seems that psychological disengagement does not, as predicted, shield self-esteem from discrimination. In this study, the negative link between discounting and self-esteem indicates how difficult it is to discredit the feedback of colleagues and superiors in a line of duty promoting brotherhood, solidarity, and esprit de corps (Beauchesne, 2001).

This study also showed that the relation between personal relative deprivation and the two disengagement strategies was not symmetrical. This is congruent with a previous study (Schmader, Major, & Gramzow, 2001) evaluating the relations among academic performance, two measures of collective discrimination, and the two processes of psychological disengagement. The present study goes further by suggesting a stepwise approach starting with the adoption of discounting followed by devaluing. Even if this chain of relations was not predicted or could not be validated with correlational data, it is nevertheless consistent with the view expressed by some analysts that devaluing is a more drastic strategy than discounting (Croizet & Martinot, 2003). Finally, the absence of a significant link between devaluing and self-esteem suggests that once engaged in this radical road, self-

Table 2
*Correlations and Descriptive Analyses for All Variables Included in Study 1, Study 2,
 and Study 3*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
Study 1						
1. Personal relative deprivation	—	.65**	.06	-.40**		
2. Discounting		—	.18*	-.47**		
3. Devaluing			—	-.13		
4. Self-esteem				—		
<i>M</i>	1.99	1.87	1.82	4.48		
<i>SD</i>	0.77	0.53	0.52	0.44		
Skewness	0.65	0.81	0.41	-0.93		
Kurtosis	-0.17	1.44	-0.45	0.60		
Minimum	1.00	1.00	1.00	3.00		
Maximum	4.20	4.00	3.14	5.00		
Study 2						
1. Personal relative deprivation	—	.67**	.18**	-.33**	.24**	
2. Discounting		—	.28**	-.38**	.32**	
3. Devaluing			—	-.15*	.39**	
4. Self-esteem				—	-.24**	
5. Professional withdrawal					—	
<i>M</i>	2.06	1.98	1.78	4.40	2.24	
<i>SD</i>	0.74	0.66	0.56	0.53	0.65	
Skewness	0.64	0.91	1.09	-2.25	0.85	
Kurtosis	0.29	0.93	1.72	9.23	0.62	
Minimum	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	
Maximum	4.60	4.50	3.71	5.00	4.40	
Study 3						
1. Personal relative deprivation	—	.63**	.11	-.45**	.21**	.38**
2. Discounting		—	.29**	-.54**	.29**	.31**
3. Devaluing			—	-.21**	.48**	-.04
4. Self-esteem				—	-.35**	-.43**
5. Professional withdrawal					—	.16*
6. Stress						—
<i>M</i>	2.06	2.03	1.89	4.46	2.24	2.57
<i>SD</i>	0.79	0.66	0.59	0.50	0.63	0.90
Skewness	0.37	0.59	0.59	-1.10	0.41	0.04
Kurtosis	-0.90	-0.04	-0.22	0.85	0.15	-0.72
Minimum	1.00	1.00	1.00	2.60	1.00	1.00
Maximum	4.00	4.00	3.86	5.00	4.40	5.00

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

regard is disconnected from the domain, in this case police work. It is as if detaching oneself from a domain through devaluing has no bearing on self-esteem: How individuals regard themselves is not affected by their psychological withdrawal from a domain.

Study 2

In the second study, the pattern of relations among personal relative deprivation, psychological disengagement, and self-esteem was reexamined in another sample of policewomen. In this case, the predictive model was extended to take into account *professional withdrawal*, a variable referring to reduced work involvement and intentions to change career. Although researchers have postulated that personal relative deprivation is directly associated with attitudes and behaviors intended to

change one's conditions (I. Walker & Pettigrew, 1984), there is little support for such a direct link (Smith & Ortiz, 2002). On account of weak or nonsignificant links, this direct association between relative deprivation and action has been challenged (Kawakami & Dion, 1993; Martin, 1986; Veilleux, Tougas, & Rinfret, 1992). It has been suggested that feelings of relative deprivation could prime individuals for action without directly translating into attitudes and behaviors of personal change (Tougas & Beaton, 2002; Petta & Walker, 1992; I. Walker, 1999). This hypothesis is congruent with the fact that relative deprivation has been associated with depleted self-esteem. Threats to self-esteem such as those triggered by feelings of discontent following invidious personal comparisons can trigger a search for means to bring about changes in one's overall condition (I. Walker, 1999).

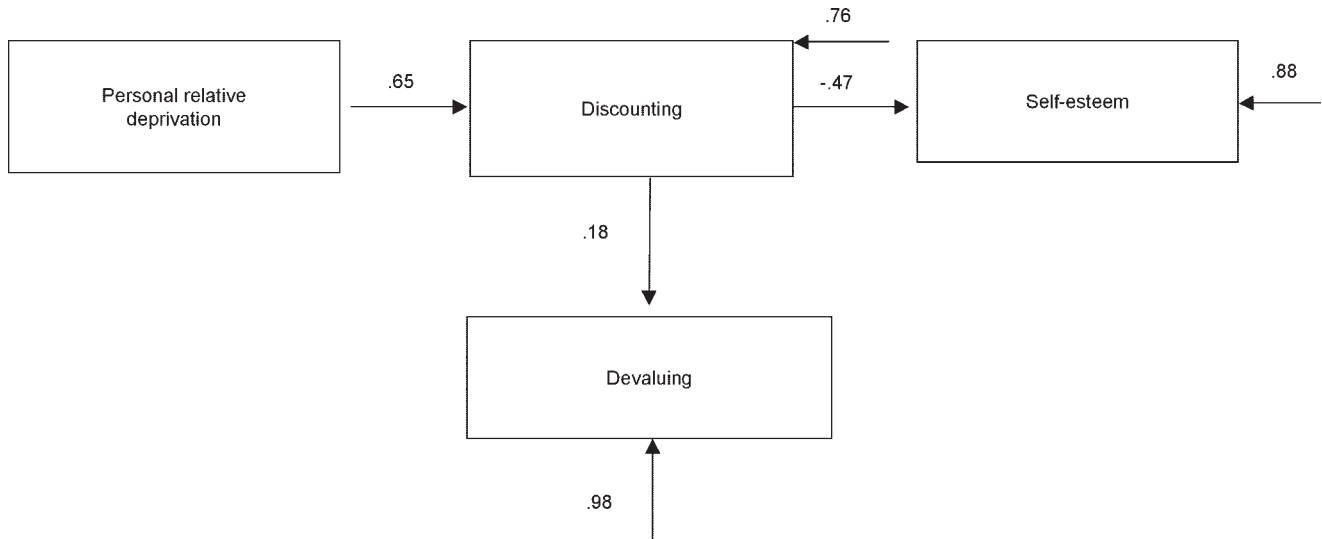


Figure 1. Standardized solution of the psychological disengagement model.

The first study suggested a more comprehensive path from relative deprivation to attitudes and behaviors of personal change, in that discounting and self-esteem act as mediators of the impact of personal relative deprivation on action and behavioral intentions such as those measured by professional withdrawal. Devaluing was also taken into consideration when assessing pathways to professional withdrawal. This link is logical because it pertains to the translation of a psychological state into action—that is, psychologically devaluing the importance of a profession results in professional withdrawal. It is also supported by research associating school and organizational attachment, which included valuing the domain, to participating in one’s sector of activity (Finn, 1989; Mayer & Schoorman, 1992, 1998). For example, external manifestations of school participation have included nominal (doing the minimum required), enthusiastic (doing more than required), social (extracurricular), and administrative (governance) involvement (Finn, 1989).

On the basis of the preceding, the following hypotheses were included in the predictive model: Feelings of personal relative deprivation were positively associated with discounting, which was negatively related to self-esteem; discounting was also positively linked to devaluing, which in turn was positively related to professional withdrawal; finally, a negative relation between self-esteem and professional withdrawal was postulated.

Table 3
Results of the Bootstrap for Study 1

Link	M	Lower bound	Upper bound	p
PRD → Discounting	.64	.55	.73	.00
Discounting → Devaluing	.18	.04	.31	.03
Discounting → Self-esteem	-.47	-.57	-.35	.00

Note. PRD = personal relative deprivation.

Method

Following the same procedure used in Study 1, a total of 336 questionnaires were sent, and 205 were returned. Two questionnaires were eliminated because of the high percentage of missing responses. Among this sample of 203 policewomen, 36.6% had a university degree, 31.5% were single, 63.5% were married, and 52.7% had at least one child. On average, respondents were 30.32 years of age and reported 7.34 years of service.

Questionnaire

As in the first study, participants were asked to respond to questions concerning personal relative deprivation (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .74$), discounting (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .85$), devaluing (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .79$), and self-esteem (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .86$). In addition to the questions included in Study 1, a scale of professional withdrawal was included.

Professional Withdrawal

This scale included five items. The first four items were designed to translate at the organizational level, the four levels of class participation described by Finn (1989). They are as follows (items followed by an asterisk were reverse scored): “My participation as a policewomen at [name of organization] is limited to the minimum required”; “I constantly try to improve myself”*; “I like to participate in social activities of my work unit, of [name of organization], and the [name of the union]”*; and “I try to be part of different committees.”* The last item referred to quitting the police: “At times, I think about a career change.” Responses to these questions were pooled (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .63$).

Results and Discussion

The robust method was again used to test the postulated model. Correlations and descriptive statistics for this sample are reproduced in Table 2. The goodness-of-fit indices provided show that the model fits the data well, $S-B\chi^2(5, N = 203) = 7.40, p = .19$ (CFI = .98; RMSEA = .07). Accordingly, this model is considered final.

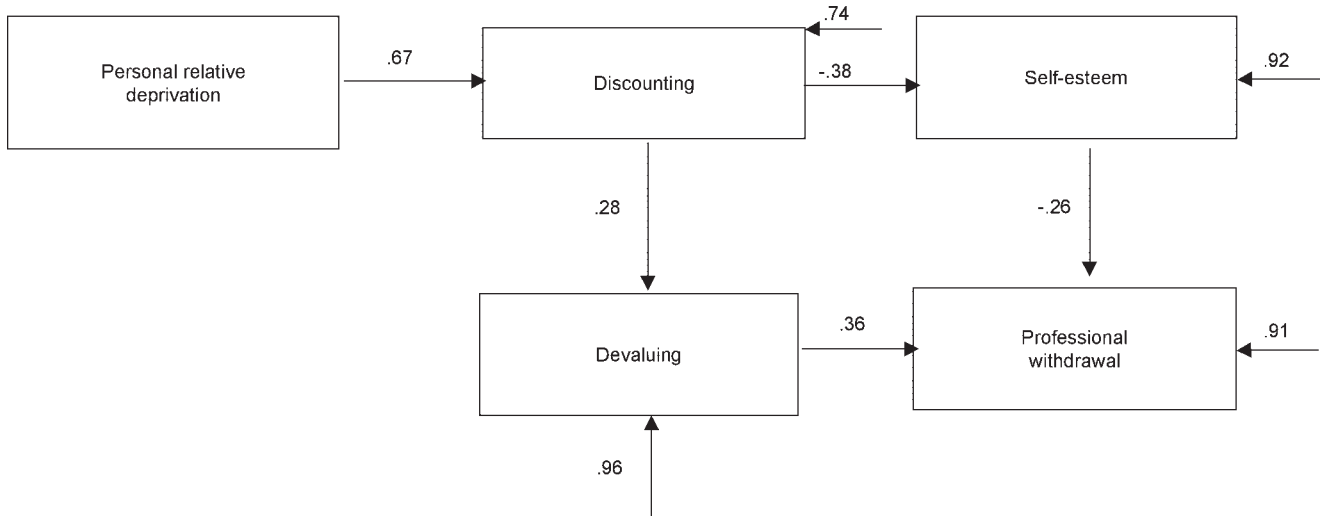


Figure 2. Standardized solution of the repercussions of psychological disengagement on professional withdrawal.

The final solution illustrated in Figure 2 is in part a replication of the model obtained in Study 1. Personal relative deprivation was associated with discounting of feedback received in one's line of work. The path from discounting to devaluing was replicated. In both samples, discounting had a side effect, that is, reduced self-esteem. This study also evaluated a new approach of the link between relative deprivation and actions oriented toward the avoidance of negative situations and possibly the improvement of one's life conditions. According to hypotheses, personal relative deprivation acted as a primer of a chain of reactions, including discounting and lowered self-esteem, leading to professional withdrawal. As in the first study, devaluing did not damage self-esteem. As predicted, devaluing led to professional withdrawal, which can be both beneficial and harmful. On the positive side, professional withdrawal means that policewomen retire from a domain in which differential treatment on the basis of gender was experienced and found to elicit discontent. Avoiding difficult situations can easily be seen as an improvement in their working life. However, this has a downside both at the personal and the collective levels, because it could be viewed as a personal failure and as supporting the notion that women do not have what it takes to make it as a police officer.

Study 3

The goal of the third study was to replicate the model of the second study. Moreover, this study intended to test the mediating role of psychological disengagement and self-esteem in the link between personal relative deprivation and one important related outcome, stress. Recent research has militated in favor of the evaluation of mediators of the impact of personal relative deprivation on stress. Although previous research associated feelings of personal relative deprivation to stress among members of different socially devalued groups (Beaton & Tougas, 1997; McDonald & Korabik, 1991; I. Walker & Mann, 1987), results of a recent meta-analysis revealed that the link between relative deprivation and internal states, such as stress, was weak (Smith & Ortiz, 2002).

Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that self-esteem is a significant determinant of experienced stress (Greenberg et al., 1999). An indirect link between personal relative deprivation and stress via discounting and self-esteem was thus proposed and tested. In addition to this series of links, the postulated model reproduced the model presented and confirmed in Study 2.

Method

Following the same procedure as in the first two studies, 325 questionnaires were sent out, and 198 were returned duly filled out. Among the 198 policewomen, 69.7% had a spouse, 35.9% had a university degree, and 47.6% had at least one child. On average, the respondents were 30.44 years of age and had accumulated 7.72 years of service.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire contained items pertaining to personal relative deprivation (Cronbach's $\alpha = .78$), discounting (Cronbach's $\alpha = .84$), devaluing (Cronbach's $\alpha = .75$), and self-esteem (Cronbach's $\alpha = .85$). As in Study 2, the Cronbach's alpha for professional withdrawal was rather low at .62.² The questionnaire also included a measure of stress.

Stress

This scale contained three items that were part of a previous study conducted among policewomen. The items were as follows: "I am often stressed at work"; "It stresses me out to have to outshine as a woman in a man's world"; "The thought of making a mistake stresses me out." Items were added to form a stress scale, and the Cronbach's alpha was also low at .69 (see Footnote 2).

² The professional withdrawal and the stress scales contained a limited number of items. Because Cronbach's alpha is quite sensitive to the number of items in a scale (Black, 1999; Kaplan & Saccuzzo, 2001), we used interitem correlation when it was low (Briggs & Cheek, 1986). The optimal range (between .20 and .40) was reached for professional withdrawal (.26 in Study 2 and .25 in Study 3), and stress (.43).

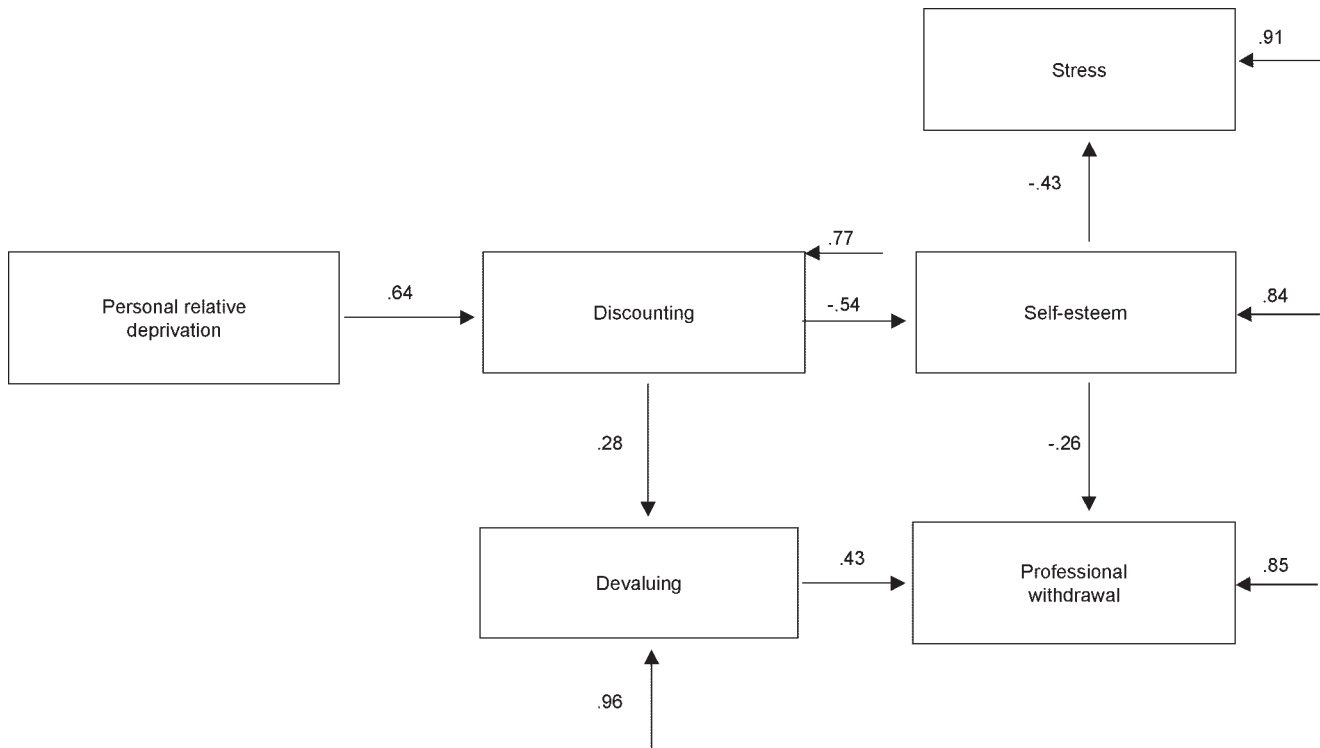


Figure 3. Standardized solution of the repercussions of psychological disengagement on professional withdrawal and stress.

Results and Discussion

The predictive model was tested using a robust estimation. Statistics concerning variables included in the model are reproduced in Table 2. According to the fit indices provided by EQS, $S-B\chi^2(9, N = 198) = 23.35, p < .01$ (CFI = .94; RMSEA = .09), the postulated model fit the data well. The postulated model is considered final and is presented in Figure 3.

The third study allowed for a replication of the models of Studies 1 and 2 among another sample of policewomen.³ The mediating role of psychological disengagement was once again confirmed, and direct and indirect repercussions of personal relative deprivation were hypothesized and confirmed. Policewomen encountering personal discrimination turned to discounting and devaluing to cope with their disadvantaged situation. As in the previous study, devaluing was associated with professional withdrawal. Congruent with the first two studies, discounting emerged as a strategy that weakened women's self-esteem. According to the final model, self-esteem has repercussions both at the behavioral and the emotional levels. Lower self-esteem was associated with behaviors designed to take a proactive approach to the difficulties encountered in the police station, that is, professional withdrawal. The final model revealed a negative path from self-esteem to stress showing that lower self-esteem is associated with more stress. Psychological disengagement through discounting has a price, that is, reduced self-esteem, which translated into higher stress.

³ A reviewer suggested testing alternative models. In Study 1, a variant of the final model was created by adding a path from personal relative deprivation to self-esteem. Results of the path analysis revealed that personal relative deprivation was not directly associated with self-esteem. The final models obtained in Studies 2 and 3 were also modified to determine whether personal relative deprivation was directly associated with self-esteem. Another path, included in the predictive model of Study 1, was added from personal relative deprivation to devaluation. With one exception, the added paths were not significant. Specifically, the alternative model in Study 3 was tested, $S-B\chi^2(7, N = 198) = 17.72, p = .01$, and revealed that personal relative deprivation was directly associated with self-esteem ($b = -.11, p < .05$). To test whether discounting remained a significant intervening variable, analyses were conducted to evaluate the joint significance of the indirect effects. These analyses were based on the distribution of a z' test statistic (MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, & Sheets, 2002). Results lend support for the intervening variable effect ($z' = -4.57, p < .05$) and confirm the role of discounting as a mediator between personal relative deprivation and self-esteem. The Sobel test (Sobel, 1982) produced the same results ($z = -5.01, p = .00$). All in all, these analyses support a model based on partial rather than complete mediation between personal relative deprivation and self-esteem (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Shrout & Bolger, 2002). A chi-square difference test was performed to compare the model presented in Figure 3 to the alternative model. According to findings, the alternative model did not provide a superior fit, $\Delta S-B\chi^2(2, N = 198) = 5.63, p > .05$.

General Discussion

The point of departure for this work was to provide a further test of the link between individual experiences of discrimination and psychological disengagement by taking into consideration both perceptions and resentment of differential treatment as measured by personal relative deprivation. Contrary to hypotheses, personal relative deprivation was associated with only one psychological disengagement strategy, that is, discounting. Moreover, it was found that discounting mediated the effect of personal relative deprivation on devaluing. The paths from personal relative deprivation to discounting and from discounting to devaluing are congruent with the theoretical view that these strategies have very different implications in a person's life. However, on account of previous studies revealing different links between personal disadvantage, discounting, and devaluing across groups (Major & Schmader, 1998; Schmader, Major, & Gramzow, 2001), generalization of present findings to people belonging to other socially disadvantaged groups would be premature. It is possible that the reactions of policewomen who participated in the studies do not match those of members of other socially disadvantaged groups. Feelings of personal relative deprivation were low among policewomen of the three samples (see Table 2).

Previous studies also have suggested examining the effect of collective experiences of discrimination on psychological disengagement (Major & Schmader, 1998; Schmader, Major, & Gramzow, 2001). Indeed, it was found, especially among African Americans, that devaluing and discounting intensified as perceptions of unjust treatment of the in-group became stronger. Assessing the effect of both collective and personal relative deprivation would provide an indirect analysis of the role of prejudice attribution of personal situation, which according to some analysts is favorable to the adoption of self-protective strategies (Major et al., 2002).

The studies were designed to determine whether psychological disengagement can protect the self-esteem of policewomen expressing feelings of personal relative deprivation. The three studies indicate that discounting was accompanied by reduced self-esteem. Nevertheless, as Table 2 shows, on average policewomen had high self-esteem. Post hoc *t*-test analysis was conducted to determine whether self-esteem remained high even when discounting was used as a disengagement strategy, and the analysis revealed that this was so.⁴ It thus seems that being a member of a socially devalued group does not necessarily entail low self-regard (Crocker & Major, 1989). What the studies presented in this article suggest, however, is that discounting feedback perceived as biased and discriminatory can entail reduced appraisals among women with positive self-regard. Given that psychological disengagement is viewed by analysts as a temporary measure (Crocker et al., 1998; Major et al., 1998; Major & Schmader, 1998; Schmader, Major, & Gramzow, 2001), it could be argued that discounting has a ripple effect on those with high self-esteem. What are the consequences of these short-term fluctuations? Studies assessing the implications of unstable high self-esteem point to negative outcomes such as anger and hostility (Kernis, 1993; Paradise & Kernis, 2002) and reactivity to daily events (Greenier et al., 1999) and to evaluative feedback (Kernis, Greenier, Herlocker, Whisenhunt, & Abend, 1997). In fact, a recent study has shown that fluctuations of self-esteem are particularly debilitating among re-

spondents with high self-regard (Paradise & Kernis, 2002). At this point, it would be interesting to determine if, as suggested, unfair treatment and discounting result in fluctuations of self-esteem.

Contrary to predictions, devaluing the domain was shown in the three studies to have no impact on the self-esteem of policewomen. In a previous study, devaluing academic activities was negatively associated with self-esteem among African American students (Major & Schmader, 2001). In the three studies conducted among policewomen, it was discounting that produced such a negative impact on self-esteem. These conflicting results could suggest that the cost of discounting and devaluing differ according to the domain under study. Whereas devaluing the academic domain is very costly in our society, discounting the feedback could be better accepted, depending on an academic's sense of humor. The situation of police work seems very different. Discounting feedback can be very damaging considering the importance of teamwork and close partnership in this type of work. Even if devaluing the domain involves some important costs, it could be considered as less damaging to self-esteem than discounting. Devaluing a domain of work that is often not positively viewed in our society might be less costly than discounting the feedback in a closed milieu condemning infringement to the tacit rules of group cohesiveness.

To improve understanding of the role of psychological disengagement on self-esteem, it thus seems important to conduct research among members of disadvantaged groups in different domains of activity. The conflicting findings highlighted above suggest that the social evaluation of the domain should be taken into consideration. Moreover, it would seem justified to investigate the effect of time on the consequences of discrimination both in terms of determining at what point self-esteem is negatively affected and the long-term effects of fluctuating self-regard. The present studies raise many questions, but they also show that discrimination has a price for individuals, organizations, and possibly for the reputation of their already devalued social group.

Although the role of psychological disengagement in the relation between relative deprivation and self-esteem was replicated on three occasions with different samples, these studies are correlational and do not imply causality. Although logical, whether individuals embark on the process of disengagement by first adopting the less disruptive and costly strategy remains to be tested. Engaging in the royal road of psychological disengagement via devaluing could be the second step. The studies presented also raise the question as to whether personal disadvantage on account of group membership as measured by relative deprivation always triggers a chain of reactions resulting in depleted self-esteem. According to Branscombe and her colleagues (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999; Schmitt, Spears, & Branscombe, 2003), this is not so. These authors have suggested and confirmed in correlational studies that identification with one's group protects the personal and the collective self-esteem of those who have

⁴ A post hoc *t* test was conducted with participants of the three samples pooled and divided into two groups on the basis of the median of discounting scores. It was shown that self-esteem differed according to discounting, $t(541) = 9.23, p < .001$. Although above the midpoint of the 5-point scale, self-esteem of policewomen was lower in the high discounting group ($M = 4.25$) than in the low discounting group ($M = 4.62$).

experienced chronic personal discrimination. The next step could then be to evaluate the effects of personal relative deprivation on self-esteem by taking into consideration both psychological disengagement and identification with one's group. Such an effort may offer clues to help policewomen shield themselves from the assault of inequity in the line of fire.

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