COPING WITH STRUCTURAL DISADVANTAGE: WHEN NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF PERCEIVED BARRIERS ARE OVERCOME

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Theoretical Background

Differential exposure to stress by social status (Turner, Wheaton & Lloyd, 1995)
➔Members of structurally disadvantaged groups (SDG) are more likely to face systemic stressors (barriers to personal projects, social devaluation and material vulnerability).

(Systemic) exposure does not lead systematically to vulnerability and in some conditions even to resilience.
➔Our approach: group processes and self-categorization effects to explain the conditions under which exposure to stress leads to vulnerability. Theoretically:
- Articulation between stress theory and SIT (Social Identity Theory) / SCT (Self Categorization Theory)
- Focus on Identity change and developmental regulations (Salmela-Aro 2009, Heckhausen et al., 2010)

Cognitive theory of stress appraisal (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984): the outcomes of stressful encounters are mediated by two psychological processes:
  Primary appraisal: What is at stake in the encounter
  Secondary appraisal: Judgment of one's potential to cope effectively with demands

Social Identity approach (SIT/SCT) : the process of cognitive appraisal depends on the level of self-categorization (individual level Vs group level). Level of self-categorization as:
  • Determinant of stress appraisal (Haslam et al. 2005)
  • Base for social support (Haslam et al. 2009)
  • Access to group-based (more active) coping options (Leach et al., 2010, Outten et al., 2009, Mummendey et al., 1999)

Questions & Hypotheses

RQ(1):What helps members of SDG to overcome negative effects of systemic disadvantage on well-being and health?
RQ(2):What helps members of SDG to challenge the structure that disadvantages them?
RQ(3): Is social mobilization a predecessor of personal well being or a consequence of it?

Hypotheses:
1. Meaningful collective self-definitions, when available, buffer the negative effects of disadvantage on personal well-being and health.
2. Effect of structural disadvantage on social mobilization is mediated by collective self-definitions as well as personal well-being.
3. Social mobilization and personal well-being influence each other mutually.

Exposure | First and second appraisal | Outcomes
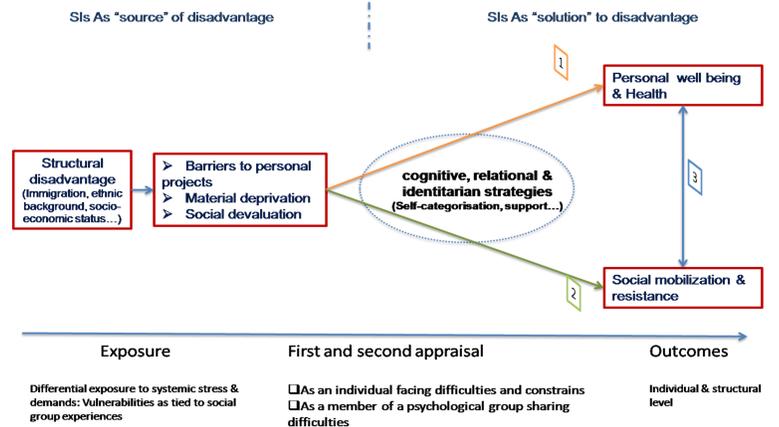
Data collection

Survey questionnaires	• Young people aged 15-30.
Three institutions: 1. COFOP* / 2. Municipality of Lausanne / 3. College St-Maurice	• A master questionnaire including the most relevant scales on personal projects, event regulation, psychological well-being, feelings of control and self-esteem, group identification...
Semi-structured Interviews (subsample of the quantitative sample)	• Investigate the role of significant others in the process of regulation • Investigate the subjective meaning of ethnic identity and how it develops through regulation of life course demands
Longitudinal following	• Investigate change in sense and level of identifications • Test for the inter-related development of identification and coping potential

* COFOP: Centre de Formation et d'Orientation Professionnelle

When negative effects of perceived barriers are overcome : First results

Method

SDG studied: Non Swiss (without Swiss nationality) Vs Swiss
Differential exposure hypo: Do they perceive more systemic stress (=more external barriers to life projects)?
Does this harm their self esteem? If not, what helps them overcoming their structural disadvantage? (test hypo1)

COFOP (N=137)	Municipality of Lausanne (N=225)	St-Maurice (N=339)
Age (M= 18.22, SD=2)	Age (M=24.64 SD=4.04)	Age (M=18 SD=.97)
Male (61%)	Male (52%)	Male (45%)
Non Swiss (52%)	Non Swiss (14%)	Non Swiss (10%)

Measure

Dependant variables
Self-esteem (5 items, $\alpha = .80$)
Appraised Coping potential: "I have confidence in my ability to overcome the problems in my life"

Independent variable
List of 3 projects ➔ Please circle the most important project
While thinking about this project, tell us if: "Despite my best efforts, there are a lot of external barriers that might prevent me from this project"

Potential Moderator
List three groups to define "Who you are" ➔ Please circle the most important group
Categories used in Self-definition:

| Structural/relational	Personal
Ethno-national, ex: " Portugais", "Kurde" / Vocational-professional, ex: "apprenti", "futur mécanicien" / Relational, ex: "membre de ma famille", "mes amis"	Personal attributes: "gentille", "ouvert" / Personal activities: "footballeur", "danseuse"

➔ Level of self-definition : Collective (structural/relational) Vs Personal

Results

- Non Swiss perceive more barriers to their projects
- Perceiving barriers is negatively associated with Self Esteem (SE)
- Non Swiss don't have lower SE
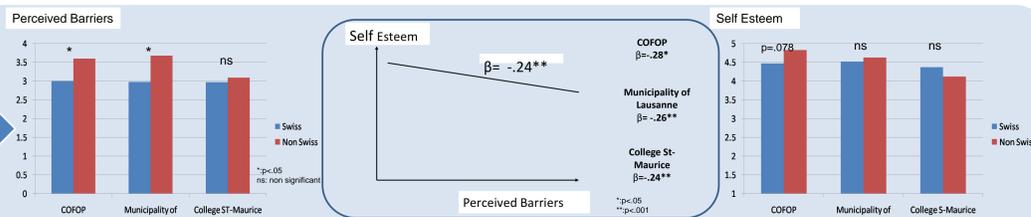
- No negative association between perceived barriers and SE for Non Swiss
- This moderation effect is only present for COFOP
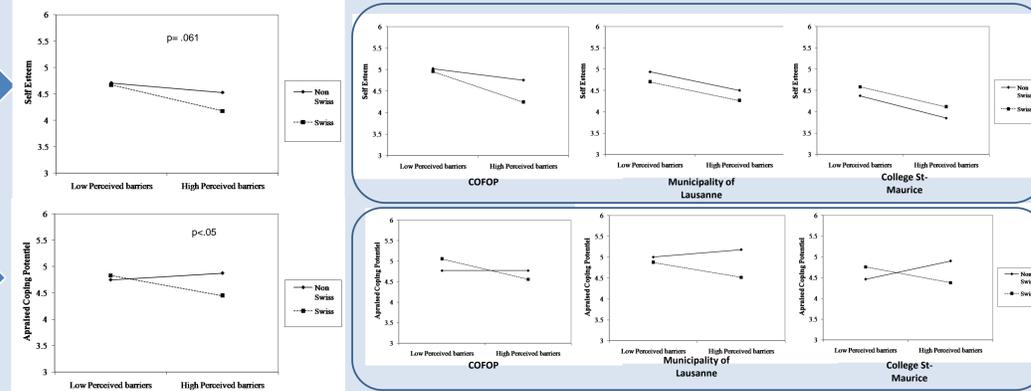
- SE is highly correlated with appraised coping potential (r=.60)

Do Non Swiss believe to be able to cope effectively even with higher barriers (resilience effect) ?

What helps Non Swiss coping effectively with this systemic strain? (test Hypo1)

This resilience effect is moderated by level of self-definitions: present only for those who self-define themselves at a collective-level

Discussion

Non Swiss report more systemic stress, but for those who are attached to collective self-definitions, stress does not affect their judgment of their potential to cope effectively with demands and harm their self-esteem.

Three pathways how collective self-definitions helps (to be tested):
- Rejection-identification hypothesis (Branscombe et al., 1999) : collective self-definition as an emotional strategy against threat to self-esteem
- Support hypothesis (Haslam et al., 2005): collective self-definitions give access to effective support (materiel and emotional)
- Discounting Hypothesis (Major et al., 2003) : blaming an external agent and protecting self-evaluations

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