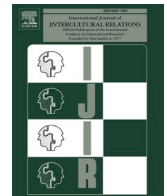




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Social intergroup and temporal intrapersonal comparisons: Responses to perceived discrimination and protective mechanisms of eudaimonic well-being

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ABSTRACT

Discrimination has a negative impact on minority group members' wellbeing, particularly immigrants. Yet, empirical research investigating coping mechanisms against perceived discrimination among immigrants remains scarce. The present study examined the association between perceived ethnic discrimination and eudaimonic (psychological and social) wellbeing among immigrants by assessing the role of intergroup (downward and upward) and intrapersonal (temporal) comparisons as coping mechanisms in this association. Using a representative sample comprising five foreign-born immigrant groups ($N = 1250$) in Spain, we found that immigrants tend to engage in more favorable downward and upward intergroup comparisons in response to perceived discrimination, but lower temporal intrapersonal comparisons. Downward intergroup comparison was related to lower psychological wellbeing and upward intergroup comparison was associated with higher psychological wellbeing. Temporal intrapersonal comparison was predominately predictive of psychological and social wellbeing. We further discuss specific indirect effects and the important roles of intergroup and intrapersonal comparisons for immigrants' wellbeing.

Minority group members experience relatively poor psychological outcomes across multiple life domains as a result of discrimination (see meta-analyses by Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009; Schmitt, Postmes, Branscombe, & Garcia, 2014). Immigrants, in particular, are a minority population at risk of discrimination, as having a minority status as well as an immigrant status often translates into poorer conditions (De Jong & Madamba, 2001). The Migration Data Portal (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs) indicates that, as of mid-year 2020, there are 280.6 million immigrants worldwide. However, regardless of the growth of immigration trends and ethnoculturally diverse environments (Vertovec, 2007), social exclusion of immigrants remains an important concern globally. In Spain, for example, discrimination limits immigrants' access to employment, denies them decent housing, and creates barriers to obtaining other services (Llácer et al., 2009). Such experiences are stressful and typically carry negative health and psychological consequences. Minority group members, however, do not simply internalize the negative consequences and messages of discrimination; they may instead develop ways to subdue damaging consequences of discrimination and

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social rejection (Bobowik, Martinovic, Basabe, Barsties, & Wachter, 2017).

Literature related to social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986) and social stigma (Crocker & Major, 1989), suggests that minority group members may engage in different identity management strategies to improve their devalued identity and alleviate negative psychological consequences (Blanz, Mummendey, Mielke, & Klink, 1998; Cobb et al., 2019; Hakim, Molina, & Branscombe, 2018). SIT categorizes responses to negative social identity into three strategies: individual mobility (e.g., enhancing individual status by leaving or dissociating one's self from the ingroup) and social competition (e.g., improving ingroup status through open hostility with a relevant outgroup), which strictly serve individual and group goals respectively, as well as social creativity, which is an expression of either individual or collective goals (Tajfel, 1979).

Social creativity allows individuals to maintain or achieve a positive social identity through the reinterpretation of individual or group comparisons. More specifically, social creativity implies that individuals redefine existing dimensions of comparisons and select an alternative referent target to which oneself or one's ingroup is compared to achieve a more favorable evaluation (Shinnar, 2008). Yet, despite its crucial role in shaping these comparisons, the implications of social creativity among members of minority groups remain largely unknown (van Bezouw, van Der Toorn, & Becker, 2020). Therefore, the present study will focus on three strategies that stem from social creativity comparison processes comprising intergroup (collective) and temporal intrapersonal (personal) comparisons that allow individuals to change the parameters that define themselves and/or their group relative to others (Blanz et al., 1998; Brown & Zagefka, 2006).

Empirical research investigating social creativity strategies (i.e., comparison strategies) as coping mechanisms against perceived discrimination remains scarce. Social creativity, in particular, is an understudied identity management strategy that offers an alternative identity management strategy in socio-political contexts where immigrants may feel pressure, but not necessarily want to assimilate and fit into the mainstream culture, on one hand, and enjoy less freedom to express their own culture and become recognized as an ethnic minority, on the other. Under such circumstances, social creativity may serve as an important identity management strategy. Furthermore, since discrimination can be a reoccurring experience for immigrants and other minority groups, exploring mechanisms that can overcome harmful consequences (e.g., negative wellbeing) of discrimination is essential.

While identity management strategies were shown to facilitate a better self-image and/or group related image among stigmatized individuals (Blanz et al., 1998; Brown & Zagefka, 2006; Hakim et al., 2018), it is important to investigate if these comparison strategies can serve as protective mechanisms against perceptions of discrimination by allowing immigrants place their ingroup and/or self in higher regard. The current study therefore aims to investigate whether intergroup comparisons and temporal intrapersonal comparisons can statistically explain the relationship between perceived discrimination and eudaimonic wellbeing (i.e., psychological and social wellbeing) among foreign-born immigrants in Spain.

Intergroup Comparisons

Threatening experiences (e.g., discrimination) may augment the need for social comparisons owing to the uncertainty inherent in negative situations. Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory explains how individuals compare various aspects of their lives with others' when met with ominous experiences to achieve a positive self-evaluation. This theory has generated a considerable amount of research, which extends onto intergroup comparisons. These collective comparisons are derived from the standing of one's ingroup relative to an outgroup. That is, when adopting collective social creativity strategies, individuals reinterpret the status differentiation to achieve an improved ingroup position by shifting their comparisons to dimensions on which the ingroup fares more favorably. By changing the evaluation of their entire ingroup, stigmatized group members improve their subjective wellbeing (Blanz et al., 1998; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). These comparisons take the form of downward (Wills, 1981) and/or upward comparisons (Collins, 1996).

Downward Intergroup Comparisons

The concept of downward intergroup comparison refers to the cognitive act of attempting to improve one's ingroup social evaluation by favorably comparing it to a lower-status outgroup (Collins, 1996; Zagefka & Brown, 2005). One of the first social psychologists (Hakmiller, 1966) to empirically address downward comparison found that threatened individuals prefer to socially compare with worse-off others (Finlay & Lyons, 2000). Thus, persons with a devalued social identity may employ downward intergroup comparisons to achieve a positive evaluation of the ingroup and thereby of the social self (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986; Zagefka & Brown, 2005). Wills (1981) later proposed that threat produces downward comparison in an attempt to restore or improve wellbeing (e.g. self-esteem). Accordingly, studies among stigmatized group members found that perceiving oneself as better off than others alleviate compromising wellbeing (Finlay & Lyons, 2000; Gibbons & Gerrard, 1997; Tennen, Mckee, & Affleck, 2000; Zagefka & Brown, 2005).

In accordance with these theoretical and empirical findings, one may assume that the tendency to engage in downward intergroup comparisons derives from the need to enhance the social self when faced with hardships such as discrimination. In the Spanish context, for example, when Latino immigrants (e.g., Colombians) experience discrimination, they may favorably compare their ingroup to a relatively lower-status group (e.g., African immigrants) to avoid harmful impact to their wellbeing. Therefore, we anticipate perceived discrimination to be associated with a stronger tendency to engage in favorable downward intergroup comparisons, which may in turn positively relate to psychological and social wellbeing: *Hypothesis 1 (H1)*.

Upward Intergroup Comparisons

Upward intergroup comparisons entail the act of comparing the ingroup to a higher-status outgroup. Some research suggests that upward comparisons are often avoided since they may not be conducive to a favorable evaluation of the social self (Zagefka & Brown, 2005). However, in her theory, Collins (1996) argued that individuals can interpret upward comparisons in terms of similarities with a better-off target or adjust their self-evaluation upward allowing them to elevate their self-worth. SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) further proposes that members of stigmatized groups can improve their negative social identity by putting forward certain comparison dimensions where their group compares favorably with a higher status group. For example, immigrants may avoid comparisons with the majority group on status dimensions (e.g., socioeconomic position), and choose to compare on different traits and moral dimensions (e.g., hardworking). Previous research has shown that perceiving oneself as superior (to a better off target) based on skills and/or morality is associated with higher self-appraisals, mood improvement, and positive wellbeing (Buunk, Collins, Taylor, VanYperen, & Dakof, 1990; Collins, 1996; Gibbons et al., 2002; Ouwerkerk & Ellemers, 2002; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Accordingly, we expect perceived discrimination to be associated with favorable upward intergroup comparisons, which in turn are expected to be positively associated with immigrants' psychological and social wellbeing: *Hypothesis 2 (H2)*.

Temporal Intrapersonal Comparisons

Another coping strategy derived from social comparison research is temporal comparison (Albert, 1977). This strategy allows individuals to improve their position by endorsing favorable intrapersonal (subjective or personal) reappraisals. Temporal intrapersonal comparisons allow individuals to achieve or restore a positive self-evaluation by considering their current situation to be an improvement from their past. That is, stressful occasions provide an opportunity for individuals to reflect on themselves to represent an impetus for positive personal change, which has been shown to have positive implications for wellbeing by promoting a sense of personal growth (an aspect of psychological wellbeing) and alleviating distressed feelings (McFarland & Alvaro, 2000). Consequently, self-enhancing temporal comparisons based on derogation of previous situations may allow individuals to compensate for the negative implications of adverse experiences. This strategy is based on positive reappraisal in the context of adverse experiences that may be closely related to the concept of resilience. Resilience offers an outlet to overcome the negative effects of risk exposure, coping successfully with traumatic experiences, and avoiding negative trajectories as a result of adverse situations.

Likewise, immigrants may be inclined to engage in temporal intrapersonal comparisons (e.g., perceiving that they are performing better financially, obtaining higher education, and/or experiencing personal growth more now than in the past) when met with threatening situations (e.g., discriminatory experiences) to avoid negative consequences (e.g., wellbeing).

Thus, higher perceived discrimination is expected to be associated with a higher tendency to engage in favorable temporal intrapersonal comparisons, which in turn is expected to positively relate to psychological and social wellbeing: *Hypothesis 3 (H3)*.

Perceived Discrimination and Eudaimonic Wellbeing

Social psychological research has focused on the impact of perceived discrimination on hedonic wellbeing and negative symptomologies related to depression and anxiety (Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009; Schmitt et al., 2014), but much less work has focused on eudaimonic wellbeing (but see Bobowik et al., 2017; Ryff, Keyes, & Hughes, 2003). Compared to the hedonic approach, eudaimonia is concerned with social fulfillment and personal development by concentrating on personal as well as social functioning (Ryan & Deci, 2001). The eudaimonic approach allows researchers to investigate immigrants in the process of adapting to new societal conditions (Bobowik et al., 2017) by focusing on psychological wellbeing (Ryff, 1989) and social wellbeing (Keyes, 1998).

Psychological wellbeing is the integration of positive psychological functioning including self-actualization, individuation, and perceptions of personal maturity (see Ryff, 1989). We selectively focus on three sub-dimensions: positive relations (with others in society), environmental mastery (perceived sense of control over one's social environment), and personal growth (ability to continue developing one's potential). Compared to the other three dimensions of psychological wellbeing (i.e., autonomy, self-acceptance, and purpose in life) positive relations with others in the host society, sense of personal progress, and control over the new environment are particularly relevant during the migratory process (Bobowik et al., 2017).

Social wellbeing is the appraisal of one's circumstances, functioning, and value in society (see Keyes, 1998, 2007). We consider three sub-dimensions: social contribution (evaluation of one's societal value), social actualization (the belief that the resettlement society has the potential to become better), and social integration (sense of belonging to society). These aspects of social wellbeing are crucial outcomes for minority populations and relate to immigrants' functioning in the host society, such as the sense of belonging to the host society, sense of being a valuable member of the society, as well as benefiting from it (Keyes, 2007).

Together, the selected sub-dimensions of the two wellbeing components are particularly challenging for immigrants and contain key elements to a successful migratory process that can be damaged by threatening experiences (Bobowik et al., 2017). Perceived discrimination is therefore expected to be negatively associated with psychological and social wellbeing: *Hypothesis 4 (H4)*.

Current Study

The present study contributes to the existing research in three important ways. First, to our knowledge this is the first study to examine the link between perceived discrimination and intergroup and intrapersonal comparisons simultaneously. Current examinations of intergroup comparisons in ominous situations remain neglected (i.e., in response to perceptions of group status and

treatment; Zagefka & Brown, 2005), particularly among immigrants and resources that may enable them to protect their psychological and sociological adjustment (Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2006). Additionally, in this line of research, investigators primarily focus their efforts on examining comparison ability (i.e., choice of comparison target) among vulnerable populations (e.g., patients) and in an experimental setting (e.g., comparing test scores; triggering comparison target; Buunk & Gibbons, 2007; Buunk & Mussweiler, 2001).

Second, we aim to extend previous findings by focusing on two understudied indicators of adaptation, namely psychological wellbeing and social wellbeing. These components have seldom been studied among immigrants, which contain key resettlement aspects (Keyes, 2007; Ryff et al. 2003).

Third, in examining the impact of perceived discrimination on wellbeing, we focus on foreign-born immigrants rather than minority members born in a given society, such as African-Americans (Schmitt et al., 2014) or relatively high-status group members (e.g., international students; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). Little research has examined immigrants relative to other minority and low-status groups, particularly in the field of identity management and coping strategies (Blanz et al., 1998; Verkuyten & Reijerse, 2008).

We examine the hypothesized relations across five immigrant groups in the Basque Country: Sub-Saharan Africans (Senegal, Nigeria, Equatorial Guinea, and Cameroon), Bolivians, Colombians, Moroccans, and Romanians. In the Spanish context, Colombians and Bolivians have relatively higher socioeconomic status, while Sub-Saharan Africans and Moroccans have the lowest status (Sevillano, Basabe, Bobowik, & Aierdi, 2014). Linguistically, Bolivians and Colombians share the Spanish language with natives, whereas culturally and religiously, Moroccans and Sub-Saharan Africans are most distant from Spanish natives. Despite these group differences, we do not have clear theoretical reasons to expect our hypothesized relations will differ per group. That said, the objective of this study is to analyze the pattern of relationships between the variables, not comparing the groups at the descriptive level (i.e., comparing means; see Appendix B, Table I for means). It is likely that discrimination is painful for members of different immigrant groups (e.g., Chou, Asnaani, & Hofmann, 2012) and associated with similar comparisons strategies that contribute to wellbeing. Nevertheless, we will examine whether the predicted associations hold for the different immigrant groups.

Method

Sample and Data Collection

The current study is based on survey data collected in 2010 in the Basque country, an autonomous region in Spain. The sample was obtained through a random probability sample procedure by ethnicity with stratification by age and gender¹. Data were gathered through structured face-to-face interviews, which were conducted in Spanish, as the vast majority of participants fluently spoke and understood Spanish. However, in case needed, all interviewers were bilingual and were equipped with questionnaires in English and French (Sevillano et al., 2014). The total immigrant sample consisted of 1250 foreign-born immigrants from Sub-Saharan Africa, Bolivia, Colombia, Morocco, and Romania². Each group consisted of 250 participants. Females made up 44.3% of the sample and mean age (range 18–64) was 33.22 ($SD = 9.44$). Thirteen percent of the total sample had no formal education, 30.3% completed primary education, 41.4% completed secondary education, and 14.1% had a university degree. Socio-demographic characteristics per group are presented in Appendix B Table II (for more information about the sample characteristics, see Sevillano et al., 2014).

Measures

All items (listed in Appendix A) were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 5 (*completely agree*) unless stated otherwise, and were estimated as latent factors. In order to account for measurement error, scale reliability was assessed using composite reliability (ρ , see Raykov, 2017; a reasonable threshold for composite reliability can be anywhere from 0.60 and higher. It is suggested that a smaller number of items in a scale tends to have lower reliability levels, while larger numbers of scale items tend to have higher reliability) as reported in the text (see Appendix B Table III).

Perceived discrimination

Self-reported discriminatory experiences (see Sevillano et al., 2014) were measured using five items ($\rho = 0.89$; e.g., “During your stay in the Basque Country, how frequently have Basque or Spanish people made you feel discriminated against or made you feel that you are a financial threat, taking their jobs, soaking up welfare benefits, etc.?”). The items assessed the frequency of personal perceived discrimination due to one’s ethnic background and were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*almost always*). A similar measure (with six items) achieved satisfactory reliability in previous studies with immigrant population in the Basque Country.

Comparison strategies

The three comparison strategies were extracted from a broader identity management measure developed for the purpose of this study and inspired by Blanz et al. (1998). This measure was initially composed of 35 items, from which 15 items were selected and validated into a shortened 15-item version of identity management scale. In this study, we use six items belonging to an intergroup social comparison dimension and a temporal comparison dimension. *Downward intergroup comparison* was assessed using a single item (please refer to the Analytical Measures section for measurement error) in which participants were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the following comparison statement: “My country’s culture is more interesting than other immigrant cultures.” For *upward intergroup comparison* participants were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with the following two statements ($\rho = 0.60$): “Despite what people say, we are much more hard working than the Basques” and “We, people from my country, are better

than the Basques and Spanish in many respects.” To measure *temporal intrapersonal comparison*, participants were asked to respond to three items ($\rho = 0.66$) comparing their current and past situations (e.g., “Compared with the past, my situation is better than before”).

Eudaimonic wellbeing

Wellbeing was measured using six sub-dimensions, three related to psychological wellbeing and three related to social wellbeing. To capture *psychological wellbeing*, we used the Psychological Wellbeing Scale (Ryff, 1989) by using three items specific to positive relations (e.g., “I have warm and trusting relationships with others”), two items tapping into environmental mastery (e.g., “In general, I feel I am in charge of my situation in which I live”), and three items assessing personal growth (e.g., “I have improved as a person over the years”). For *social wellbeing*, we used the Social Wellbeing Scale (Keyes, 1998). Three items were used to measure social contribution (e.g., “I have something important to contribute to society”), three items for social actualization (e.g., “Society is becoming a better place for people like me”), and three for social integration (e.g., “I feel close to the people in my community”). In the analyses, the six theoretically distinct sub-dimensions were considered as first-order latent factors, while psychological wellbeing ($\rho = 0.75$) and social wellbeing ($\rho = 0.75$) were modeled as second-order factors.

Analytical Strategy

All analyses were conducted in Mplus 7.3. We fit a multi-group mediation model for five ethnic groups using nine latent factors to measure perceived discrimination, upward intergroup comparisons, temporal intrapersonal comparisons, and the six sub-dimensions of eudaimonic wellbeing. The wellbeing sub-dimensions were unified in two second-order factors of psychological wellbeing and social wellbeing. To avoid the possibility of measurement error due to using a single-item indicator, we fixed the factor loading of downward intergroup comparison to one and the error term to the single-indicator-reliability (i.e., composite reliability of upward intergroup comparisons). We controlled for age (in years), gender (1 = female, 0 = male), and education (five levels, ranging from no education completed to a university degree). Psychological wellbeing and social wellbeing were regressed on the three comparison strategies, which were in turn regressed on perceived discrimination. Missing values on the mediators and dependent constructs were dealt with by using Full Information Maximum Likelihood (i.e., all available data were used to estimate a parameter). Exogenous variables with missing values (controls; $N = 14$) were treated as endogenous variables. We additionally conducted *t*-tests against the midpoint of the response scale with the aim of examining the general level of self-reported discrimination, social comparisons, and wellbeing in the sample under study.

To properly test for mediation, the method of bootstrapping was used to obtain reliable statistics for the indirect effects. We followed Preacher and Hayes' (2008) bootstrapping procedure with 5000 replacement samples whereby an indirect effect is significant if the 95% bias corrected confidence interval does not include zero.

Results

Measurement Invariance Across Immigrant Groups

To assess the factorial structure and measurement invariance of the latent factors across the five groups, we tested for configural ($\chi^2(1650) = 2766.540$, Scaling factor = 1.090, $CFI = 0.901$, $RMSEA = 0.052$, $SRMR = 0.071$) and metric ($\chi^2(1722) = 2841.713$, Scaling factor = 1.108, $CFI = 0.901$, $RMSEA = 0.051$, $SRMR = 0.078$) measurement invariance. A Satorra-Bentler scaled chi-square difference test (specific for MLR estimation) indicated that the null hypothesis of metric invariance cannot be rejected ($\Delta\chi^2 = 87.531$, $p = .103$). Notably, these results build upon the already existing theoretical and empirical work demonstrating that when the sub-dimensions are reliably measured, they can be successfully integrated into second-order factors (Bobowik et al., 2017; Ryff et al., 2003).

Descriptive Findings

Correlations are reported in Table 1 for the total sample³. Perceived discrimination was relatively low and significantly below the midpoint ($t(1249) = -34.89$, $p < .001$). Downward intergroup comparisons (DIC) ($t(1249) = 17.49$, $p < .001$), upward intergroup comparisons (UIC) ($t(1249) = 19.92$, $p < .001$), and temporal intrapersonal comparisons (TIC) ($t(1249) = 37.70$, $p < .001$) were

Table 1
Bivariate Correlations among Variables under Study.

Total sample $N = 1250$	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Psychological wellbeing	–					
2. Social wellbeing	.90***	–				
3. Perceived discrimination	-.43***	.47***	–			
4. Downward intergroup comparison	-.17***	-.02	.20***	–		
5. Upward intergroup comparison	.02	.03	.24***	.57***	–	
6. Temporal intrapersonal comparison	.73***	.61***	-.36***	-.10*	.03	–

* $p < .05$.

*** $p < .001$.

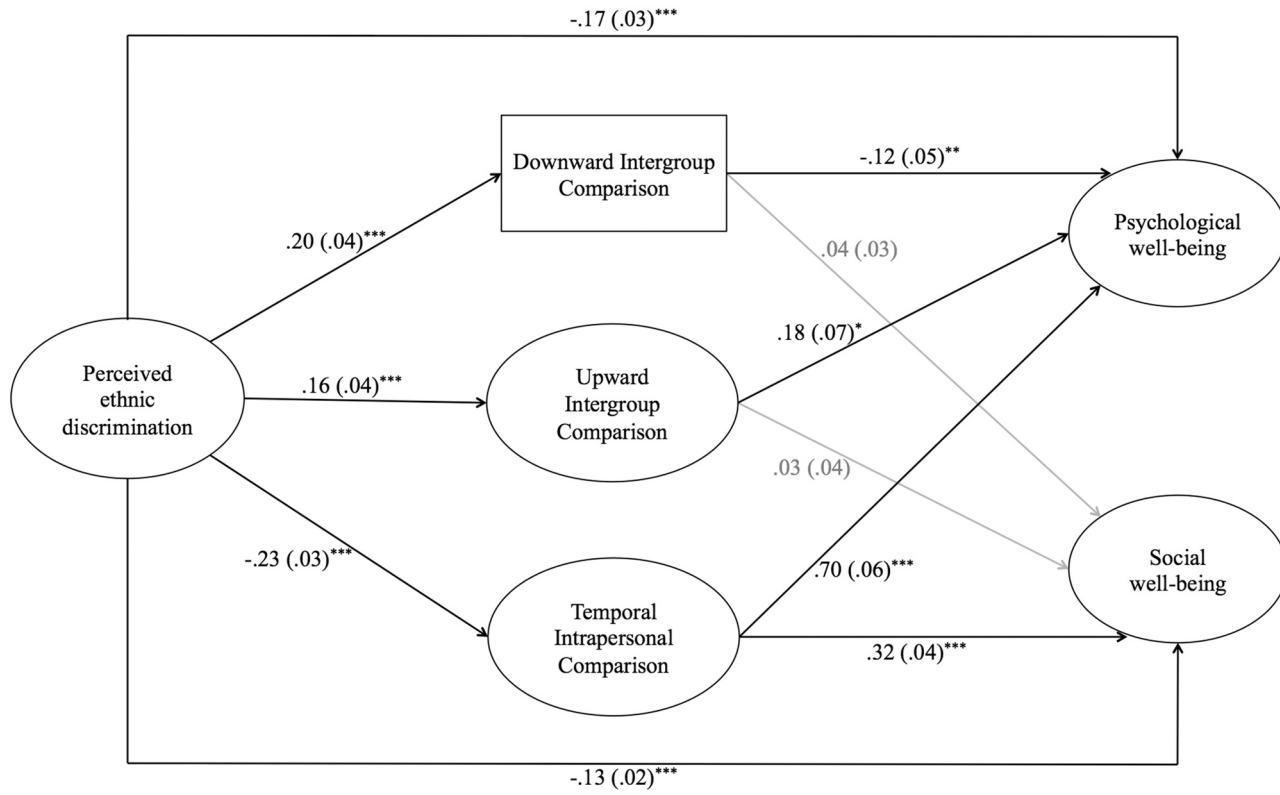


Fig. 1. Unstandardized direct effects (and standard errors) in a model with perceived discrimination, social comparisons, and psychological and social wellbeing. *Note.* Light grey lines represent non-significant results. Control variables not presented. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

relatively high and significantly above the midpoint of the scale. The same holds for psychological (PWB) ($t(1249) = 53.75, p < .001$) and social wellbeing (SWB) ($t(1249) = 61.54, p < .001$).

Multi-group Path Model

We first estimated a structurally invariant multigroup model, where we constrained all structural paths to be equal across groups ($\chi^2(2156) = 3460.968$, Scaling factor = 1.086, $CFI = 0.890$, $RMSEA = 0.049$, $SRMR = 0.079$). We subsequently estimated a structurally variant mediation model allowing for all structural paths to differ between groups ($\chi^2(2052) = 3359.532$, Scaling factor = 1.085, $CFI = 0.890$, $RMSEA = 0.050$, $SRMR = 0.074$). A scaled chi-square difference test showed that the structurally invariant and variant models do not significantly differ from one another indicating that there are no path differences between groups ($\Delta\chi^2 = 102.652, p = .519$). Wald tests were also conducted, which indicated that the differences in the main effects across groups are not significant, further confirming that there were no significant differences ($p_s > 0.05$) between specific paths across groups. The structurally invariant model was therefore considered as our final model; summarized in Fig. 1.

Our hypotheses were generally confirmed. Perceived discrimination was significantly related to engaging in more favorable DIC and UIC, but unexpectedly to fewer TIC. While DIC was significantly related to lower PWB, UIC and TIC were significantly related to higher PWB. Favorable DIC and UIC were not significantly related to SWB. However, favorable TIC was positively associated with SWB. Lastly, immigrants who perceived more ethnic discrimination reported significantly lower levels of PWB and SWB.

All relations and 95% confidence intervals are reported in Table 2. The indirect effect from discrimination to PWB through DIC was significantly negative. This indicates that the more immigrants felt discriminated, the more they engaged in favorable DIC, which in turn lowered their PWB; we did not find evidence of an indirect effect via DIC to SWB (not confirming H1). The indirect effect via UIC to PWB was significantly positive. This means that the more immigrants perceived discrimination, the more they engaged in favorable UIC, which in turn was associated with higher PWB, but not with SWB (partly confirming H2). The indirect effects from ethnic discrimination to PWB and SWB were partially mediated via TIC (corroborating H3). Although TIC was significantly associated with higher PWB and SWB, its negative relationship with ethnic discrimination amounted to a negative indirect effect. Notably, while the direct effects of perceived discrimination on PWB and SWB remained negative, the total effects decreased after the mediators were taken into account.

We ran additional analyses to test whether the effects of perceived discrimination were significantly stronger across PWB and SWB. A Wald test indicated that this was not the case ($W(1) = 1.337, p = .248$). Another Wald test indicated that the association between perceived discrimination and DIC and UIC were the same, $W(1) = 0.539, p = .463$. The effect of perceived discrimination on TIC was significantly stronger than on DIC, $W(1) = 73.806, p < .001$, and on UIC, $W(1) = 76.867, p < .001$. Lastly, the effect of TIC on PWB was significantly stronger than on SWB ($W(1) = 39.362, p < .001$).

Discussion

Previous research has consistently shown the negative impact of perceived discrimination on wellbeing (Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009; Schmitt et al., 2014). Literature has also emphasized the importance of different coping strategies, such as social comparison processes (Crocker & Major, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986), to manage threatening situations. The present study is one of the first to systematically and simultaneously examine the role of downward intergroup comparisons, upward intergroup comparisons, and temporal intergroup comparisons in the relationship between perceived ethnic discrimination and psychological and social wellbeing among foreign-born immigrants.

The current study provides evidence that experiences of ethnic discrimination are related to favorable downward intergroup

Table 2
Specific Total, Direct and Indirect Effects Between Perceived Discrimination and Psychological and Social Wellbeing.

Path: Psychological Wellbeing	b	SE	95% CI [LL, UL]
Perceived discrimination → PWB (total)	-0.33***	.04	[-.39, -.27]
Perceived discrimination → PWB (direct)	-0.17***	.04	[-.23, -.11]
Perceived discrimination → DIC → PWB	-0.02*	.01	[-.05, -.01]
Perceived discrimination → UIC → PWB	.03*	.01	[.01, .06]
Perceived discrimination → TIC → PWB	-0.16***	.02	[-.21, -.13]
Path: Social Wellbeing	b	SE	95% CI [LL, UL]
Perceived discrimination → SWB (total)	-0.19***	.02	[-.24, -.16]
Perceived discrimination → SWB (direct)	-0.13***	.02	[-.17, -.10]
Perceived discrimination → DIC → SWB	.01	.01	[-.001, .02]
Perceived discrimination → UIC → SWB	.004	.01	[-.01, .002]
Perceived discrimination → TIC → SWB	-0.07***	.01	[-.10, -.06]

Note. Entries are the results of SEM analysis in Mplus 7.3. Reported are the unstandardized coefficients (b) and standard errors (SE). PWB: psychological wellbeing; SWB: social wellbeing; DIC: downward intergroup comparison; UIC: upward intergroup comparison; TIC: temporal intra-personal comparison.

* $p < .05$.

*** $p < .001$.

comparisons. That is, in response to ethnic discrimination, immigrants tend to consider their ingroup's culture as more interesting than the culture of other immigrant groups thus viewing themselves in a better light (Wills, 1981). This is in line with social creativity and intergroup theories, which emphasize favorable intergroup comparisons as a strategy to cope with a negative or stigmatized social identity (Crocker & Major, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This finding further contributes to a series of studies showing downward comparisons are prominent in populations facing various types of threat (Blanz et al., 1998; Brown & Zagefka, 2006; Buunk et al. 1990; Buunk & Gibbons, 2007; Wills, 1981).

However, downward intergroup comparison appears to reinforce the detrimental effects of perceived discrimination on psychological wellbeing. Favorably comparing with a lower-status immigrant group seems to be particularly damaging to immigrants' positive relations with others in society, perceptions of control (i.e., environmental mastery), and personal growth. Although inconsistent with our expectations, this finding might be linked to previous research proposing that downward comparison may ultimately become problematic, tying it to diminishing wellbeing (Buunk et al., 1990; White, Langer, Yariv, & Welch, 2006). Engaging in downward intergroup comparisons may momentarily help immigrants feel better about themselves, but upon realizing that this does not facilitate actual improvement, immigrants may eventually feel dissatisfied. Furthermore, although focusing on being better than other immigrant groups may temporarily lead to enhanced wellbeing, the possibility that one could perform worse or become more similar to the worse-off target group, might result in negative affect (Buunk et al., 1990).

The current study does not provide evidence of the relationship between downward intergroup comparison and social wellbeing. This suggests that although comparing downward on cultural-dimensions (as reflected in the current study) may be relevant to immigrants' psychological wellbeing, it may not be as relevant to their social functioning. According to Keyes (1998), social structures corroborate social wellbeing by developing a sense of self or social accomplishment (e.g., education or socioeconomic status). Therefore, compared to downward *cultural* comparisons, comparing downward on socioeconomic standing (Keyes, 1998) or degree of social participation (Cicognani et al., 2008) may be of greater relevance for immigrants' perceptions of their societal value (social contribution), social belonging (social integration), and/or society's trajectory and potential (social actualization). Additionally, despite perceiving one's culture to be superior to others, immigrants may believe that the culture, of any group, is not considered valuable by the host society, deeming downward intergroup comparison irrelevant to social wellbeing, as it reflects wider societal functioning, contribution, and value.

Experiences of ethnic discrimination were also related to favorable upward intergroup comparisons. Similar to downward intergroup comparison, the more discrimination immigrants experience, the more they tend to use upward comparisons to present their ingroup in the best light possible. This finding provides additional support for research suggesting the occurrence of upward comparison among individuals facing threat or stress (Buunk et al., 1990; Buunk & Gibbons, 2007). Upward intergroup comparisons further enhance immigrants' psychological wellbeing, indicating that threatened individuals may be inclined to assimilate their self-evaluation upward allowing them to elevate their self-worth. Viewing one's ingroup as superior to a higher status group on some dimensions (e.g., more hardworking), seems to be beneficial for immigrants' psychological wellbeing when they feel discriminated. This is in line with previous research suggesting that comparing with a better-off target in respect to performance or skill-related circumstances can be uplifting, enhance self-appraisals, and increase positive affect (Buunk et al., 1990; Collins, 1996; Ouwerkerk & Ellemers, 2002). However, the expected relationship between upward intergroup comparison and social wellbeing is not supported by our findings. Although upward intergroup comparisons may be beneficial to feeling valuable to society (social contribution), it may hinder immigrants' perception of what the new society offers them (social actualization). Despite working hard and usefully contributing to society, immigrants may feel that society is yet to become a better place for them when considering how they are treated (e.g., experiencing discrimination, fewer job opportunities, etc.), thus offsetting improved consequences, such as enhancing social wellbeing.

Our findings further indicate that immigrants engage in favorable temporal intrapersonal comparisons less often when they feel discriminated. Temporal comparison is generally beneficial for wellbeing when individuals perceive their situation to be an improvement compared to the past (Brown & Zagefka, 2006). However, discrimination can be a very unsettling experience as it implies unfair treatment hinting that one is not considered an equal member of society. As a result, higher perceptions of discrimination might make it more difficult to engage in favorable temporal intrapersonal comparisons in which immigrants' current situation is positively compared to their past. Yet, our findings provide evidence that favorable temporal intrapersonal comparisons are associated with higher psychological and social wellbeing. This is in line with previous research showing one's current personal situation as better than that of the past contributes to wellbeing (Mcfarland & Alvaro, 2000; Wilson & Ross, 2000). However, since ethnic discrimination appears to lower immigrants' tendencies to engage in this comparison strategy, we cannot conclude that temporal intrapersonal comparisons may act as a coping mechanism of psychological and social wellbeing in response to perceived discrimination.

Notably, the association between ethnic discrimination and temporal intrapersonal comparisons was stronger than with intergroup comparisons. This supports previous research suggesting that threatened individuals may be particularly likely to engage in temporal intrapersonal comparisons for two reasons (Wilson & Ross, 2000). First, intrapersonal comparisons consist of information readily accessible and highly pertinent to current personal evaluations. Second, intergroup comparisons require group members to measure themselves against others and obtaining collective comparisons may be more difficult than self-referential comparisons.

Lastly, regardless of cultural and social differences between the groups, the current study shows that all immigrant groups responded similarly to experiences of discrimination. This suggests that foreign-born immigrants may adopt similar comparison strategies despite their socio-cultural and demographic differences, and face similar outcomes as a result of perceived discrimination. This is in line with existing research (e.g., Chou et al., 2012) that indicates discrimination can be just as painful for different minority groups. Despite the objective differences between the groups, they are all foreign-born immigrants facing similar challenges to feel included in their host society. This is in line with research that indicates perceptions of discrimination tend to lead to poorer wellbeing

outcomes across minority and socially disadvantaged groups in different societies (Schmitt et al. 2014). Since the objective and scope of our study were to analyze the pattern of relationships between variables, we encourage future research to consider socio-demographics and cultural differences as well as examine differences across groups in response to discrimination.

Limitations

There are several limitations that provide directions for future studies. First, only one item was used to evaluate downward intergroup comparison. Although we accounted for measurement error, we were only able to compare the single item measure to our measure of upward intergroup comparison. Additionally, the corresponding downward intergroup comparison item measured culturally based contrasts, which may have overlooked the harmful impact of the assessed discriminatory experiences (e.g., perceived social threat, hostile treatment, and physical appearance). Future research is encouraged to develop and validate a downward intergroup comparison measure using multiple items (e.g., based on perceived ingroup status in relation to socio-demographic characteristics). Additionally, we encourage future research to examine and analyze different sub-dimension comparisons that may be applied by immigrant groups, such as cultural and economic comparisons, in more depth.

Second, we investigated immigrants' subjective experiences of discrimination and were not able to consider the degree to which immigrants believe their group, as a whole, faces discrimination. Future research should take personal-group discrimination discrepancy (see Bourguignon, Seron, Yzerbyt, & Herman, 2006) into account, as immigrants may use different types of social comparative judgments depending on the level of perceived group discrimination. Furthermore, albeit our measure of personal perceived discrimination was negatively related to both psychological and social wellbeing, one may speculate that group perceived ethnic discrimination might impact the wellbeing components differently.

Third, it should be noted that we used cross-sectional data. Consequently, the direction of causality remains uncertain. For example, it is possible that instability in psychological and social wellbeing increases the use of comparison strategies, which could affect one's awareness of and sensitivity to discrimination. Likewise, engaging in comparison strategies may lessen perceptions of discrimination and/or the effect of perceived discrimination on eudaimonic wellbeing. Longitudinal research is needed to determine the (mutual) directions of influence. Future research should examine the generality of the current findings. It is important to investigate whether similar associations are found in other national contexts or among second-generation immigrants, who might have a different perspective on their situation and experiences in the host society.

Conclusion

The present study provides new insights on the role of different comparison strategies in the detrimental effects of perceived discrimination on eudaimonic wellbeing among immigrants. Despite the negative relationship between perceived ethnic discrimination and psychological and social wellbeing, the relations weakened after taking the comparison strategies into account. This suggests that favorable comparison processes are important for immigrants to cope with discrimination and how it might affect their wellbeing. Immigrants tend to selectively choose to enhance intergroup comparisons to internally rebuild their societal position, which may contribute to discovering ways to adapt to and overcome the challenges of resettling in a new society.

Social psychological research on minority groups' reactions to discrimination has evolved from early identity management strategies and social identity theories of minority stigmatization. As this literature develops, empirical findings can contribute to a better understanding of intergroup relations and situational variables that can advance insight into immigrants' reactions to discrimination and its impact on wellbeing. Our research particularly highlighted the importance of exploring the various strategies immigrants may employ in response to challenges of fitting into a new society that can contribute to understanding migratory processes. Furthermore, these processes may require an active response to discriminatory treatment that may have real implications for immigrants' eudaimonic wellbeing. Altogether, although the host society and its political institutions should make an effort to promote social inclusion of immigrants, our results demonstrated that engaging in social creativity strategies may help immigrants cope with existing social rejection as well as achieve better wellbeing and integration into the host-society.

Authorship

Dina Madi prepared, interpreted, and analyzed the data, as well as drafted the article. Magdalena Bobowik was actively involved in study design and fieldwork, assisted with conceptualizing the paper, supervised data analysis and interpretation, and provided feedback. Maykel Verkuyten provided comments and feedback on the written article. Nekane Basabe was actively involved as the IP of the grant, study design, and fieldwork.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The author(s) has/have no competing interests to declare.

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Notes

¹ The sample was drawn from public records while taking into account the distribution of immigrants in the districts of the Basque Country. Respondents were recruited from randomly selected routes from each district. Once immigrants in a random route were all interviewed, the routes were rearranged by assigning a new starting point in the district.

² The selection of immigrant groups was based on the statistical records of immigrants, and covers the largest migrant groups in the Basque Country, representing 46% of all immigrants. Our sample reflects the actual representation of each district, gender, and age group within the Basque Country.

³ Correlations and composite reliabilities per group, reported in Table III under Appendix B, were of a similar magnitude as the total sample.

Appendix A. Supporting information

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found in the online version at [doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2021.10.007](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2021.10.007).

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