

João Luiz Bastos¹

Helen Gonçalves¹

Eduardo Faerstein^{II}

Aluísio JD Barros¹

Experiences of discrimination among university students in the city of Rio de Janeiro

ABSTRACT

OBJECTIVE: To understand experiences of discrimination lived by undergraduate students and to analyze their applicability to the construction of a Brazilian discrimination scale.

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES: In a qualitative study five focus groups were conducted with 43 university students from the city of Rio de Janeiro, Southeastern Brazil, in 2008. Students from undergraduate courses with different candidate/place ratios; of both sexes; self-identified as white, mixed or black; and belonging to two public higher education institutions were selected. An interview guide focusing on issues related to “prejudice” and “discrimination” and asking participants about their experiences of discrimination was used. The method of interpretation of meanings was adopted, seeking to understand the context, reasons and logics of participants’ speech.

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS: Prejudice was interpreted as something belonging to the field of ideas, probably equivocated, and which could be either positive or negative. Discrimination was attributed to the field of observable behaviors and with an invariably negative connotation. The interpretation of a discriminatory event as such was influenced by subjective factors, such as personal interests and the level of affectivity established between individuals. However, the limit between what was interpreted as discriminatory or not depended strongly on the specific context in which the interaction among individuals occurred. Different situations and, at times, more than one motivation were simultaneously indicated as regards discriminatory experiences. Participants saw themselves as both victims and perpetrators of discrimination.

CONCLUSIONS: The interpretation of an event as discriminatory involves great complexity and the experiences of discrimination can hardly be generalized. When evident, the reasons for which individuals suppose they have been discriminated against may be multiple and associated with each other. Such aspects must be considered when constructing items for the discrimination scale.

DESCRIPTORS: Young Adult. Students. Prejudice. Interpersonal Relations. Qualitative Research.

¹ Programa de Pós-graduação em Epidemiologia. Universidade Federal de Pelotas (UFPel). Pelotas, RS, Brasil

^{II} Instituto de Medicina Social. Departamento de Epidemiologia. Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brasil

Correspondence:

João Luiz Bastos
R. Marechal Deodoro, 1160, 3º piso – Centro
96020-220 Pelotas, RS, Brasil
E-mail: joao.luiz.epi@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Although the causes of social inequalities in health have been an object of academic investigation and political debates for over 150 years, only in the late 20th century discrimination began to be viewed as an important factor in the production of diseases and as a driver of health disparities.¹⁰ The study of the relationships between discrimination and health has been partly guided by the ecosocial theory,⁸ which assumes that population patterns of health, disease and well-being reflect embodied material and social conditions of human existence, including various forms of discrimination and oppression. On the other hand, the biopsychosocial model, with its greater emphasis on stress and coping strategies, has also been used to understand the pathological effects that discrimination may cause.⁴

In collective health, the first studies on experiences of discrimination involved mainly racially biased discriminatory behaviors,¹¹ to the detriment of other forms of unfair treatment, such as those with a sexist or class-biased content, in addition to their possible inter-relationships.⁸ In particular, racism and the living conditions of the black population in the United States (US) have been the object of several investigations. In the US, efforts have been directed towards the development of scales to measure experiences of racial^a discrimination, with instruments aimed at measuring experiences of racial discrimination being published in journals dedicated to the resolution of social problems and counseling of minority groups. More recently, the study of discrimination effects on health conditions and health-related behaviors has reached an international scope.¹³ Moreover, the diversity of forms of discrimination studied has increased. Notably, in addition to racially biased discriminatory behaviors, unfair treatment related to mental health conditions, such as schizophrenia, and to sexual orientation, especially homosexuality, are forms of discrimination with growing academic interest. However, despite the growing interest in different types of discrimination, the idea that these multiple forms can be combined and experienced simultaneously⁸ has been under-studied.

In Brazil, there have been no attempts at the development of discrimination scales for use in studies on social determinants of health conditions and health-related behaviors. Characteristics of Brazilian social relations, with their marked regional differences, could suggest that a scale with that purpose should be developed for use only in this country and/or in some of its regions and population domains. In the case of racial discrimination, several authors, such as Telles¹² and Fry,⁵ emphasize important differences between racism

and social dynamics in Brazil and the US, although their interpretations about this phenomenon in Brazil diverge. Spatial segregation, for example, is considered the main mechanism through which racial discrimination operates in the US.¹² This aspect may not apply to other socio-cultural contexts and warrants, according to a relativist approach,¹ the construction of a specific instrument for use in Brazil. On the other hand, if the initiative of constructing a discrimination scale reveals that this phenomenon is interpreted in Brazil in a way similar to that of other socio-cultural contexts, the importance of efforts directed towards the trans-cultural adaptation of an instrument may be strengthened.^{1,7}

The objective of the present study was to understand experiences of discrimination lived by undergraduate students and to analyze their applicability to the construction of a Brazilian discrimination scale.

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

This was a qualitative study whose reference population consisted of students from two public universities, one federal and the other state-owned, located in the city of Rio de Janeiro, Southeastern Brazil, in the second academic semester of 2008. These institutions were selected because they cover socio-economically different populations and show distinct admission systems. The state university reserves a number of places for low-income students and those self-identified as black or mixed.

A total of five focus groups were conducted, comprised of students selected from courses with different candidate/place ratios, since this could influence the perception and the reporting of experiences of discrimination. Individuals taking part in this study were approached in the classroom, student unions and cafeterias or coffee shops of the visited university campuses.

Self-classification of race/color was another criterion to form focus groups, based on the following categories, defined by the *Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística* (IBGE – Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics): white, mixed, black, Asian-Brazilian and Indigenous. Before each group was formed, between 20 and 25 students willing to take part in the study were asked to fill in a form with information about personal classification and telephone contact, in addition to demographic data, such as age, sex and self-classified race/color. With this information, the research coordinator formed the groups with a balanced distribution in terms of sex and approximately 1/3 of self-classified

^a The term "race" and its classifications will not be put in quotes throughout the text for reading purposes only. In the present study, such terms are understood as emic categories, which must be relativized and do not represent a scientifically unequivocal, fixed or exhaustive classificatory system.⁵

whites, 1/3 of mixed individuals and 1/3 of blacks. This procedure was performed so that the group environment reflected the students' daily social contacts, forcing manifestations related to discriminatory experiences to be necessarily shared among individuals of both sexes and from different race/colors.

In the state university, three groups were conducted, each formed by medicine, physical education and social sciences students. In the federal university, meetings held included medicine and physical education students exclusively, due to the difficulty in gathering social sciences students from this latter institution. Transcription of records was supported by notes on participants' non-verbal behavior and the dynamics established, among other subjects. An interview guide was used, including one initial question, which encouraged students to define what prejudice and discrimination meant to them and whether they identified differences between these two terms. This question was read right after the title and the objectives of the research project of which this study was part were introduced.^a Subsequently, students were asked about discriminatory experiences they might have experienced.

This study avoided focusing on a specific type of discrimination (e.g. gender, age, race or class discrimination). This was performed so that: (a) individuals not aware of the reasons for which they have been discriminated against could express themselves, without being influenced by the frequency or emphasis with which a certain form of discrimination was mentioned; and, consequently, (b) different discriminatory experiences could be approached in the most accurate way possible in those contexts, allowing participants to point to none, one or more reasons for their discriminatory experiences.

The method of interpretation of meanings was used, seeking to interpret the individual and social logics, reasons and contexts of the obtained reports.⁶ Analytical categories were established in the interview guide and also from participants' speech. In the interpretative trajectory, the following stages were carried out: (a) thorough reading of transcriptions, aiming to obtain a broader perspective and to fully grasp the details of the material; (b) identification and thematic division of the elements that arose in participants' speech; (c) identification and critical appraisal of the explicit and implicit ideas in the participants' speech; (d) search for broader (socio-cultural) meanings, underlying participants' reports; (e) preparation of interpretative synthesis, seeking to link study objective and empirical data; and (f) dialogue between the explicit and implicit ideas and information originating from other studies on this topic.

In all, the five focus groups included the participation of 43 university students, 23 men and 20 women. Of these, 17 self-classified as white, ten as black, 12 as mixed, one was Asian-Brazilian and three did not inform their race/color. Participants' age varied between 19 and 33 years and meetings had a minimum and a maximum duration of 1h05m and 2h10m, respectively. The number of participants in each group varied from five to 14.

This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committees of the *Universidade Federal de Pelotas* and *Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro*. Participation was voluntary and achieved by signing an informed consent form. Participants' anonymity was preserved, with participants being identified by the initials GF, followed by their numerical position in the group and identification of courses and universities (UE and UF identified students from state and federal universities, respectively).

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

The main categories analyzed were: prejudice and discrimination, factors affecting perception of discrimination, and contexts and reasons for the experiences of discrimination.

Prejudice and discrimination

Prejudice was conceived as a general idea or a superficial thought, previously established about something or someone and subject to be mistaken. In the groups, prejudice was associated with notions of social rules, acts and norms, including inevitable ("natural") prejudgments and conclusions about one's appearance or behavior at the first moment. The different types of prejudice mentioned were regarded as socially shared ideas or in their specific groups. Individuals of a lower social class, for example, could share specific prejudices against those of higher social classes and vice-versa. In addition, discriminatory ideas were considered natural; they were interpreted as inherent to all and every human being. By going through this process of becoming natural, such ideas acquired a status of humanity, turning into something that individuals should not necessarily feel ashamed of, as exemplified below:

"So, I don't have a problem when I say I have prejudice in some situations. (...) But, you know, I have prejudice and think that everybody does in fact... When you think of some stuff you don't know, when you think about what it is and what it's not... it's natural to create a prejudgment, a preconception... Now, what matters is what you say afterwards..." (GF2CSUE)

^a The project, whose main general objective prescribed the construction of a scale of discriminatory experiences, was entitled "Racial' inequalities in health: assessing the experience of self-reported discrimination in Brazil".

In some circumstances, however, prejudice was understood as socio-historically constructed, such as in the case of racial prejudice. One of the participants of the focus group with social sciences students from the state university reported that, after a long process of reflection and stimulated by the university environment, he began to understand racial prejudice as a social construction:

“But, of course, you reflect on this with time, even in the university, and as this goes on you come to realize it’s a social construction. Obviously, it’s a historical question of the black person in slavery and, as time goes by, the question of melanin was one that divided society and, automatically, black people were those most excluded and, because they were the most excluded, they’re the ones who have least access to education and, then, one thing leads to another and it all ends up at the margin of poverty, where the majority are blacks, who’ll become robbers... It’s not a question of melanin, but rather a social question...” (GF2CSUE)

By its turn, discrimination was understood as something that was in the sphere of actions and that of observable behavior. Individuals viewed discrimination as the result, the concrete manifestation of a prejudice – discrimination would be the action, whereas prejudice would be the thought, the idea. By becoming natural, prejudice would become too difficult to control, something that might not occur with discrimination. By showing this possible relation of progression and of cause and effect from prejudice to discrimination, individuals in the focus groups also expressed concern for this “causal link” not to be triggered or showed in front of others, as exemplified in the following reports:

“Prejudice is something that we’re impregnated with at all times and makes us constantly watch ourselves so we can deal with this... The question is what comes afterwards... That’s what the problem is, it’s discrimination... Which means you have a preconception, you don’t fight against it, you don’t try to think over your concept and, then, you make the mistake of discriminating without discussing with that person you had a preconception about, before getting to meet them.” (GF1CSUE)

“It doesn’t matter if I like them or not, what I can’t do is to show this... (...) I have prejudice against others, I admit... I’d be lying if I said I had no prejudice about many things, but what I can’t do is to show this, you know?” (GF6MEDUE)

“I think that... Prejudice is inner discrimination. It’s the idea that’s in you, for example... Anyway, discrimination is the result of this, it’s the action. So, the idea is prejudice (...) I have a concept of sexuality and how to deal with it and I don’t agree with homosexuality. Still, this doesn’t give me the right to discriminate a homosexual.” (GF1EFUE)

These reports suggest that consenting to prejudices present in society is something that occurs in a relatively passive and unavoidable way, as exemplified by the use of the expression “to be impregnated with”, instead of “to adhere to”. “To be impregnated with” means “to be absorbed with”, whereas “to adhere to” means “to consent to something out of conviction or interest”. Moreover, despite individuals recognizing the social importance of not discriminating against others, interaction among them in the focus groups occurred through the explicit manifestation of prejudices, frequently in the form of jokes or teasing.

In the focus groups, discrimination had an invariably negative connotation and, thus, resulting from prejudices with only derogatory meanings. On the other hand, prejudice was not viewed as something strictly demeaning. In some circumstances, this could become positive and turned into something that causes the victim of prejudice to be valued. As an example, one student reported being discriminated against when he was considered a “daddy’s boy” in certain circumstances. However, this individual also acknowledged that something positive could be associated with the fact that he lived in a socially valued area of the city, Barra da Tijuca, and that he showed phenotypic characteristics (white skin, light eyes and blond hair, according to his own description), which would tend to give him more status. The possibly positive connotation of prejudice was corroborated by another participant of the same focus group:

“For me, the difference between prejudice and discrimination is that prejudice could be both positive and negative. But not discrimination, which is always negative. You can look at someone well-dressed in the streets and, I don’t know, find that person awesome, sensational... But, in fact, that’s not it. It’s a form of prejudice. You created a concept before meeting that person.” (GF4EFUE)

Although participants pointed to important conceptual differences between prejudice and discrimination, both terms were frequently used interchangeably in the focus group discussions.

Factors affecting perception of discrimination

According to participants in focus groups, the negative impact of discrimination could be reduced when in the context of a relationship with more intimacy and affection among people. In situations of greater affection, the manifestation of certain preconceptions would tend to be tolerated, despite its continuing discriminatory connotation. The terms maintain the sense of locating people in a series of types of relations and levels of affection, which could thus be reinterpreted by taking on more tolerable forms in given circumstances. Being called by a rather derogatory term as a

joke, for example, is something that can be accepted by everyone, including those who are the target of the term in question and who reject discriminatory actions. The relations among individuals in the focus groups actually involved jokes and teasing with a discriminatory content, according to what was observed in the following examples:

"I don't worry about being called 'negão' [a Brazilian term which roughly translates as 'big black guy']... At times, it's not even the word itself... It's the way it's said... it's the intonation... You notice when 'negão' is said in a friendly way, in partnership, even showing intimacy with someone... When you let someone treat you this way... now, it's another thing when 'negão' is used to discriminate, to describe and spot you..." (GF7CSUE)

"I think that, in friendship, it's OK... But, then, you think it's OK and yet... For example, I got a friend who's Jewish, while I have an Arabian background... Then, on the phone, it's always like, 'Hey, what's up, Jew?... I'm sending you to a [concentration] camp!' (...) Likewise, my friend jokes by saying things like, 'Hey, Bin Laden, I'm gonna throw a bomb at you'..." (GF3CSUE)

"If you joke about something, it's like... It's the most subtle way to tell the truth to someone without hurting them..." (GF9EFUF)

However, when the dynamics of relationships changes, i.e. when a certain daily conduct, pre-established among people who see themselves as different is broken, this can be a sign that the level of affectivity among them has also changed. In these cases, the perception of individuals changes and the same types of behavior can be seen, from then on, as discriminatory to the point of being rejected and rendering the relationship impossible to go on. In the two cases exemplified as follows, breaking a pre-established conduct among individuals is something that occurs through the use of certain terms in a "way more rude" than usual or a joke in a "different tone" than expected. This would trigger a change, although brief, of affection among individuals and could cause this behavior, otherwise acceptable, to become discriminatory in this situation.

"I have a big nose. Sometimes, I joke about it, we make jokes about our flaws. There's a healthy way to do it and we think this is OK. (...) And I think the way you put it. Likewise, if a friend speaks in a more rude way, I'm not gonna like it. But it's a friend of mine. It depends on how you say it." (GF2EFUE)

"I think that, when you're friends with someone, you know it's a joke. You see that it's a joke. But, if you see or find out that, I don't know, one of your friends really discriminates against you, I mean, if they really think blonde women are stupid, then, I... I don't get it..." (...)

Ah, the joking tone. But, then, you have your limits and you actually find out that person's discriminated against you. Now, that hurts much more than social prejudice, because he's your friend, you trusted him... That's a bummer!" (GF5MEDUE)

The richness of reports indicates that the limits between what is interpreted as discriminatory and what is not are clear. However, these limits are revealed through the specific context of the relationship, at the exact moment individuals are interacting and under the influence of feelings from previous experiences/interactions. In other words, the limits exist, but they are not fixed and are context-dependent. Moreover, in the context of interpersonal relationships, behaviors can have a discriminatory connotation, according to the personal interests of those interacting and the way words are expressed and actions manifested, including the pronunciation of certain terms, such as those considered to be politically correct (e.g. "brunette" instead of "black").

In general, university students agreed that the social condition of poverty increases the probability that prejudice and discrimination are manifested. In the majority of cases reported, power relations were viewed as mediators in the transition from prejudice to discriminatory action, implying situations of violence, whether physical or symbolical, against individuals' dignity and citizenship. In this sense, situations such as those where the power relation established between professor and student and between police officer and ordinary citizen could have increased the manifestation of discriminatory behavior were reported. In this way, perception of discrimination was seen as a particularly subjective and affective process, in addition to its being contextual and inherent to society.

Contexts and reasons for the experiences of discrimination

Several circumstances where participants of focus groups perceived themselves or someone close to them as victims of discrimination were identified (Table). There were also specific situations where the speaker did not consider himself to be the one discriminated against, but rather someone who witnessed the event and identified the victim as such. Frequently, discriminatory experiences were "explicit discrimination", as suggested by Blank et al² (2004), and occurred in different backgrounds: schools, universities, business centers, districts in the North/West/South regions and suburbs of the city of Rio de Janeiro, army barracks and other public institutions. When perpetrators of discrimination were made reference to, individuals from different social classes, professors, doctors and police officers were mentioned, in addition to institutions such as military and educational institutions. The reasons why participants assumed they were discriminated

against were not always pointed out. In addition, when they were, several reasons were given, such as: intellectual ability, undergraduate course chosen, being eligible for places allocated to minority groups by certain universities (affirmative action for racial minorities), not being eligible for these places, physical appearance, place of residence, clothing, place of origin, lack of professional experience, race/color (especially in relation to white and black individuals) and behavior that shows homosexual orientation.

Similarly, certain terms or ideas with a discriminatory content frequently triggered another set of prejudices associated with the perception of discrimination. The term “black”, for example, was strongly associated with other expressions, such as poor, poorly dressed, bus, thief, robbery and fear. The same occurred with other words, described as follows:

University professor → old → bald → impotent → crazy;

Jew → miserly → wealthy → clever in business;

Arab → crime → terrorism;

Law student → high social class → suit and tie, someone wearing a tie;

Engineering students → pimples on the face → computer;

Social Sciences student → long hair → beard → intellectualized individuals.

Although there was consensus among individuals concerning the idea that prejudice is not measurable and that discrimination could be quantified, since it is an observable behavior, participants in the focus groups found it difficult to organize the reported experiences of discrimination in a scale of intensity. In general, it was stated that this difficulty resulted from the innumerable subjective aspects surrounding the experiences of discrimination. Finally, participants in the focus groups not only saw themselves as victims of discrimination, but also as possible perpetrators of discriminatory acts, as reported below:

“I used to go [to the school] by bus and, then, my mother started driving me in her Beetle. (...) I’d get out of the car and people would give me this look as I got out... (...) Then, automatically, I felt discriminated against and I created other prejudices. (...) I joined the students’ union and all that stuff and, then, there were those boys whose mothers would come and pick them up by car

by the school entrance. Brand new car and all... And I’d tease them, ‘Hey, daddy’s boy!’ and this and that... I’d stereotype and discriminate against them, I’d throw paper balls at them and stuff. I created prejudice and discriminated the other way around.” (GF2CSUE)

In a certain way, this reveals the difficulty individuals have to assume only one position: either that of victim or that of perpetrator of discrimination. In this sense, it is possible that experiencing certain prejudices and forms of discrimination involves situations of considerable complexity, in which having prejudice or discriminating against someone at some point (rather than just being a victim) is part of the process.

DISCUSSION

To apprehend how members of the target population understand certain terms, such as prejudice and discrimination, may guide the process of trans-cultural adaptation of any discrimination instrument, in addition to helping to construct items for a new one, once the use of words will occur in a context of more accurate knowledge about how they will be interpreted. Moreover, to approach the complexity of discriminatory experiences enables the scale to be critically situated in relation to the complexity of the construct intended to be assessed. In particular, it should be emphasized that the majority of scales already published have not focused on the complex, subjective and contextual nature of experiences of discrimination. In fact, apart from discrimination, scales have proposed to measure other constructs simultaneously, such as the coping strategies adopted when facing discriminatory events.⁸ This poses even greater challenges to the already existing scales, once simultaneous quantification of constructs is recognizably more complex.¹⁴

Another relevant aspect is that items, which can be derived from the present study will be markedly different from those formulated by other scale authors. Whereas the present study focused on a very specific population, similar studies^{9,b,c} sought to obtain participants from a diverse range of backgrounds, from both the socioeconomic point of view and that of place of residence, country of origin and age, among other characteristics. In a study by Collado-Proctor^b (1999), for example, given the fact that participants aged between 18 and 61 years were included, experiences of discrimination occurred with considerably higher frequency in the work environment. Furthermore, a great number of discriminatory events were motivated by the victims’ status of illegal immigrant, especially

^a Bastos JLD. Desigualdades “raciais” em saúde: medindo a experiência de discriminação auto-relatada no Brasil [doctorate project]. Pelotas: Departamento de Medicina Social da UFPel; 2009.

^b Collado-Proctor SM. The Perceived Racism Scale for Latina/os: a multidimensional assessment of the experience of racism among Latina/os [doctorate thesis]. Durham: Duke University; 1999.

^c Paradies YC. Race, racism, stress and indigenous health [doctorate thesis]. Melbourne: Melbourne University; 2006.

immigrants in the US whose native language is Spanish.^a Cultural differences among victims and perpetrators of discrimination was also noticeable in these reports and, in certain situations, pointed out as motivators of discriminatory events.^a In its turn, a study by Nuru-Jeter et al⁹ (2009) dealt with African-American mothers and their experiences of racial discrimination. Discriminatory events frequently occurred in the work environment as well.⁹ Participants also reported being in a state of hypervigilance with regard to themselves and to their children.⁹ None of these aspects are paralleled by the results of the present investigation.

On the other hand, despite its focusing on individuals from the city of Rio de Janeiro, with a low-income level and relatively younger age (18-24 years), the study by Cecchetto & Monteiro³ (2006) revealed aspects in the experiences of discrimination similar to what was found in the present study. The contexts and motivations for such experiences were comparable: in terms of contexts, shopping malls, streets and other public spaces were identified; in terms of reasons, place of residence, clothing, race/color and social class were reported. Moreover, the feeling of discrimination when receiving a “different look” and the idea that contacts with the police are situations where discrimination tends to be manifested were also mentioned. This indicates something in common among experiences of discrimination of young adults from distinct social classes of a certain city. However, one aspect that distinguishes the results of both studies was the fact that the job market had been mentioned by Cecchetto & Monteiro³ (2006) as an area where discrimination, especially racial discrimination, tends to be manifested more frequently. Because participants in this study were enrolled in public universities and belonged to a higher social class, it is possible that they had had little contact with the job market, so that they did not report experiences of discrimination in this area with similar emphasis and frequency.

None of the reviewed racial discrimination scales^b sought to identify the respondent as a potential perpetrator of discriminatory acts. This contrasts with what was observed in the present study, once individuals also saw themselves as perpetrators of discrimination in some circumstances. The idea of identifying individuals not only as victims, but also as potential perpetrators of discrimination, had been previously proposed by Smith^c (2002) and should be considered in a broader perspective of experiences of discrimination. It is possible that the act of discriminating against others also has

health consequences and, thus, the possibility of scales including both aspects of discriminatory experiences should be discussed.

Moreover, published scales^b assume that respondents would be able to distinguish and indicate the (only) reason for which they suppose they were discriminated against. The results of the present study suggest that, when evident, the reasons for which individuals assume they were discriminated against can be multiple and associated with each other. Similar result was observed in a study by Cecchetto & Monteiro³ (2006), where young adults also reported the experience of multiple types of discriminations, simultaneously. Thus, the advantages and disadvantages of attempting to assess only one particular type of discrimination, as previous scales have proposed, should be discussed. Assessing racial discrimination exclusively, for example, probably implies a considerable methodological reduction in terms of the richness of the discriminatory experiences, thus having a potential direct impact on the observed results. Finally, there is evidence that the health effects of experiences of discrimination are associated with the general perception of discriminatory treatment than the alleged motivation for such event.¹³ It has recently been suggested that different forms of discrimination tend to be equally pathogenic,¹¹ but with an even greater potential to be harmful to health when experienced simultaneously.^d

CONCLUSIONS

In order to subsidize the development of items for a Brazilian discrimination scale, the analysis of these results points to the following directions:

in case items of the scale include the term discrimination in their formulations, it is expected that members of this specific population will tend to associate it with the idea of an observable behavior, with a negative connotation;

complex factors affect the perception of discrimination. Thus, the richness of experiences of discrimination will hardly be identified in its entirety by a scale, regardless of the instrument's form and number of items. This will occur especially because such experiences are marked by a specific context and are seen as subjective;

the items for the discrimination scale can be derived from the reports organized in the Table, given its recurrence in the groups;

^a Collado-Proctor SM. The Perceived Racism Scale for Latina/os: a multidimensional assessment of the experience of racism among Latina/os [doctorate thesis]. Durham: Duke University; 1999.

^b Bastos JLD. Desigualdades “raciais” em saúde: medindo a experiência de discriminação auto-relatada no Brasil [tese de doutorado]. Pelotas: Departamento de Medicina Social da UFPel; 2009.

^c Smith TW. Measuring racial and ethnic discrimination. Chicago: National Opinion Research Center; 2002.

^d Frykman J. Discrimination - a threat to public health. Final report. Health and Discrimination Project. Stockholm: National Institute of Public Health; 2006.

the reason why participants suppose they have been discriminated against can be multiple and associated with one another.³ In this way, the future scale will enable more than one motivation to be indicated for a certain discriminatory experience;

during the contact with focus group participants, it was not possible to reach a consensus on the possibility of organizing different experiences of discrimination in a scale of intensity. This aspect makes it difficult to

immediately design a map of the construct, as recommended in the literature¹⁴ and theorized in the case of racial discrimination;² and

participants also see themselves as perpetrators of discrimination. Given the fact that this type of behavior can be equally harmful to health, future scales and their adaptations must consider the possibility of asking their respondents about situations in which they have discriminated against others.

Table. Experiences of discrimination that arose in the focus groups.

Topic of experience of discrimination	Report that characterizes the individual's experience and characteristics
To be mistaken for a shop assistant	<i>"Once, I was at a store... There were many people there... There were many people dressed just like me... One lady came to me and asked if I could give her some information, as if I worked there... I answered her coolly, 'I could even give you this information, but I don't work here, that girl does.' For me, this wasn't prejudice, it was a mistake. But my dad thought it was prejudice. He thought it was a racial issue, you know? But that depends on the person who is treated like this." (GF5EFUF) (23 years, female, black)</i>
To be approached by a security professional or police officer as one is seen as a potential offender	<i>"Discrimination is like the case of the school where I was discriminated against. I went to a science fair at my cousin's school. I got in and sat there. Then, a security guard came... I was cool with this... But this guard stayed close to me... Then, he approached me and said, 'You, what you doing here?' Then, I began to argue with this guy... 'Hey, this is prejudice and this and that...' 'No, it's not prejudice, it's just that I gotta do my job, and this and that...' So, I said to him, 'Look, man, I'm a university student and stuff... Damn it, I work for the police and I study law... You're wrong...' Next, I went to the administration and they gave me this church talk... 'No, you see, nobody discriminates here, we're evangelicals and stuff...' Then, I felt a little awkward..." (GF4EFUF) (21 years, male, black)</i>
To be considered intellectually incapable	<i>"It's easy to say that racial prejudice affects whites and blacks... but I date a black guy... The first time I was stopped by the police, I was with my boyfriend... They searched him and I just stayed there, motionless, watching... 'What do you mean? He's being searched? We were just walking on the street...' This had never happened to me..." (GF4CSUE) (21 years, female, mixed)</i>
To be discriminated by boyfriend's/girlfriend's parents because of physical appearance	<i>"My father said I can't make it to university. Because he said I don't have what it takes to pass the exams, so why rack my brains doing college entrance exams? It's horrible! 'Come on, just go to a private university and blah, blah, blah..." (GF9EFUF) (19 years, female, white)</i>
To be professionally undervalued because of the course chosen	<i>"He [the father] is the most prejudiced person... He thinks that, in my case... He just can't accept my boyfriend... To him, my boyfriend is black [22 years, male, mixed]." (GF9EFUF) (19 years, female, white)</i>
To be discriminated against by a professor for being eligible for places allocated due to affirmative action for racial minorities, meaning one is poor or less capable than those not eligible	<i>"Well... I'm gonna explain my side. My ex-classmates from school, one chose law, another engineering, and I, because my choice was physical education and I'm studying this now, I have to hear stuff like, 'Come on, physical education is just about playing ball and having fun, it's easy!' But it's not really like that, right?" (GF3EFUE) (21 years, female, white)</i>
	<i>"This question of profession by itself bothers me a lot [physical education], when, for example, you go see a client... This guy, I don't know, he's got some problem. So, he goes, 'My doctor recommended this, I can do this and I can't do that' You got to intervene and this guy doesn't care about what you gotta explain to him. This bothers me a lot." (GF4EFUE) (20 years, male, black)</i>
	<i>"(...) 45% of places for every course of Medicine are for eligible students and our professor of Clinical Practice... he's the most prejudiced person I ever met... I don't know... I just don't get it because... But he gives us the impression that he hates quota students and thinks they should all leave the university... This even makes you laugh... (...) Here [in the university], if you let him, he'll chew you out... But not with me, nobody messes with me... The other day, we almost went at each other in the first-aid room..." (GF6MEDUE) (21 years, male, mixed)</i>

To be continued

Table continuation

Topic of experience of discrimination	Report that characterizes the individual's experience and characteristics
Not to be eligible for these special places	<p>“- Do you think the quota system discriminates? (moderator) - Yes. (GF5EFUE) (22 years, female, white) - I think this system has to... It must... It's like saying, 'Hey, from now on, we're gonna improve the schools and introduce the quota system. Then, when the schools are good, we'll remove this system.' But they introduce the system and the schools remain the same. So, this quota system will be like this forever and schools will always be as they are. (GF6EFUE) (21 years, female, white) - Everyone has the right to equal access. (GF5EFUE) (22 years, female, white) - It means to treat unfairly all those who are already treated unfairly. (GF6EFUE) (21 years, female, white) - It's like a 100-meter race where you leave the black runner there in the front, 50 meters ahead. (GF4EFUE) (20 years, male, black)” “I personally had many problems about the quota system, here, last year, because I already had... I took the college entrance exams two times... The first time, I didn't pass because of 26 candidates who got better grades... So, I wanted to kill myself, you know? I saw the passing grades for this system... My God... (...) I felt discriminated against... Why does a black person have the right for a special place? They got grades lower than mine...” (GF1MEDUE) (20 years, female, white) “Why does this system bother me? Because that can make somebody's life easier, when nobody made mine easy... I had to take the college entrance exams... I had to study and so-and-so didn't have to...” (GF4CSUE) (21 years, female, mixed)</p>
To be labeled as “daddy's boy”	<p>“Something I'd like to talk about is discrimination against whites, we think it's only against blacks. I'm blond, have light eyes... and I'm white. Folks always label me a daddy's boy. 'Hey, daddy's boy!' Even if I'm wearing flip-flops, shorts and a T-shirt.” (GF2EFUE) (22 years, male, white)</p>
To be given a different look	<p>“- When we go to the other floors wearing a gym outfit, while everyone else is well-dressed, they all give you this look... (GF10EFUE) (33 years, female, race/color not declared) - But they look at you with envy. With envy! (GF2EFUE) (22 years, male, white)”</p>
To be labeled as an outsider	<p>“This is prejudice. Anyone who comes from Northeastern Brazil is a Paraíba! [a derogatory term, meaning someone who is from the state of Paraíba, in Northeastern Brazil] Not necessarily. Like, my father is from Fortaleza and my mother is from Maranhão. When they are called Paraibas, I flip out!” (GF9EFUE) (21 years, female, white)</p>
To be discriminated against by a patient due to one's lack of professional experience/being young	<p>Like the day we were in the first-aid room of... Then, the staff gave me a patient's record... So, I went and called this man... He got in and saw me and a friend of mine... Then, he said, 'Are you a student?' And I felt like kicking him out of there...” (GF6MEDUE) (21 years, male, mixed)</p>
To be from the countryside and speak with a thick accent, distinct from urban areas	<p>“I lived in the countryside of São Paulo and then I came here to Rio de Janeiro. Man, all the time, it was like, 'Say 'countryside', far in the countryside.' [to hear her accent] 'Have you got CDs there? Are there movie theaters? What's playing now? 'Blue Lagoon' still playing?'” (GF1MEDUE) (21 years, female, white)</p>
To be considered a homosexual because of the way one behaves and one's physical appearance	<p>“I always liked to go out to dance, samba and stuff... Then, people would look and... You're thin, dancing and shaking your butt in public... So, you're a fag! Then, my girlfriends would get there and hug me... And folks would say, 'Bro, I thought you were a faggot...' Then, you realize that the way you dress, talk, walk, it all looks like... And you're discriminated against the whole time...” (GF3CSUE) (21 years, male, white)</p>
To feel discriminated against because one had to declare one's sexual orientation during military call-up	<p>“When it comes to military service, it's complicated... They ask you if you've already had sex with other men and you gotta answer that in front of 80 other guys.” (GF1CSUE) (22 years, male, mixed)</p>
To be excluded from certain social interactions with one's group, based not only on socioeconomic condition, but also on the idea of “race”, place of origin and place of residence	<p>“But, then, in the following year, some girl came, I am not sure where from... And she was worried about this, because, apart from being black, she also lived in a community that wasn't what people wanted in the group... So, for her, it was worse, because, besides coming from another state, she was black, had a very low income level and for her... She was the one who excluded herself, nobody excluded her, this girl excluded herself, because she thought less of herself... We'd invite her, I can't remember her name... And she'd exclude herself from everything. Group work during the course... She'd exclude herself from all. (...) There were parties and she'd say she wouldn't go... 'I can't mingle with the others... Because I don't have a car to get there... I don't have the clothes for it... Because I don't want to...' And nobody worried about these things...” (GF2MEDUE) (21 years, female, mixed)</p>

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To the researchers Romeu Gomes, Elaine Ferreira do Nascimento and Lúcia Emília Figueiredo de Sousa Rebello, from the *Instituto Fernandes Figueira, Fundação Oswaldo Cruz*, for their contribution to planning the focus groups and conducting the field work; also, researchers Ricardo Ventura Santos from the *Escola Nacional de Saúde Pública Sérgio Arouca da Fundação Oswaldo Cruz*, Simone Souza Monteiro

from the *Instituto Oswaldo Cruz da Fundação Oswaldo Cruz*, and Alba Maria Zaluar from the *Instituto de Medicina Social da Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro* for their suggestions to the project that originated this study; finally, researcher Fernando Ferreira Pinto de Freitas from the *Instituto de Psicologia da Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro* and his team for the intellectual and logistic support when conducting the focus groups.

REFERENCES

- Berry JW, Poortinga YH, Segall MH, Dasen PR. Cross-cultural psychology: research and applications. New York: Cambridge University Press; 2007.
- Blank RM, Dabady M, Citro CF. Measuring racial discrimination: panel on methods for assessing discrimination. Washington: The National Academies Press; 2004.
- Cecchetto F, Monteiro S. Discriminação, cor e intervenção social entre jovens na cidade do Rio de Janeiro (RJ, Brasil): a perspectiva masculina. *Rev Estud Fem*. 2006;14(1):199-218. DOI:10.1590/S0104-026X2006000100011
- Clark R, Anderson NB, Clark VR, Williams DR. Racism as a stressor for African Americans: a biopsychosocial model. *Am Psychol*. 1999;54(10):805-16. DOI:10.1037/0003-066X.54.10.805
- Fry PH. A persistência da raça: ensaios antropológicos sobre o Brasil e a África Austral. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira; 2005.
- Gomes R. Análise e interpretação de dados de pesquisa qualitativa. In: Minayo MCS, organizador. Pesquisa social: teoria, método e criatividade. Petrópolis: Vozes; 2007. p.79-108.
- Herdman M, Fox-Rushby J, Badia X. A model of equivalence in the cultural adaptation of HRQoL instruments: the universalist approach. *Qual Life Res*. 1998;7(4):323-35. DOI:10.1023/A:1008846618880
- Krieger N. Discrimination and health. In: Berkman LF, Kawachi I, editors. Social epidemiology. New York: Oxford University Press; 2000. p.36-75.
- Nuru-Jeter A, Dominguez TP, Hammond WP, Leu J, Skaff M, Egerter S, et al. "It's the skin you're in": African-American women talk about their experiences of racism. an exploratory study to develop measures of racism for birth outcome studies. *Matern Child Health J*. 2009;13(1):29-39. DOI:10.1007/s10995-008-0357-x
- Paradies YC, Williams DR. Racism and health. In: Heggenhougen K, Quah S, editores. International Encyclopedia of Public Health. San Diego: Academic Press; 2008. p.474-82.
- Pascoe EA, Smart Richman L. Perceived discrimination and health: a meta-analytic review. *Psychol Bull*. 2009;135(4):531-54. DOI:10.1037/a0016059
- Telles EE. Racismo à brasileira: uma nova perspectiva sociológica. Rio de Janeiro: Relume Dumará; 2003.
- Williams DR, Mohammed SA. Discrimination and racial disparities in health: evidence and needed research. *J Behav Med*. 2009;32(1):20-47. DOI:10.1007/s10865-008-9185-0
- Wilson M. Constructing measures: an item response modeling approach. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates; 2005.

Research funded by the *Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado do Rio de Janeiro* (FAPERJ) – State of Rio de Janeiro Research Support Foundation – Process E-26/110.315/2007).

Article based on the doctoral thesis by Bastos JL, presented to the *Programa de Pós-graduação em Epidemiologia* of the *Universidade Federal de Pelotas*, in 2010.

Bastos JL was granted a doctoral scholarship by the *Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior* (CAPES – Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel) and by the *Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico* (CNPq – National Council for Scientific and Technological Development)