

The Moderating Role of Everyday Discrimination in the Relationship between Grit and Professional Development: A Comparison between Black Women and White Men

O papel moderador da discriminação cotidiana na relação da garra com o desenvolvimento profissional: uma comparação entre mulheres negras e homens brancos

El papel moderador de la discriminación cotidiana en la relación entre la perseverancia y el desarrollo profesional: una comparación entre mujeres negras y hombres blancos



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Abstract: Organizations have demanded greater investment in knowledge and professional development, understood as the construction of knowledge, skills, and competencies. Different constructs contribute to enhancing professional development, such as personal resources. In this study, grit was used (a personality trait that enables achievement through perseverance and passion for attaining long-term goals). However, some factors may weaken this relationship, such as everyday discrimination (acts of exclusion and injustice perceived daily as a product of prejudice). The objective was to investigate the moderating role of everyday discrimination in the relationship between grit and professional development. The study included 332 Brazilian workers of both sexes. Structural Equation Modeling showed positive and direct relationships between the two dimensions of grit and professional development. However, this relationship is stronger among individuals experiencing high levels of everyday discrimination. Moreover, these relationships differ between white men and black women. Thus, the study concluded that individuals facing higher levels of workplace discrimination need to rely more on their personal resources to achieve professional development.

Keywords: professional development; grit; gender; race; discrimination

Resumo: As organizações passaram a demandar maior investimento por conhecimento e desenvolvimento profissional, compreendido como construção de conhecimento, habilidades e competências. Diferentes construtos ajudam a melhorar o desenvolvimento profissional, como os recursos pessoais. Nesse estudo, foi utilizada a garra (característica de personalidade que possibilita a conquista e realização por um tipo de perseverança e paixão pela concretização de objetivos a longo prazo). Entretanto, alguns fatores podem enfraquecer essa relação, como à discriminação cotidiana (ações de exclusão e injustiça percebidas diariamente como um produto do preconceito). O objetivo foi investigar o papel moderador da discriminação cotidiana na relação da garra com o desenvolvimento profissional. Participaram do estudo 332 trabalhadores brasileiros, de ambos os sexos. A Modelagem de Equações Estruturais evidenciou relação direta e positiva entre garra e desenvolvimento profissional. Porém, essa relação é mais forte em pessoas que experimentam altos níveis de discriminação cotidiana. Ademais, essas relações se diferem em homens brancos e mulheres negras.

Assim, o estudo concluiu que pessoas que experimentam maior nível de discriminação no ambiente laboral precisam usar mais seus recursos pessoais para alcançar seu desenvolvimento profissional.

Palavras-chave: desenvolvimento profissional; garra; gênero; raça; discriminação

Resumen: Las organizaciones han comenzado a demandar una mayor inversión en conocimiento y desarrollo profesional, entendido como la construcción de saberes, habilidades y competencias. Diferentes constructos contribuyen a mejorar el desarrollo profesional, como los recursos personales. En este estudio se utilizó la determinación (rasgo de personalidad que posibilita la conquista y realización a través de la perseverancia y la pasión por alcanzar objetivos a largo plazo). Sin embargo, algunos factores pueden debilitar esta relación, como la discriminación cotidiana (acciones de exclusión e injusticia percibidas diariamente como producto del prejuicio). El objetivo fue investigar el papel moderador de la discriminación cotidiana en la relación entre la determinación y el desarrollo profesional. En el estudio participaron 332 trabajadores brasileños, de ambos sexos. El Modelado de Ecuaciones Estructurales evidenció una relación directa y positiva entre determinación y desarrollo profesional. No obstante, esta relación es más fuerte en personas que experimentan altos niveles de discriminación cotidiana. Además, difieren entre hombres blancos y mujeres negras. Así, el estudio concluyó que las personas que enfrentan mayores niveles de discriminación en el ámbito laboral necesitan recurrir más a sus recursos personales para alcanzar su desarrollo profesional.

Palabras clave: desarrollo profesional; determinación; género; raza; discriminación

In recent decades, society has changed, driven by technological advances, economic transformations, and changes in social dynamics. These changes have directly impacted the labor market, requiring professionals to constantly adapt to new organizational demands (Rodrigues Rocha & Verzola Vaz, 2023). In this context, amid rapid innovation and increasing competitiveness, qualification and continuous development have become essential factors for career retention and success (Mourão & Fernandes, 2020).

Thus, organizations have come to value investment in the knowledge and professional training of their employees, such as professional development opportunities. This construct can be understood as a continuous process of acquiring skills, competencies, and knowledge that enables individuals to adapt and thrive throughout their professional careers (Mourão & Fernandes, 2020). In addition to contributing to organizational growth, this process provides workers with a greater sense of self-actualization, as workplace learning is directly associated with motivation and work engagement.

Therefore, learning at work plays a crucial role in individuals' self-actualization. As they face challenges, acquire new competencies, and achieve professional goals, workers experience a sense of purpose and personal satisfaction. This connection between professional growth and personal fulfillment highlights the importance of work environments that promote opportunities for continuous development (Lehtonen et al., 2022).

It is important to recognize, therefore, that intersectionalities related to gender and race impact professional growth, personal fulfillment, and ongoing development. This is because Nana and Mourão (2024), in their study, pointed out that professional development can be perceived differently depending on race and that white people presented higher levels of perceived professional development and professional fulfillment. In contrast, black people reported lower levels of fulfillment, indicating that they face more barriers. The authors further emphasized that professional development is affected by structural inequalities such as race, which directly impact opportunities and experiences at work.

Similarly, the study by Teles (2023) analyzed wage disparities and hierarchical advancement, focusing on the intersections of race and gender, using data from the *Relação Anual de Informações Sociais* (RAIS). The author found that women and black people face significant disadvantages compared to white men, with black women occupying the bottom of the salary and hierarchical career advancement pyramid, while white men are at the top.

In addition to race and gender, Monteiro and Mourão (2017) emphasized that other social, educational, and psychological factors play crucial roles in promoting or hindering professional growth. In other words, professional development can be influenced by a combination of factors that act as drivers or inhibitors throughout individuals' work trajectories (Mourão & Fernandes, 2020). Drivers can be considered elements, both subjective and objective, that favor and enrich the professional journey. On the other hand, inhibitors may be associated with difficulties in development (Mourão &

Fernandes, 2020). Therefore, understanding and managing these drivers and inhibitors is essential to fostering work environments that encourage continuous learning and the improvement of professional competencies.

In this study, a personal resource was used as a possible driver of professional development, namely grit. This is because grit can be defined as passion and perseverance toward the achievement of long-term goals. Therefore, it can be associated with a driving force, since it helps individuals overcome challenges and achieve their professional goals (Noronha et al., 2024).

Besides the variables mentioned above, everyday discrimination was included in the model because this variable refers to hostile actions and behaviors toward a particular individual or group, characterized by acts of exclusion and injustice in daily interactions, and is a direct reflection of prejudice (Daflon et al., 2017). The authors further add that black people report a greater perception of discrimination when compared to brown people, and that this discrimination is even more pronounced when this comparison is made between black and white people, which reinforces the importance of the issue of colorism in understanding the layers of racism. These findings increasingly make it evident that skin color and socioeconomic position significantly influence the perception of discrimination in Brazil (Daflon et al., 2017).

Understanding everyday discrimination requires a return to the foundations of Social Psychology. Allport (1954) had already pointed out that prejudice manifests itself in microbehaviors that structure social relationships unequally, while Goffman (1963) demonstrated how stigma organizes daily interactions, producing subtle yet persistent exclusions, and Tajfel and Turner (1979) explained how processes of categorization and social identity sustain such dynamics. In addition, Link and Phelan (2001) demonstrated how stigma and discrimination operate systematically in everyday life, producing cumulative inequalities. These classic contributions are fundamental to understanding how social markers such as gender and race shape experiences of discrimination (Williams et al., 1997).

Some recent studies show that these experiences do not occur in isolation. Lausi (2026) highlights how psychological mechanisms of gender discrimination operate simultaneously at individual, interpersonal, and institutional levels, while research reveals that racial and gender minorities face specific discriminatory barriers in everyday interactions (Fumarco et al., 2024; Seabra et al., 2023). This overlap of social markers reinforces the intersectional perspective proposed by Crenshaw (1989), according to which the combination of gender and race intensifies the frequency and impact of everyday discrimination, producing cumulative effects on well-being, mental health, and social participation.

Based on these assertions, the objective was to understand how professional development occurs among black women and white men. To this end, three different specific objectives were developed: to compare the levels of professional development in these groups; to test the moderation of everyday discrimination in the relationship between grit and professional development; and to determine whether these relationships may differ between the two groups tested.

The choice to compare black women and white men is grounded in the intersectional perspective, which recognizes race and gender as social markers that operate simultaneously in the production and maintenance of social inequalities (Collins, 2020; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). In the Brazilian context, these groups occupy historically contrasting positions in the social structure and labor market, with white men frequently associated with greater opportunities for professional advancement, better occupational conditions, and greater access to material and symbolic resources, while black women experience the overlapping effects of racism and sexism, placing them in a position of greater social and occupational vulnerability (Carneiro, 2023; Gonzalez, 2020; Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 2022). Thus, comparing these groups makes it possible to investigate how individual resources, such as grit, and experiences of everyday discrimination are related to professional development among groups situated at opposite ends of the hierarchy of social privileges and disadvantages, making the effects of structural inequalities on professional trajectories more evident.

In this sense, this study makes important contributions to the field of Social and Work Psychology. The first of these concerns the comparison of professional development levels among black women and white men. Another contribution concerns the investigation of a model that had not yet been tested in empirical studies, which incorporates the variables grit and everyday discrimination in relation to professional development, particularly in examining the moderating role of everyday

discrimination. The study also proposes a multigroup analysis to provide a more comprehensive understanding of gender and race.

In light of the foregoing, from a practical perspective, the findings may demonstrate how grit and discrimination affect professional development, which may help organizations identify invisible barriers to the advancement of talent, allowing for more effective retention strategies, especially among women and Black people.

Professional Development: Comparison between White Men and Black Women

Studies on professional development gained prominence in the 1990s. Professional development can be understood as a continuous process of acquiring knowledge, skills, and attitudes that expand individuals' competence and effectiveness in their work context. It consists of a set of formal and informal activities that contribute to the development and improvement of professional practices, going beyond initial training (Pimentel, 2007).

Regarding the construct, Mourão et al. (2022) proposed a model that includes variables such as self-knowledge, career planning, and perceived employability, highlighting the importance of strategies for professional growth. The authors emphasized that, in an increasingly competitive labor market, continuous development is essential for entering and remaining in the workforce. They also defined professional development as a process of growth and acquisition of knowledge throughout one's career trajectory, through learning experienced in practice (Mourão et al., 2022).

The literature on professional development demonstrates that this process is deeply influenced by social markers such as gender and race. Although white men hold a greater concentration of positions with higher prestige, remuneration, and career advancement, black women face intersectional barriers that limit their professional growth (Nana & Mourão, 2024). Recent empirical evidence (Linos et al., 2025) showed that black women are less likely to be promoted, receive less recognition, and are more likely to leave their jobs when working in teams with a higher proportion of white colleagues.

In this context, Black women are expected to present lower levels of professional development than white men, given that white people reported greater perceptions of professional development and professional fulfillment (Nana & Mourão, 2024). Furthermore, gender discrimination may negatively affect career development and, consequently, professional development (Barros & Mourão, 2020; Teles, 2023). Based on this, the following hypothesis was formulated, namely **Hypothesis 1**: black women present lower levels of professional development than white men.

Relationship between Grit and Professional Development: the Moderation of Everyday Discrimination

The concept of "grit" refers to a personality characteristic that involves passion and perseverance in the pursuit of long-term goals (Duckworth et al., 2007). According to the authors, grit is expressed through continuous dedication and persistent effort, which enables individuals to face challenges without losing focus, even in the face of adversity and throughout the time required to achieve their goals. It should be noted that this is less a cognitive ability and more of a motivational attitude, characterized by clarity of goals, determination, courage, and resilience.

The construct is divided into two dimensions: consistency of interest, related to the stability of long-term goals, and perseverance of effort, associated with continuous dedication even in the face of obstacles (Noronha et al., 2024).

Grit has been widely recognized by several theorists as a fundamental factor for success and psychological well-being in different areas, including academic and work contexts. In these contexts, the construct stands out for its contribution to understanding the factors that lead individuals to achieve positive and meaningful performance, favoring the attainment of their goals (Collantes-Tique et al., 2021).

Recent research showed that individuals with high levels of grit are more likely to achieve success in their careers. For example, in a study conducted with cadets at the United States Military Academy, grit was a significant predictor of rigorous initial training, even outperforming measures of intelligence (Duckworth et al., 2019). Another study highlighted that grit is positively related to career satisfaction among teachers, suggesting that this characteristic may mediate the relationship between personal resources and professional success (Putri & Ingarianti, 2024).

Koekemoer et al. (2023) pointed out that personal resources such as resilience and grit mediate the relationship between person-environment fit and perceived career success among women. These findings indicate that developing such resources is essential for successful professional trajectories. Therefore, the following hypotheses were formulated, namely **Hypothesis 2a**: interest Consistency is positively related to Professional Development, and **Hypothesis 2b**: effort Perseverance is positively related to Professional Development.

Concerning everyday discrimination, this refers to the perception of hostile attitudes, acts of exclusion, and injustice that occur in everyday life against certain groups, constituting a product of prejudice (Daflon et al., 2017). These are frequent experiences of disrespect, devaluation, or unfair treatment based on social characteristics such as race, gender, class, or other identity markers. These practices often occur subtly and are normalized in routine interactions (Daflon et al., 2017).

Thus, it is worth emphasizing that studying everyday discrimination is essential for understanding the various discriminatory practices, considering Brazil's historical process and its political, social, and cultural formation, which leads to an understanding of the formation of Brazilian ethnic-racial inequality, among other dimensions such as oppression, social class, gender relations, sexualities, and many other markers (Lima & Gaudenzi, 2023). Therefore, it is of paramount importance that discriminatory acts experienced daily be studied, since such discrimination has negative effects on both the physical and mental health of individuals, leading to intrapersonal harm while also affecting society as a whole (Abreu et al., 2022).

In the workplace context, discrimination imposes significant barriers to professional development and career advancement, particularly affecting women and black people, encompassing aspects related to gender and race differences (Nana & Mourão, 2024). Furthermore, the authors state that when there is an intersection between social markers of difference such as gender and race, the barriers that limit professional development are even more severe, pointing out that, across the five regions of Brazil, black women are the most disadvantaged in terms of position, power, and status in the workplace. In fact, they are overrepresented in occupations with lower prestige and lower earnings, which reveals and reinforces how gender and race structure social inequalities.

Furthermore, Monteiro and Mourão (2017) emphasized that increasingly effective strategies are required from these groups, highlighting that other factors may either promote or hinder professional growth. These factors can include both environmental and social aspects, as well as certain personal resources, that help people cope with these challenges related to discrimination and inequality. In this sense, it would be reasonable to assume that, in the presence of everyday discrimination, people need to make greater use of their grit (consistency and perseverance) to achieve professional development. Thus, the following hypotheses were formulated, namely **Hypothesis 3a**: Everyday Discrimination moderates the relationship between Interest Consistency and Professional Development, in the sense that this relationship is stronger in the presence of high levels of discrimination, and **Hypothesis 3b**: Everyday Discrimination moderates the relationship between Effort Perseverance and Professional Development, such that this relationship is stronger in the presence of high levels of discrimination.

Differences in the Relationships between Grit, Professional Development, and Everyday Discrimination among White Men and Black Women

Regarding the relationship between grit and professional development among women and men, the study by Sigmundsson et al. (2021) identified that men demonstrate higher levels of passion (a component of grit) compared to women, suggesting that this characteristic may contribute to greater involvement and persistence in their professional activities. Thus, the findings suggest that, among men, consistency of interest, a dimension of the grit construct, tends to be more effective, as it is more strongly associated with persistence toward long-term goals, which may have a major influence on men's professional development.

Furthermore, the study by Kwon (2021) investigated how socioeconomic status and sense of control influence the components of grit, specifically consistency of interest and perseverance of effort, across different cultural contexts. The results indicated that individuals with higher socioeconomic status tend to develop a stronger sense of control, which, in turn, is associated with higher levels of grit, especially in the perseverance of effort dimension.

It was also found that grit can be enhanced in privileged social contexts that promote individual autonomy, as is often the case among men in Western societies.

The aforementioned assertions thus suggest that, to achieve adequate professional development, white men make use of the personal resource of grit. On the other hand, black women, a group with lower socioeconomic privilege, may pursue their professional development regardless of their perseverance and consistency of interest. Therefore, the following hypothesis was formulated, namely **Hypothesis 4a**: the relationship between Interest Consistency and Professional Development is weaker among black women, and **Hypothesis 4b**: the relationship between Effort Perseverance and Professional Development is weaker among black women.

Notably, black women face significant challenges arising from the intersectionality between race and gender, and are frequently subjected to discrimination, prejudice, and inequalities that affect their personal and professional trajectories. In other words, black women experience discrimination on a daily basis, which leads them to develop and mobilize coping strategies that enable them to resist adversity and promote their personal and professional growth (Clemente & Clemente, 2023; Lemos & Ximenes, 2024).

Regarding this issue, Smith and Read (2024) demonstrated that everyday discrimination is associated with greater psychological distress across all groups analyzed. The results indicated that individuals who experience fewer discriminatory situations throughout their lives tend to develop fewer emotional coping strategies, which may result in greater vulnerability when faced with discriminatory episodes, even when they are isolated. In contrast, groups historically more exposed to discriminatory practices develop resilience mechanisms that may mitigate, but not eliminate, the negative emotional impacts of these experiences. It is important to emphasize that this resilience does not mean an absence of suffering, but rather an adaptive response to the structural conditions of inequality that affect markers such as race and gender.

Thus, it would be expected that everyday discrimination exerts a differentiated influence on the relationship between grit and professional development, varying according to the contexts of exposure to social markers of difference. Individuals historically less exposed to discriminatory practices may be more vulnerable when confronted with such situations, whereas groups that experience these structural barriers on a daily basis develop adaptive strategies that modulate the effects of discrimination. Based on these considerations, the following hypotheses were formulated, namely **Hypothesis 5a**: the moderating effect of discrimination on the relationship between Interest Consistency and Professional Development is weaker among black women, and **Hypothesis 5b**: the moderating effect of discrimination on the relationship between Effort Perseverance and Professional Development is weaker among black women.

Based on the hypotheses proposed, the study assumes that professional development does not result solely from the interaction between individual resources, but also from contextual factors, as pointed out by Linos et al. (2024). In this sense, grit constitutes an important resource for investment and career growth, as indicated in the study by Putri and Ingarianti (2024), according to which individuals with high levels of grit are more likely to achieve success in their careers. However, professional development does not occur independently of the social conditions in which individuals are embedded and may be influenced by contextual experiences, such as everyday discrimination, which can act as a stressor and inhibitor, restricting opportunities and hindering occupational trajectories (Nana & Mourão, 2024). Furthermore, considering the intersectional perspective, such relationships may manifest differently among socially unequal groups, such as black women and white men, since race and gender influence access to resources, opportunities, and recognition in the labor market (Teles, 2023). Thus, it is proposed that everyday discrimination may moderate the relationship between grit and professional development, with this process potentially differing according to the social positions occupied by the groups investigated.

Method

Participants

A total of 332 Brazilian workers participated in the study, divided into two groups: black women (73.2 %) and white men (26.8 %), from the five Brazilian regions, with the vast majority belonging to the Southeast Region (90.7 %). As for marital status, the sample was mainly divided between married participants or those living as married (46.4 %) and single participants (44.9 %). Regarding having children, the majority indicated that they had no children (54.5 %). In terms of educational attainment,

most respondents had incomplete higher education (39.4 %), followed by postgraduate studies/specialization (19.6 %). Most of the sample worked in private institutions (59.9 %) and public institutions (31.9 %). Concerning the sector in which they worked, the majority were employed in service provision (71.1 %). As for employment status, the most prominent responses were permanent/CLT employment (31.9 %) and internship (16.3 %). Most participants worked in person (78.3 %). In terms of income, 71.6 % of the women reported earning one to three minimum wages, and only 4.1 % reported earning more than 10 minimum wages. Among the men, 44.9 % reported earning one to three minimum wages and 21.3% more than 10 minimum wages. participants' ages ranged from 18 to 73 years ($M = 35.5$; $SD = 12.2$). The inclusion criteria for the study were: being over 18 years of age, being employed at the time of data collection, and identifying as a black woman or a white man. The exclusion criteria were: not engaging in paid professional activity at the time of data collection and not fully completing the research instruments.

Instruments

To assess the construct of perceived everyday discrimination, the Everyday Discrimination Scale developed by Taylor et al. (2004) and adapted to the Brazilian context by Daflon et al. (2017) was used. The Brazilian version retained the nine items of the original scale, answered using a dichotomous yes/no response format, allowing the identification of recurring experiences of discrimination. An example item is: "Do you feel that you are treated less kindly by other people?" The scale aims to assess the frequency with which individuals perceive experiences of unfair or discriminatory treatment. Despite its adaptation to the Brazilian context, no studies have yet been conducted to investigate the psychometric properties of this instrument (Daflon et al., 2017). In this sample, the internal structure of the scale was confirmed through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), presenting adequate fit indices ($\chi^2 (df) = 115.54 (27)$, CFI = .983, TLI = .978, RMSEA = .072 [90 % CI .059, .086]), as well as satisfactory internal consistency ($\alpha = .88$; $\omega = .89$).

To assess the construct of grit, the International Portuguese Language Version of the Grit Assessment Scale, developed by Noronha et al. (2024), was used. This scale aims to assess the tendency to maintain perseverance and Interest Consistency in the pursuit of long-term goals. The instrument consists of eight items, equally divided into two factors: Interest Consistency and Effort Perseverance, each represented by four items, which are answered using a four-point Likert-type scale (1: *strongly disagree* to 4: *strongly agree*). Examples of items include: "I follow my plans, even when I face difficulties in carrying them out" and "If I start a task, I focus on completing it". In this study, the internal structure of the instrument was confirmed through CFA, presenting adequate fit indices ($\chi^2 (df) = 59.95 (18)$, CFI = .993, TLI = .989, RMSEA = .061 [90 % CI .044, .078]). In addition, the internal consistency indices were adequate for both the Interest Consistency factor ($\alpha = .78$; $\omega = .80$) and the Effort Perseverance factor ($\alpha = .82$; $\omega = .84$).

To investigate the participants' professional development, the Current Perception of Professional Development Scale, developed by Mourão et al. (2022), was used. This instrument aims to assess workers' perceptions of the development of their knowledge, skills, and competencies throughout their professional trajectories. It is a unidimensional scale consisting of six items, which are answered using a seven-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1: *strongly disagree* to 7: *strongly agree*. Example item: "I have experienced significant professional development since I started working." In this investigation, the internal structure of the scale was confirmed through CFA, presenting adequate fit indices ($\chi^2 (df) = 38.99 (7)$, CFI = .994, TLI = .987, RMSEA = .085 [90 % CI .060, .112]). Although the RMSEA presented a value slightly above the conventional criterion, this result should be interpreted in light of the limitations of this index in models with a low number of degrees of freedom. In such cases, RMSEA tends to excessively penalize the model, overestimating the lack of fit (Kenny et al., 2015). Therefore, considering the high CFI and TLI values, it can be concluded that the instrument presented satisfactory overall fit. Moreover, the internal consistency indices were adequate ($\alpha = .85$; $\omega = .85$).

In addition to the aforementioned instruments, a Sociodemographic Questionnaire was used to characterize the sample. This instrument included questions about age, gender identity, marital status, presence of children, race/skin color, educational attainment, salary range, employment status, and length of employment. This information allowed for a more detailed and accurate description of the participants' profile.

Ethical and Data Collection Procedures

The research was submitted to the institution's Research Ethics Committee (REC) and approved (CAAE – No. 64791322.1.00005289). Participants indicated their agreement to participate in the research by completing the Free and Informed Consent Term (FICT). Also, participants were informed about the voluntary nature of the research and the anonymity of their responses.

The survey was administered online, and participants were contacted through different social media platforms: Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and WhatsApp. The invitation included brief explanations about the research objectives, followed by a link that directed participants directly to the initial survey screen. Once completed, the information was stored to form part of the research database. Only responses from those who agreed to participate in the research through the FICT were accepted.

Data Analysis Procedures

To verify the internal structures of the scales, CFAs were conducted through Structural Equation Modeling using MPlus software (version 8.11), with the adoption of the Weighted Least Squares Mean- and Variance-Adjusted (WLSMV) estimator. The choice of this estimator is justified by its robustness and its ability to provide weighted least squares estimates and mean- and variance-adjusted estimates for the chi-square test. In addition, the item parameter invariance technique was adopted, since, according to Sauerwein and Theis (2021), tests of mean differences should only be conducted when configural, metric, and scalar invariance of the instrument has been established. Parameter invariance was tested using Multi-Group Confirmatory Factor Analysis (MG-CFA), in which models were tested with the number of items and factors fixed (configural invariance), factor loadings fixed (metric invariance), and thresholds fixed (scalar invariance). Differences between model fits were assessed using the difference in CFI (ΔCFI). For the instrument to be considered invariant, $\Delta\text{CFI} < .01$ was required (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002).

To assess model fit to the data, the following indicators were considered: chi-square (χ^2), Root-Mean-Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI). Values below .08 for RMSEA and above .95 for CFI and TLI were adopted as indicators of good fit (Broc & Gana, 2019).

The internal consistency of the instruments was analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha and the Omega coefficient. To test the hypotheses comparing Professional Development between the two different groups, the nonparametric Mann-Whitney U test was used. To test the hypotheses regarding relationships between the variables, analyses were conducted using Structural Equation Modeling and Multigroup Structural Equation Modeling.

Results

Internal Structure of the Variables

Regarding the invariance of the instruments across the two groups (white men and black women), the results demonstrated configural, metric, and scalar invariance for the three instruments, as values of $\Delta\text{CFI} < .01$ were found (Table 1). Although small fluctuations in the CFI values were observed, with slight decreases in the Discrimination Scale and increases in the Professional Development and Grit scales, such variations are expected in analyses based on the WLSMV estimator and robust statistics, since incremental fit indices, such as the CFI, do not necessarily behave monotonically across nested models. Thus, the interpretation of invariance was based on the magnitude of the index variation ($|\Delta\text{CFI}| < .01$), as recommended by Cheung and Rensvold (2002). These findings indicate equivalence of the factor structure, factor loadings, and thresholds across the groups analyzed, allowing valid comparisons between black women and white men.

Table 1

Factorial invariance tests for discrimination, professional development, and grit

Measure	Model	χ^2 (df)	$\Delta\chi^2$	CFI	Δ CFI
Discrimination	Configural	77.35 (54)	—	.991	—
	Metric	84.89 (61)	10.69	.990	-.001
	Scalar	89.62 (62)	7.37	.989	-.001
Professional Development	Configural	71.83 (14)	—	.980	—
	Metric	51.88 (19)	4.40	.989	.009
	Scalar	64.34 (48)	21.95	.994	.005
Grit	Configural	125.21 (38)	—	.975	—
	Metric	110.67 (44)	12.22	.981	.006
	Scalar	106.91 (58)	-19.07	.986	.005

Note. χ^2 : Chi-square; *df*: degrees of freedom; $\Delta\chi^2$: robust chi-square difference test between nested models, calculated using the Satorra (2000) method; CFI: Comparative Fit Index; Δ CFI: change in CFI between models. Values of Δ CFI $\leq$.01 indicate invariance between the models (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002).

Comparison of Professional Development

To determine whether the groups of black women and white men differed in terms of Professional Development, an independent-samples comparison test was performed. As the assumption of normality was violated, the Mann-Whitney U test was used.

This test's results indicated a significant difference. In addition, the descriptive statistics indicated that white men presented higher central values (mean and median) than those observed among black women. The Mann-Whitney U test indicated a statistically significant difference between the distributions of the groups, with a moderate effect size, corroborating Hypothesis 1. Table 2 provides a summary of these results.

Table 2

Results of the independent-samples comparison test

Variable	Groups	Means	Median	<i>U</i>	Rank-Biserial Correlation	Shapiro-Wilk
Professional Development	Black women	5.390	5.500	7904.500 (<i>p</i> < .001)	-0.269	0.95 (<i>p</i> < .001)
	White men	5.949	6.000			

Relationship Between the Variables

Initially, the correlations between the variables were tested using the measurement model, in which the two grit factors, professional development, and everyday discrimination were included as distinct factors. This model presented adequate fit indices (χ^2 (*df*) = 434.696 (221), CFI = .983, TLI = .980, RMSEA = .039 [95 % CI .034, .045]). In addition, the variables investigated showed significant correlations with each other (Table 3). Interest Consistency, Effort Perseverance, and Professional Development were positively correlated. Everyday Discrimination, in turn, showed negative correlations with the other variables.

Table 3

Means, standard deviations, and correlations among latent factors

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3
1. Interest Consistency	3.85	0.62	—		
2. Effort Perseverance	4.10	0.55	.87	—	
3. Professional Development	3.76	0.58	.42	.48	—
4. Everyday Discrimination	2.91	0.65	-.36	-.32	-.28

* $p < .05$, $p < .01$, $p < .001$.

As can be observed in Table 3, the grit factors showed a very high correlation with each other. Thus, considering the assumption of independence between the independent variables, it can be considered that the factors presented high collinearity, which could lead to a Type II error, that is, accepting the null hypothesis that there is no relationship between the IV and DV when, in fact, there is (Lavary et al., 2019). For this reason, it was decided to test two distinct models, one for each dimension of grit.

To test the hypotheses, the first step was to verify the direct relationship between grit and Professional Development. The findings indicated that both Interest Consistency ($\beta = 0.33$; $p < .001$) and Effort Perseverance ($\beta = 0.43$; $p < .001$) showed positive and significant relationships with Professional Development. These results allowed for the confirmation of Hypotheses 2a and 2b.

With the inclusion of the moderating variable, the results indicated that Everyday Discrimination acted as a moderator of the relationship between grit and Professional Development. Specifically, the interaction between Everyday Discrimination and Interest Consistency was significantly related to Professional Development ($\beta = 0.16$; $p < .001$), as was the interaction between Everyday Discrimination and Effort Perseverance ($\beta = 0.21$; $p < .001$). Furthermore, as can be observed in Figures 1 and 2, the greater the perception of discrimination, the stronger the association between grit and Professional Development. Thus, Hypotheses 3a and 3b were corroborated.

Figure 1

Moderation of Everyday Discrimination in the relationship between Interest Consistency (grit) and Professional Development

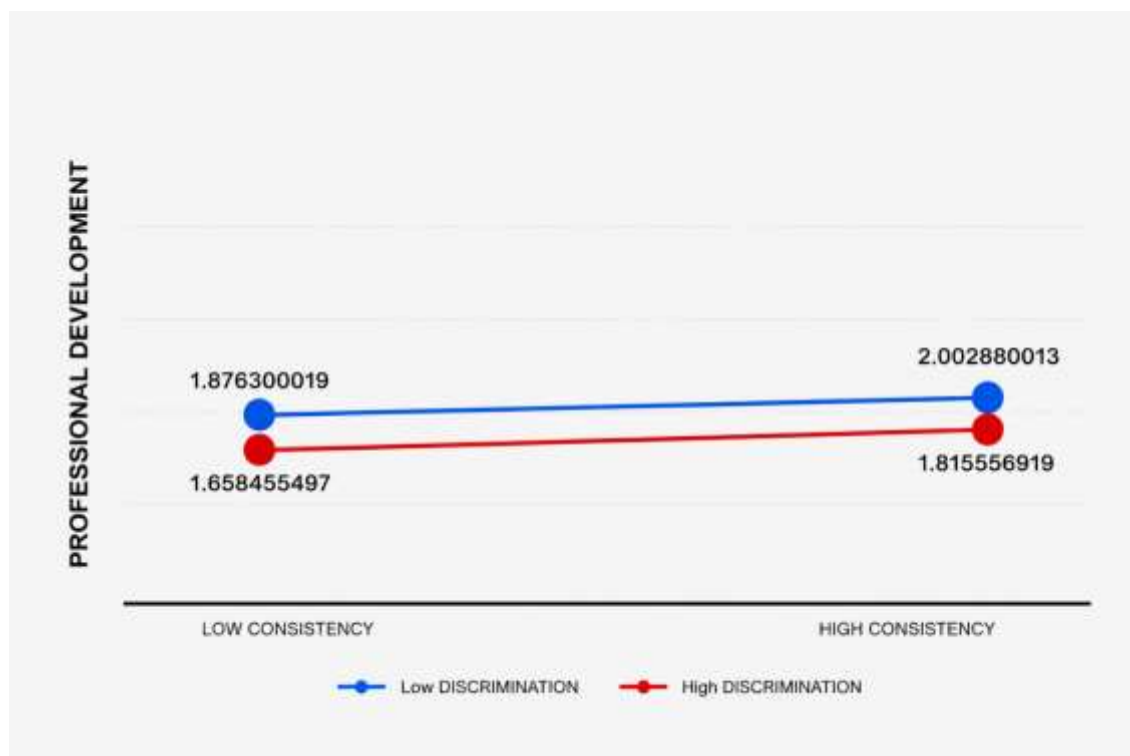
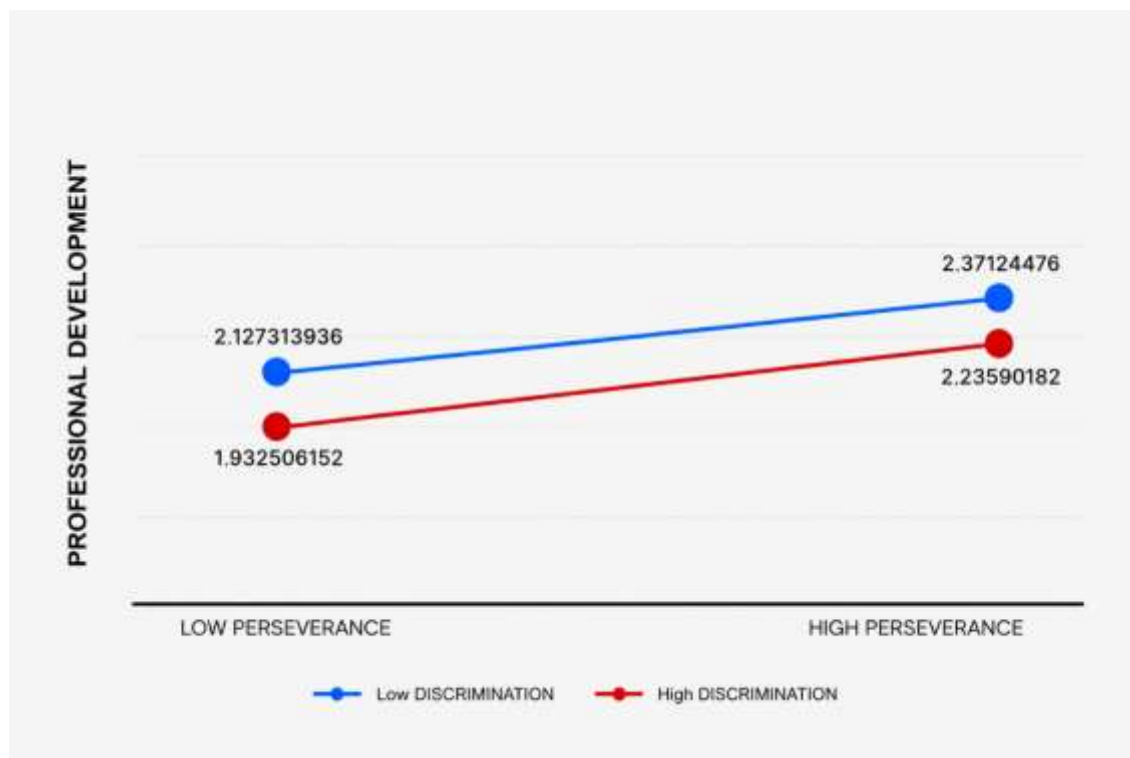


Figure 2

Moderation of Everyday Discrimination in the relationship between Effort Perseverance (grit) and Professional Development



Differences in the relationships between the variables

In the multigroup analyses, it was found that the relationship between Interest Consistency and Professional Development differs between black women and white men ($\chi^2 \text{ diff} = 113.44$; $p < .001$), with this relationship being stronger among white men ($\beta = 0.36$; $p < .001$) than among black women ($\beta = 0.29$; $p < .001$), which allowed for the confirmation of Hypothesis 4a.

Similarly, it was observed that the relationship between Effort Perseverance and Professional Development differs between black women and white men ($\chi^2 \text{ diff} = 155.34$; $p < .001$). This association was stronger among white men ($\beta = 0.39$; $p < .001$) compared to black women ($\beta = 0.29$; $p < .001$), which allowed for the confirmation of Hypothesis 4b.

Regarding the moderation of Everyday Discrimination in the relationship between Interest Consistency and Professional Development, the findings demonstrated that this moderation also differed between the groups tested ($\chi^2 \text{ diff} = 113.98$; $p < .001$), being stronger among white men ($\beta = 0.26$; $p < .001$; Figure 3) compared to black women ($\beta = 0.16$; $p < .01$; Figure 4). Thus, Hypothesis 5a was confirmed.

Figure 3
Moderation of Everyday Discrimination in the relationship between Interest Consistency (grit) and Professional Development among white men

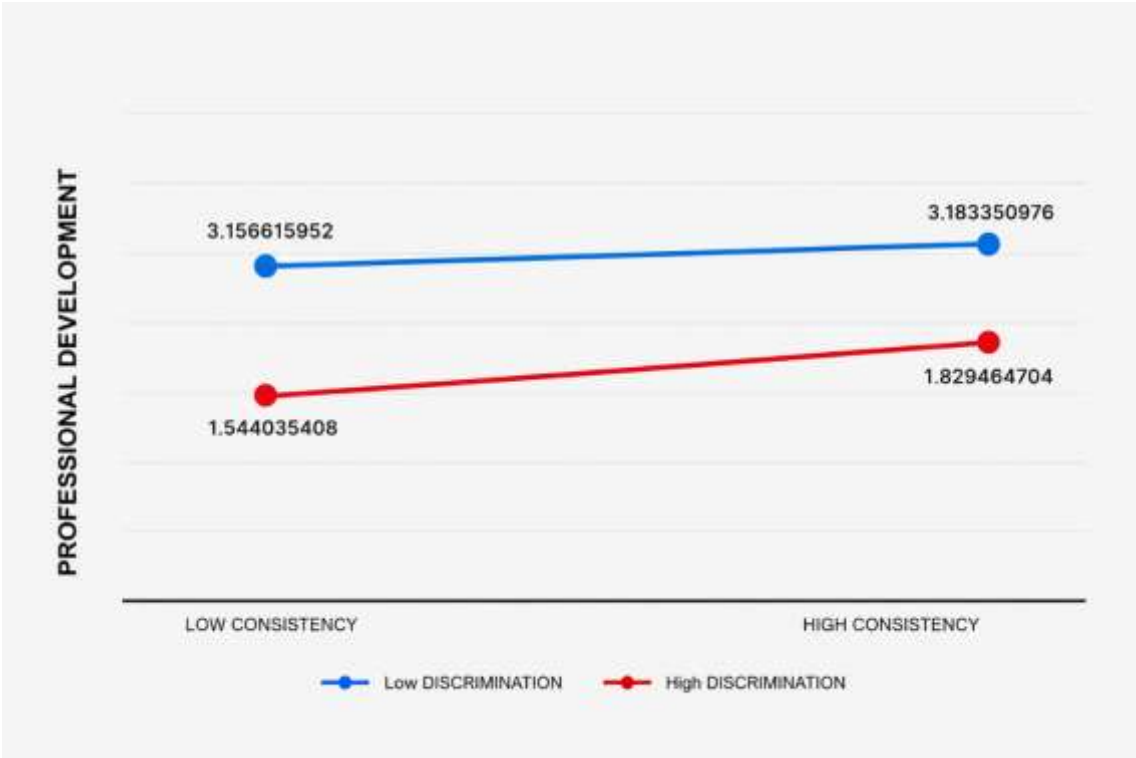


Figure 4
Moderation of Everyday Discrimination in the relationship between Interest Consistency (grit) and Professional Development among black women



With respect to the moderation of Everyday Discrimination in the association between Effort Perseverance and Professional Development, the results indicated that this moderation also differed between the groups analyzed (χ^2 diff = 127.89; $p < .001$). A stronger moderating effect was observed

among white men ($\beta = 0.35$; $p < .001$; Figure 5) compared to black women ($\beta = 0.21$; $p < .01$; Figure 6). These findings allowed for the confirmation of Hypothesis 5b.

Figura 5
Moderation of Everyday Discrimination in the relationship between Effort Perseverance (grit) and Professional Development among white men

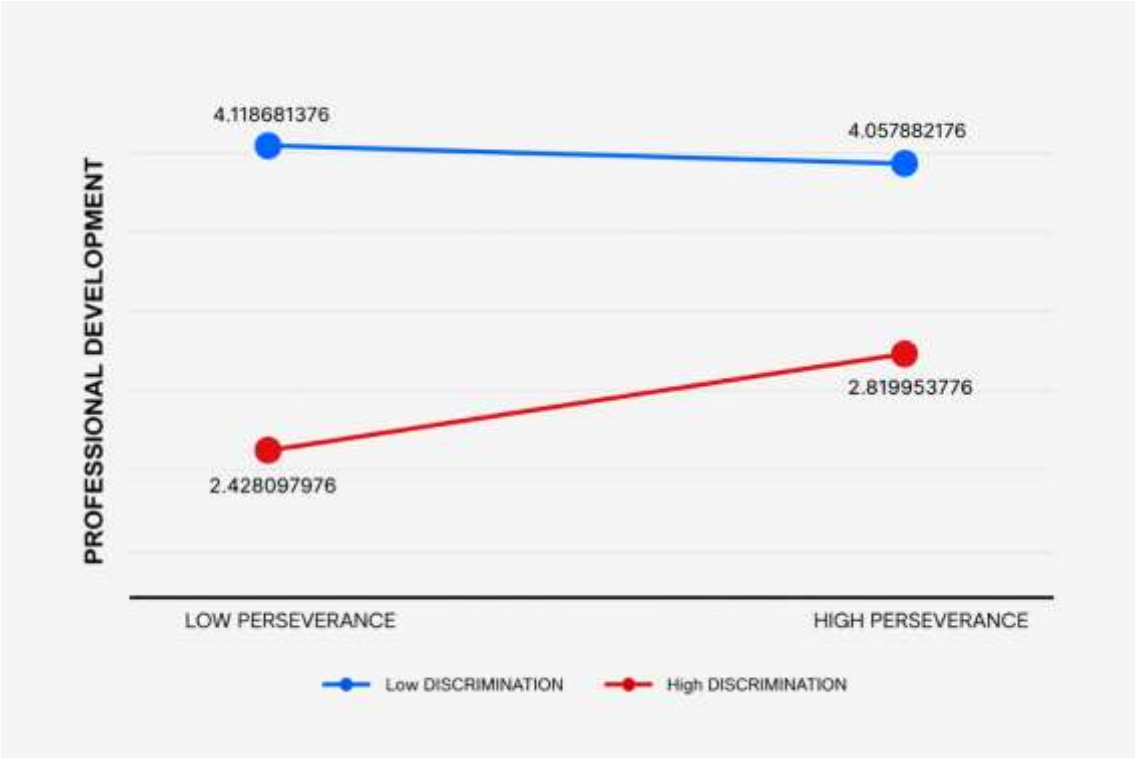
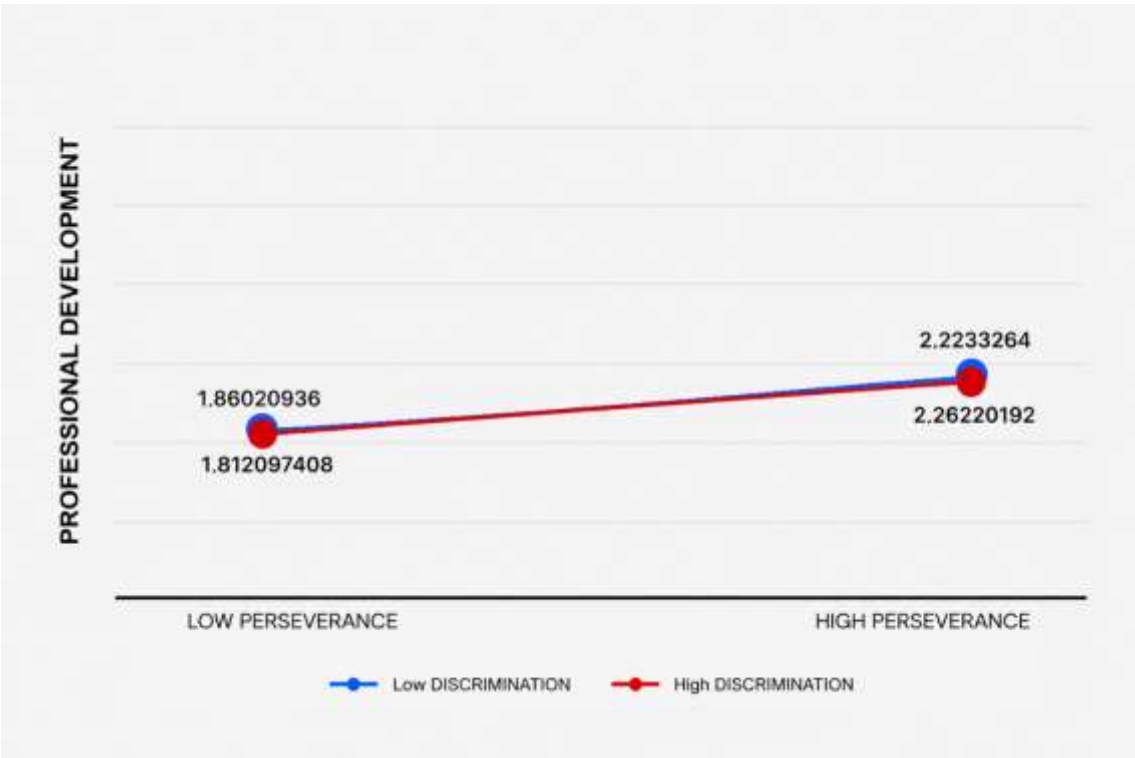


Figura 6
Moderation of Everyday Discrimination in the relationship between Effort Perseverance (grit) and Professional Development among black women



Discussion

This study aimed to understand how professional development occurs in two groups: black women and white men. Three different specific objectives were developed: to compare the levels of professional development in these groups, to test the moderation of everyday discrimination in the relationship between grit and professional development, and to determine whether these relationships may differ between the two groups tested. The findings obtained demonstrated that the objectives were met, as it was found that: white men presented higher mean levels of professional development than black women; everyday discrimination moderated the relationship between grit and professional development, in the sense that this relationship was stronger in the presence of high levels of discrimination, and that the moderating effect of everyday discrimination differed across groups. Thus, this study makes important theoretical contributions and has practical implications.

Theoretical Contributions

Concerning hypothesis testing, the results indicated a significant difference in professional development between the two groups (black women and white men), confirming Hypothesis 1. Among these groups, white men presented higher levels of professional development, which is consistent with findings from studies discussing the structural barriers faced by black women in work and academic contexts (Clemente & Clemente, 2023; Nana & Mourão, 2024; Nunes & Santos, 2019). These results reiterate gender and racial inequalities in career progression, reinforcing that, despite advances in discussions on equity, barriers to the professional growth of black women still exist (Barros & Mourão, 2020; Munoz et al., 2018).

With respect to the analysis of interest consistency, the results demonstrated that people with greater interest consistency presented higher levels of professional development, corroborating studies that have pointed to the importance of persistent and coherent goals for the construction of meaningful professional trajectories (Duckworth et al., 2007; Koekemoer et al., 2023; Putri & Ingarianti, 2024).

These results indicated that interest consistency can act as a valuable personal resource for professional development, which supported Hypothesis 2a.

Still in the direction of testing the dimensions of the grit construct, it was observed that individuals with greater effort perseverance demonstrated greater involvement in actions that enable them to develop professionally, thus being consistent with findings from studies that recognize perseverance as a predictor of success (Çarkıt, 2024; Collantes-Tique et al., 2021; Noronha et al., 2024). This result reinforces the relevance of studying this grit factor, which also supported Hypothesis 2b.

The findings related to the relationship between grit and professional development are consistent with recent investigations showing that individuals with high levels of grit are more likely to achieve success in their careers (Duckworth et al., 2019; Koekemoer et al., 2023; Putri & Ingarianti, 2024) and suggest that the development of grit may be fundamental to promoting successful professional trajectories. In this sense, investing in strengthening personal resources, such as grit, is essential for professional development and, probably, for achieving career success.

Regarding the moderating role of everyday discrimination, this study demonstrated that this variable moderates the relationship between grit and professional development, such that this relationship is stronger in the presence of high levels of everyday discrimination. These results support Hypotheses 3a and 3b and corroborate previous investigations that have pointed to discrimination as a contextual barrier capable of restricting opportunities for professional development (Nana & Mourão, 2024). Thus, the findings suggest that professional development does not depend exclusively on individual resources, but also on the social conditions in which these resources are mobilized (Monteiro & Mourão, 2017). In contexts marked by everyday discrimination, the effectiveness of grit may be altered, since individuals subjected to greater structural barriers may need to mobilize more personal resources to achieve similar levels of professional development. This result does not suggest that individuals belonging to discriminated groups need to mobilize more personal resources to overcome inequalities. On the contrary, it demonstrates that the benefits arising from these resources are not distributed homogeneously, since structural racial and gender inequalities influence the opportunities available and the possibility of converting individual efforts into professional development.

In testing the difference in the relationship between grit and professional development among white men and black women, the data indicated that grit was more strongly related to professional

development among white men, thus confirming Hypotheses 4a and 4b. These results can be interpreted in light of the social and institutional privileges that operate in favor of this group (Otaye-Ebede & Shaffakat, 2024; Teles, 2023) and reinforce discussions on meritocracy and structural racism (Lima & Gaudenzi, 2023; Nana & Mourão, 2024). Thus, race and gender produce distinct social positions and influence access to opportunities and professional recognition (Collins, 2020; Crenshaw, 1989). Accordingly, the stronger association between grit and professional development among white men suggests that individual resources tend to produce more favorable returns among socially privileged groups (Johnson et al., 2022; Koekemoer et al., 2023). In contrast, even when black women present high levels of grit, the effects of racism and sexism may limit the conversion of these personal resources into concrete opportunities for career advancement and professional development. These findings reinforce critiques of meritocratic perspectives, indicating that individuals may experience different professional trajectories depending on the social positions they occupy, which highlights the importance of intersectional analyses.

Finally, this study found that the moderation of discrimination in the relationship between grit and professional development was stronger among white men than among black women. Thus, Hypotheses 5a and 5b were corroborated. This result is similar to findings from previous studies. For example, Clemente and Clemente (2023) stated that black women develop and mobilize coping strategies that enable them to resist adversity and promote their personal and professional growth. Smith and Read (2024), in turn, demonstrated that, although discrimination is associated with greater psychological distress across all groups, this effect was more pronounced among white men. Furthermore, the reported findings suggest that individuals who experience less discrimination throughout their lives, such as white men, generally develop fewer emotional coping strategies and are more sensitive to the effects of perceived discrimination.

Although this result is similar to that found by Smith and Read (2024), its interpretation requires caution. The findings do not indicate that black women are less affected by everyday discrimination or that they have become more resilient to its effects. On the contrary, an intersectional interpretation suggests that racism and sexism constitute structuring elements of their social and professional trajectories, continuously influencing their opportunities for professional development. In this sense, the effects of discrimination may be more broadly embedded in the objective conditions of black women's participation in the workforce, reducing the variability of their impacts on the relationship between personal resources and professional development.

On the other hand, discriminatory experiences may represent more disruptive events for groups historically positioned in contexts of greater social privilege, such as white men, since such experiences tend to be less frequent throughout their trajectories. Thus, the results suggest that the usefulness of personal resources is not universal, but depends on opportunity structures and the social positions occupied by individuals. Therefore, the lower intensity of the moderating effect among black women should not be interpreted as a lesser impact of discrimination, but rather as evidence that structural inequalities already persistently shape the professional development processes of this group.

Overall, this study's results reinforce the need to understand professional development beyond individualistic and meritocratic perspectives. Although personal resources, such as grit, are positively associated with professional development, their effects do not occur uniformly across different social groups. From an intersectional perspective, the findings suggest that race and gender structures influence the conditions under which these resources are mobilized and the returns obtained from them, leading individuals to experience different opportunities for professional development and career advancement. This reinforces the idea that the results do not indicate that black women need to develop higher levels of personal resources to overcome inequalities, but rather demonstrate that structural barriers, such as racism and sexism, limit the conversion of these resources into concrete professional benefits. In this sense, promoting professional development requires not only strengthening individual resources, but, above all, transforming the structural conditions that produce and maintain inequalities in the world of work.

Practical Implications

This study's results present important practical implications. The first relates to the fact that professional development was reported at higher levels by white men than by black women. This reinforces the need for organizations to recognize that professional development and career

advancement processes are influenced by structural racial and gender inequalities. Additionally, the negative association between everyday discrimination and professional development highlights that discriminatory experiences may act as barriers to access to opportunities and professional recognition.

Therefore, companies must provide greater psychological safety for their teams. In this sense, organizations need to promote more equitable work environments by investing in diversity, equity, and inclusion policies with an intersectional focus, as well as institutional mechanisms for preventing and addressing racism and sexism. Furthermore, training programs aimed at managers may contribute to recognizing explicit and implicit biases that interfere with evaluation, promotion, and career development processes.

Although personal resources, such as grit, are associated with professional development, the results of this study suggest that their effectiveness depends on the contextual conditions in which they are mobilized. Thus, rather than encouraging the strengthening of individual characteristics, organizations should seek to reduce institutional barriers that hinder the conversion of these resources into concrete opportunities for professional development, especially for historically minoritized groups.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies

This study presents some limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. Although this investigation included a sample considered relevant to the research objectives, it is important to highlight the unequal distribution between the two groups tested, in addition to the cross-sectional design, with data collected at a single point in time through self-report instruments, which may restrict the causal interpretation of the results. The use of self-report measures in a virtual environment may also have favored the occurrence of response biases, such as inattentive responding, responses influenced by social desirability, and common method bias, which require caution when interpreting the findings.

Another limitation concerns the sample profile, which comprised a considerable number of participants with higher levels of education. This characteristic may represent a specific subset of black women who were able to access educational and professional spaces historically marked by racial and gender inequalities, such that the findings may not reflect the experiences of black women under conditions of greater social and occupational vulnerability. Moreover, data collection was conducted remotely, which tends to restrict access to participants with certain levels of connectivity and familiarity with digital resources, limiting sample diversity. Another relevant limitation concerns the concentration of participants in the state of Rio de Janeiro, which makes it difficult to generalize the findings to other regions of the country.

In light of this, as recommendations for future studies, it is suggested that the geographic diversity of the sample be expanded, as well as investigate how structural factors, such as organizational climate, management practices, diversity policies, and institutional mechanisms of discrimination, may influence the returns obtained from personal resources. Such a perspective would make it possible to gain a deeper understanding of how individual characteristics and social structures interact in producing inequalities in professional development.

Furthermore, future studies should investigate the psychometric properties of the Grit Assessment Scale among socially minoritized groups, especially black women. Considering that experiences of discrimination and structural inequalities may influence how personal resources are understood and mobilized, it is relevant to verify whether the factor structure and functioning of the instrument remain adequate in these groups, contributing additional evidence of validity across different social contexts.

Finally, it should be emphasized that the results concerning the relationship between grit and professional development should be interpreted with caution, given the high association observed between the constructs. This finding suggests the need for future investigations to examine more deeply the conceptual and empirical similarities between these variables, as well as the specific mechanisms through which grit may contribute to professional development.

Final Considerations

This study contributed to an understanding of inequalities in professional development through a multigroup analysis, considering the effects of race, gender, and individual resources, such as grit, in

relation to professional development, moderated by everyday discrimination. The findings demonstrated that white men tend to present higher levels of professional development compared to black women, highlighting the importance of considering social contexts and experiences of oppression when analyzing professional trajectories. These results challenge individualistic and decontextualized perspectives on success at work and in careers, and question strictly meritocratic interpretations of professional development.

The comparison between black women and white men is grounded in the intersectional perspective, which understands race and gender as systems that maintain social inequalities. In the Brazilian context, white men have historically occupied positions of greater economic and occupational privilege, while black women experience the overlapping inequalities of race and gender, being more exposed to discrimination, precarious work, and fewer opportunities for professional advancement. In this sense, comparing these groups made it possible to examine how individual resources and workplace experiences manifest in distinct social positions, allowing for the identification of the extent to which the observed effects can be understood in light of structural inequalities related to race and gender.

Although the sample presented an unequal distribution between the groups, this discrepancy does not invalidate the analyses performed, since both groups had adequate sample sizes for the proposed procedures. In addition, the greater participation of black women may be related to women's greater engagement in research, especially research focused on experiences of discrimination and social inequality, an aspect frequently observed in studies on race and gender.

It can therefore be concluded that professional development cannot be understood solely as a result of individual effort, but rather as a phenomenon that emerges from the interaction between individual, structural, and social factors. The results suggest that racial and gender discrimination not only limits access to opportunities, but also influences the returns obtained from personal resources, causing individuals to experience different possibilities for professional development based on the social positions they occupy.

In this sense, it is expected that this research will stimulate critical reflection and practical action in the organizational field, contributing to the promotion of fairer and more inclusive work environments capable of recognizing and addressing the multiple barriers experienced by black women throughout their professional trajectories. Furthermore, studies that seek to investigate the interactions between race, gender, and work undertake an important ethical and political commitment by highlighting how historically constructed inequalities continue to affect opportunities for professional development and career advancement, reinforcing the need to transform institutional structures and practices.

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