Relations industrielles
Industrial Relations

Perceived Gender Discrimination and Women's Subjective Career Success: The Moderating Role of Career Anchors
Discrimination sexuelle perçue et succès de carrière subjectif : l'effet modérateur des ancres de carrière
Discriminación sexual percibida y éxito subjetivo de la carrera: el efecto moderador de los anclajes de carrera

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Cite this article

Herrbach, O. & Mignonac, K. (2012). Perceived Gender Discrimination and Women's Subjective Career Success: The Moderating Role of Career Anchors. *Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations*, *67*(1), 25–50. https://doi.org/10.7202/1008194ar

Article abstract

Subjective career success reflects an individual's internal apprehension and evaluation of his or her career, across any dimensions that are perceived relevant by the individual. It has beneficial consequences on several individual and organizational outcomes, such as job performance, employee commitment, occupational retention as well as organizational retention. Given the pervasive result that women are subjected to gender discrimination in the workplace, we first wanted to check whether the level of perceived discrimination they report having faced is related to their subjective career success. We also wanted to check whether individual priorities, as evidenced in the concept of career anchor, have an influence on the relationship between perceived discrimination and career success.

Using a sample of 300 women employees working in a large French company, we therefore investigated the relationship between perceived gender discrimination, subjective career success and career anchors. We found that perceived gender discrimination was negatively related to subjective career success overall. However, the relationship between the two variables was moderated by career anchors. Some anchors (i.e. managerial, technical and lifestyle) enhanced the impact of perceived gender discrimination, while other anchors (i.e. security and autonomy) lessened it.

Our results show how individual expectations, reflected in the notion of career anchor, have an influence on how the work environment is interpreted. In addition, they provide a potential explanation for the apparently contradictory findings of the literature on gender and career success. Finally, our results suggest that organizations should pay special attention not only to the work experiences of women who aspire to move up the hierarchy, but also to the women who aspire to achieve a high level of competency at their job, or seek balance between their work life and their home life.

Perceived Gender Discrimination and Women's Subjective Career Success: The Moderating Role of Career Anchors

Olivier Herrbach and Karim Mignonac

Subjective career success has beneficial consequences on several individual and organizational outcomes. It is closely related to what people value as important at work, but may be more difficult to achieve when they experience workplace discrimination. Using a sample of 300 women employees working in a large French company, we thus investigated the relationship between perceived gender discrimination, subjective career success and career anchors. We found that perceived gender discrimination was negatively related to subjective career success overall. However, the relationship between the two variables was moderated by career anchors. Some anchors (i.e. managerial, technical and lifestyle) enhanced the impact of perceived gender discrimination, while other anchors (i.e. security and autonomy) lessened it. We discuss the theoretical and practical implications of these findings.

KEYWORDS: **perceived gender discrimination, subjective career success, career anchors**

Subjective career success reflects an individual's internal apprehension and evaluation of his or her career, across any dimensions that are perceived relevant by the individual (Arthur, Khapova and Wilderom, 2005). Subjective career success has become particularly important in the contemporary work environment because, in the pursuit of today's more heterogeneous career paths, only individuals themselves can meaningfully define and assess their career success with reference to their own self-defined standards, needs, values, career stages, and aspirations (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996; Sturges, 1999). In other words, in a less predictable world, responsibility for both career development and the interpretation of career success rests even more with the individual. It is the individual who interprets and

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acts upon career outcomes, and it is individuals' perceptions of how they (and their career) are viewed that have the strongest impact on their self-concept (Tice and Wallace, 2003).

Subjective career success – also called career satisfaction or intrinsic career success in the literature – is an important issue. Indeed, research has shown that it has consequences on several beneficial organizational outcomes such as job performance, employee commitment, occupational retention as well as organizational retention (e.g., Igbaria, 1991; Pachulicz, Schmitt and Kuljanin, 2008; Yap *et al.*, 2010). Interestingly, in the context of an aging workforce, subjective career success has also been shown to influence older workers' intention to remain with their organization (Armstrong-Stassen and Ursel, 2009). In addition, individuals themselves take advantage of a sense of career success, as it has been shown to have not only desirable consequences in terms of life satisfaction and well-being (Hall, 2002), but also to be related to goal achievement, such as hierarchical status (Abele and Spurk, 2009). Therefore, given that subjective career success appears to be highly desirable for both employers and employees, researchers continue to try to identify the individual and organizational factors that facilitate employees' sense of career success, such as human capital, organizational sponsorship, socio-demographic status, and stable individual differences (Ng *et al.*, 2005).

In that respect, one of the issues is the gendered nature of career success. Research about women's subjective career success is important for three major reasons. Firstly, from a research point of view, career mechanisms are different for women. Therefore, as aptly summarized by Kirchmeyer (1998), to the extent that women's career outcomes are less well explained than men's by current models of careers, research specifically aimed at examining additional individual determinants seems deserving. Secondly, research has shown that achieving a sense of success is especially important for women because of the impact it has on their self-confidence and on their motivation to progress (Sturges, 1999). Thirdly, from a managerial perspective, "strategies aimed at increasing the number of women in management positions and developing women's careers are likely to be undermined unless organizations attempt to understand more clearly how women actually perceive their own career success" (Sturges, 1999: 251). There are thus potential important implications of getting a better understanding of the determinants and outcomes of women's careers.

The present paper aims at contributing to this issue in two ways. First, given the pervasive result that women are subjected to gender discrimination in the workplace (e.g., Melamed, 1995; Metz and Tharenou, 2001), we wanted to check whether the level of perceived discrimination they report having faced

indeed is related to their subjective career success. More importantly, in view of the literature's paradoxical findings about men and women's similar levels of subjective career success (Ng *et al*., 2005) – which highlights the potential role of individuals' interpretations and expectations in the assessment of subjective career success – we wanted to explore whether the link between perceived gender discrimination and subjective career success was influenced by their specific expectations regarding their careers. This possibility was theoretically grounded in the construct of career anchors, that is, what individuals view as their major career driver(s) (Schein, 1978). All this was performed using quantitative data from a sample of women employees working in a large French company.

Conceptual Framework

Subjective Career Success

A well-established definition of "career" is the unfolding sequence of a person's work experiences over time (Arthur, Hall and Lawrence, 1989). Such a broad definition is relevant in a contemporary environment because, while it still accommodates a view of careers based on an individual's upward mobility within a single organization (that is, the traditional conception of a career), it can also include horizontal, upward, or in some cases downward mobility within diverse organizational, occupational, industrial, or national contexts, as well as mobility between any of these contexts (Arthur, Khapova and Wilderom, 2005). Two major approaches of the career have been conceptualized in the career literature: the objective (or external) career and the subjective (or internal) career. The objective career is the sequence of positions which someone has occupied, while the subjective career is individuals' perceptions of their working life. The objective and subjective dimension have been shown to be interrelated, but they are also independent dimensions (Khapova, Arthur and Wilderom, 2006). Both of them are also related to how an individual evaluates his or her career, that is, to career success (Nicholson and de Waal-Andrews, 2005).

Career success has been defined as "the positive psychological or work-related outcomes or achievements one accumulates as a result of work experiences" (Seibert, Crant and Kraimer, 1999: 417). Career success is arguably an important topic, both for the individuals who experience it – or not – and for organizations, because the beneficial outcomes of employees' career success may translate into beneficial organizational outcomes such as increased commitment and reduced turnover. Just like the construct of career, a conceptual distinction between objective and subjective measures of career success is made in the literature.

Objective career success is based on tangible indicators of an individual's career situation, while subjective career success may be defined as the individual's internal apprehension and evaluation of his or her career (Arthur, Khapova and Wilderom, 2005). Criteria of objective career success include salary, salary growth, promotions, or hierarchical status. Criteria of subjective career success may include, for instance, career satisfaction, job satisfaction, but also – most importantly, given the normative nature of the notion of "success" – comparative judgments, whereby individuals position their career achievements with respect to an external referent (Heslin, 2003).

In this study, we conceptualize the sources of subjective career success using Derr's (1986) framework (Baruch, 2004). This framework refers to the five potential ways that lead people to experience a sense of success at work, in accordance with their values, attitudes and motivations. The five dimensions in the framework are the following: (1) "getting ahead" reflects the need to advance both in professional standing and up the organizational structure, (2) "getting high" is related to the areas of technical and functional skill development where individuals are willing to develop expertise in their area, (3) "getting secure" reflects the need for a solid job ensuring stability, security and predictability, (4) "getting free" is individuals' need for autonomy and independence, and (5) "getting balanced" means the desire to integrate personal, family and work life growth and development.

Subjective Career Success and Perceived Gender Discrimination

Women are faced with specific challenges that may prevent them from achieving their career goals (Yap and Konrad, 2009). One is related to the impact of family duties. As argued by Valcour and Ladge (2008), women's careers are likely to be limited by family factors including childbearing, larger family size and prioritization of the husband's career, and by the related deviations from continuous organizational employment such as career gaps, part-time work, and relocations. This may prevent women from committing enough time to their career and reaching their career goals. The second reason could be that women exhibit lower managerial ambitions compared to men, whether it is because they anticipate their family duties or they align themselves with the social roles expected from women (e.g., van Vianen and Fischer, 2002). In that case, the goal itself of achieving a "successful" career may not even be that relevant or perceived to be possible in the first place (Liff and Ward, 2001). In the present paper, the focus is on the third reason, that is, gender discrimination in the workplace, whereby women are prevented from achieving career success, not because of their real or alleged "choices", but because of the differential treatment they receive from organizations. For instance, Melamed

(1995) found that a large part (55%) of the gender gap in career success was attributed to sex discrimination – and not to differences in human capital, individual characteristics, or contextual factors – while Metz and Tharenou (2001) found that women reported gender discrimination as the most frequent barrier to their advancement at all managerial levels.

Perceived discrimination could be an important factor that influences how women figure out whether or not they have satisfactorily satisfied their career needs. Goldman *et al.*'s (2008) multiple needs model of perceptions of discrimination provides a compelling argument for this. In essence, their perspective suggests that perceptions of discrimination are negatively related to both economic-based need fulfillment and interpersonal-based need fulfillment. This is not only because perceived discrimination creates doubt in the minds of employees as to whether they are likely to achieve their economic goals (i.e., desired outcomes), but also because perceptions of discrimination are also negatively related to a person's sense of social standing (i.e. a positive self-regard). Indeed, discrimination signals that an organization does not treat everyone similarly and that this differential treatment is arbitrary, so that discriminated individuals feel inherently disadvantaged, as well as express a devalued personal and social identity. In the case of gender discrimination, this may explain why women's subjective career success should be related to the amount of discrimination they have faced, because being discriminated against leads to a sense of not having achieved the symbolic and economic sense of success that could have been achieved otherwise:

HYPOTHESIS 1:   Perceived gender discrimination is negatively related to women's subjective career success.

The Moderating Role of Career Anchors

Since subjective career outcomes are consistently and positively, albeit modestly, associated with actual career outcomes (Ng *et al.*, 2005), the prevalence of gender discrimination in the workplace – which impacts on women's objective careers – should be associated with reduced subjective career success for women in general. Research, however, has failed to evidence a significant difference in terms of subjective career success between men and women – unlike the one found for objective career success (Ng *et al.*, 2005). This means that objective career success alone may not be that important for determining subjective career success, and that how one's career is interpreted could be as important or even more important than the objective outcomes that have been reached, especially when comparing men and women (Sturges, 1999; Dyke and Murphy, 2006). This possibility was the basis for including the concept of career anchor into the present research.

The career anchor construct is based on the fact that individuals shape their careers in different ways according to their perception of their talents, needs and values (Schein, 1990). A career anchor refers to what an individual considers as more important and is unwilling to relinquish, even when forced to make a difficult career choice. Career anchors may influence every major decision about career issues, affect decisions to move, and shape employee reactions to work experiences. Career anchors were introduced by Schein (1978) to suggest that through successive trials and challenges experienced in their first years of employment, young workers develop a stabilized career self-concept. He initially postulated five career anchors (technical/functional competence, managerial competence, security and stability, autonomy and independence, and entrepreneurial creativity), but later added three additional anchors: service and dedication to a cause, pure challenge, and lifestyle (Schein, 1990).

Schein's conceptualization of career anchors has been refined by other researchers in several ways. Most importantly, a distinction was introduced between talent-based, need-based and value-based career anchors (Feldman and Bolino, 1996). Even though all anchors are grounded in needs, require some talents and reflect values, they differ in how these different elements are connected, as well as on the type of needs they involve. Talent anchors (technical/functional, managerial, entrepreneurial creativity) focus on the type of work performed by people and involve achievement-oriented needs. Need-based anchors (security and stability, autonomy and independence, lifestyle) are grounded in individuals' willingness to structure their work life around their basic personal needs. Last, value-based anchors (dedication to a cause and pure challenge) reflect individuals' identification with their occupations.

This distinction is important because it means that the fit or lack thereof between an individual's career anchor and work environment will have different consequences depending on the nature of the anchor. Also, it challenges Schein's initial assumption that each individual has only one true career anchor. Given their differentiated nature, an individual may have two or even three dominant anchors; for instance, an employee could be high both in the technical/functional anchor (talent-based) and the security (need-based). This, in addition to some individuals' potential "ambivalence" that makes them unable to focus on one given path, is why recent research on career anchors typically assesses individuals' scores on the full set of anchors (or a sub-set thereof), instead of identifying their dominant anchor.

Research has evidenced that career anchors have an influence on several individual outcomes (Feldman and Bolino, 1996). In the present paper, we argue that they influence the relationship between perceived gender discrimination and women's subjective career success. However, the nature of this moderating

effect (that is, whether it increases or decreases the relationship between the two variables) will depend on the nature of the career anchor. In other words, we argue that some career anchors have an "enhancing" effect (more specifically, talent anchors), while other career anchors (need-based anchors) have a "dampening" effect with respect to the link of subjective career success with perceived gender discrimination. "Enhancing" anchors (technical, managerial) are the ones that involve needs that are especially sensitive to perceived gender discrimination in order to experience subjective career success. "Dampening" anchors (lifestyle, autonomy, security) are those for which, conversely, we expect a weaker link between perceived gender discrimination and subjective career success.

The rationale for this is that career anchors reflect individuals' perception of what "career success" means and, therefore, make some individual needs salient, while other needs are downplayed. This process is different in the case of talent- and need-based anchors. The precise theoretical justification will now be presented for the five career anchors that were included in our research, which are the five anchors reflecting Derr's (1986) and Baruch's (2004) five dimensions: "getting ahead" (managerial), "getting high" (technical), "getting secure" (security), "getting free" (autonomy), and "getting balanced" (lifestyle).

First, managerially-anchored individuals aspire to move upward into administrative and general management positions. The desire to develop and combine competencies causes them to pass up strict specialization and strive for vertical mobility, which becomes their crucial status symbol. Because women with a strong managerial career anchor give importance to progressing in the company, they will feel that perceived gender discrimination prevents them from reaching this goal. As a result, their sense of career success should be adversely affected. On the other hand, women with a low managerial anchor are not that sensitive to "getting ahead", and because the needs related to that dimension are not salient, they will not perceive that their career success is affected as much by perceived gender discrimination. We thus state the following hypothesis:

HYPOTHESIS 2A: The managerial anchor moderates the effect of perceived gender discrimination on women's subjective career success, such that the negative effect of perceived gender discrimination on their subjective career success is stronger when the managerial anchor is high than when it is low.

Next, technically-oriented individuals organize their careers around some technical specialization or competency domain. They view themselves as experts who build their professional identity around the content of their work. Reaching a management position is not their ambition and is relevant only if it enables them to pursue their field of expertise. However, as a talent-based career anchor, achieving one's goal for technically-anchored people largely depends on the

availability of and access to technically-oriented jobs, especially high-level ones, and thus perceived gender discrimination is expected to have a stronger impact for women who have a higher score on the technical anchor and are focused on "getting high", that is, on functional development in Derr's (1986) framework. We thus state the following hypothesis:

HYPOTHESIS 2B: The technical anchor moderates the effect of perceived gender discrimination on women's subjective career success, such that the negative effect of perceived gender discrimination on their subjective career success is stronger when the technical anchor is high than when it is low.

In contrast to these two talent-based anchors, we assume that the remaining three need-based anchors will have a dampening effect on the link between perceived gender discrimination and subjective career success. First, lifestyle-oriented employees wish to balance their professional and personal lives. They are looking for ways to integrate individual, family and career needs, and tend to give less importance to achieving objective career success. They seek flexibility in employment relationships but are happy to work for a long period within a more traditional organization if it offers some flexibility of the kind they desire. We thus expect women with a high lifestyle anchor, that is, those who need to "get balanced", to react less strongly to perceived gender discrimination compared to women with a lower level of the lifestyle anchor, who put more importance to work issues and will react more strongly to discrimination. We thus state the following hypothesis:

HYPOTHESIS 3A: The lifestyle anchor moderates the effect of perceived gender discrimination on women's subjective career success, such that the negative effect of perceived gender discrimination on their subjective career success is weaker when the lifestyle anchor is high than when it is low.

Security-oriented individuals link their career to an organization that can ensure long-term employment security, high-quality benefits packages and, more generally, a high degree of professional stability. The hierarchical level that has been reached is less important than stability and predictability. This makes it likely that women employees with a high score on the security anchor will not be as sensitive to perceived gender discrimination, because they are more focused on security of employment, and less to elements pertaining to objective career success or to using a comparative focus when evaluating their career. Regarding the influence of need "getting secure", we thus state the following hypothesis:

HYPOTHESIS 3B: The security anchor moderates the effect of perceived gender discrimination on women's subjective career success, such that the negative effect of perceived gender discrimination on their subjective career success is weaker when the security anchor is high than when it is low.

Last, autonomy-oriented employees seek situations in which they will be free of organizational constraints and control. Their primary need is to be on their own, setting their own pace and work habits. These individuals have a sense of their own professional identity and can link the results of their work with their own efforts. Career opportunities are welcomed if they enable the individual to maintain or develop his or her autonomy. However, the compromises necessary to vertical mobility may make vertical moves less attractive for women who have this career anchor compared to those who have a lesser need for autonomy. The added responsibilities and involvement in organizational politics that promotions entail may be an unattractive prospect to those people who prefer to be left to their own devices. As people who are focused on "getting free" are therefore less sensitive to employer actions, we state the following hypothesis:

HYPOTHESIS 3C: The autonomy anchor moderates the effect of perceived gender discrimination on women's subjective career success, such that the negative effect of perceived gender discrimination on their subjective career success is weaker when the autonomy anchor is high than when it is low.

Method

Sample and Procedure

This study was conducted in a major telecommunications company headquartered in France. The career development system at this company was traditionally aimed at ensuring continuity of employment through effective planning of its human resource needs. Managerial and professional employees are rotated through increasingly challenging job assignments, frequently involving geographic relocation. This ensures overall security of employment, although the change from a technically to a commercially-oriented company has led to structural and cultural changes in the past fifteen years. We used the company's intranet-based survey tool to collect the study's attitudinal data (that is, perceived gender discrimination, career anchors and subjective career success).

Although the study was funded by the company's HR department, it is important to mention that it occurred at the request of the company's works council, and was therefore both initiated and supported by the company's unions. In addition, potential participants were clearly made aware of the study's joint sponsorship when contacted by mail to participate in the study. Demographic and career characteristics were collected directly from the company records. A link to the intranet-based survey was emailed to a random sample of 675 women employees. In order to ensure homogeneity despite the company's diverse professional contexts, and because it was negotiated as such between the HR department and the works council, the sample was drawn from the "Network,

Operations and Information Systems" domain, in which 20% of the women employees were represented.

We received 300 usable survey responses, constituting a 44.4% response rate. A comparison of respondents and non-respondents on key demographic variables did not reveal any significant difference between the two groups (p > .05). The average age of respondents was 41.6 years and their average tenure at the company was 15.5 years; 65% occupied managerial positions primarily in the technical and marketing areas. A majority of the participants comprising the final sample worked in the two main divisions of the company: computer and information systems (57%) and network systems (15%).

Measures

All measures consisted of, or were adapted from, previously published and validated scales that were translated into French. (The full list of items and response categories is available upon request from the authors.)

Subjective career success. We measured perceived career success with three items from Turban and Dougherty's (1994) scale. A sample item included "How successful has your career been?" The reliability (Cronbach alpha) of this scale was 0.81.

Perceived gender discrimination. We assessed perceived gender discrimination with a four-item scale. Three items were taken from Foley, Huang-Yue and Wong (2005; sample item: "My gender has a negative influence on my career advancement") and a fourth item was self-developed ("My gender has a negative influence on my salary"). The reliability of this scale was 0.82.

Career anchors. The five career anchors considered in this study were assessed with five scales, each containing three items adapted from Delong (1982), Schein (1990) and Martineau, Wils and Tremblay (2005). Respondents indicated the importance of each career anchor item to them. Cronbach alphas were 0.84 (managerial), 0.65 (technical), 0.87 (lifestyle), 0.87 (security), and 0.71 (autonomy).

Control variables. Based on previous literature about predictors of subjective career success (e.g., Ng *et al.*, 2005; Valcour and Ladge, 2008), we controlled for several demographic and career variables: age (years), company tenure (years), marital status (married = 1, unmarried = 0), number of children, job-type (computer and information systems division: CIS = 1, non CIS = 0; network systems: NS = 1, non NS = 0), salary (natural logarithm of annual salary on a twelve month basis), managerial position (managerial employee = 1, non-managerial employee = 0), and willingness to relocate (respondents were asked about their willingness to relocate for three different reasons: to get a significant

salary increase, to get a promotion, to remain at the company; α = .90). Since age and company tenure were highly correlated (r = 0.82, p < .001), we dropped the former variable from the equation in the multivariate analysis. We also controlled for place of work (Paris metropolitan area = 1, other regions of France = 0), because the most prestigious jobs (i.e. those potentially related to perceptions of career success) were located at the company's headquarters (i.e. in the Paris area).

Measurement Validation

Because several of our constructs are conceptually related and could be expected to be associated in a substantive way, we conducted factor analyses to establish the discriminant validity of our measures. We first conducted an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using principal axis factoring to ascertain whether our items loaded on their intended factors. We entered all our survey measure items (perceived gender discrimination, career anchors, subjective career success, and willingness to relocate) into the analysis and using varimax rotation, eight factors with Eigenvalues greater than 1 emerged. All of the items loaded adequately on their hypothesized factors (factor loadings > 0.52) and did not cross-load significantly on others (factor loadings < 0.31).

To check the measures' convergent and discriminant validity, we next conducted a number of confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) using the survey items noted above as indicators for all measures. To assess model fit (Hu and Bentler, 1999), we report the comparative fit index (CFI), the non-normed fit index (NNFI), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR). Our baseline eight-factor CFA model yielded good fit indices (χ^2[247] = 370.16, p < .001; CFI = .97; NNFI = .96; RMSEA = .041; SRMR = .052). All indicators exhibited significant (p < .01) relationships with their intended latent variable. Next, we fit a model with all items loading onto a single latent variable and the fit indices were exceedingly poor (χ^2[275] = 3187.41, p < .001; CFI = .44; NNFI = .39; RMSEA = .188; SRMR = .166). Additionally, we tested one alternative model to ensure that our dependent variable was discriminable from our predictor. We combined perceived gender discrimination and subjective career success as one factor and found that the eight-factor original model evidenced better fit indices than the seven-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2$[13] = 474.12, p < .001; CFI = .89; NNFI = .87; RMSEA = .087; SRMR = .085).

Finally, we conducted a CFA for the items used to measure the five career anchors. The five-factor model showed good fit indices (χ^2[80] = 142.97, p < .001; CFI = .97; NNFI = .95; RMSEA = .051; SRMR = .051). All items loaded significantly at the .01 level on their intended latent variables. Given

the high correlation between the lifestyle and security anchors (r = .57, p < .01), we tested an alternative model where the six items were mapped onto a single latent variable. The five-factor model yielded a significantly better fit than the four-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2$[4] = 231.87, p < .001; CFI = .89; NNFI = .88; RMSEA = .108; SRMR = .075). Together, these results indicate that the scales do possess adequate discriminant and convergent validity for use in hypotheses testing.

To test for the presence of common method variance, we expanded the baseline eight-factor model by adding an orthogonal method factor (Podsakoff *et al*., 2003). All items were allowed to load on their theoretical construct as well as on the common method variance factor. The model that included the common method factor resulted in an excellent fit (χ^2[222] = 279.07, p < .01, CFI = .99, NNFI = .98; RMSEA = .030; SRMR = .043) and outperformed the CFA model with no method factor ($\Delta\chi^2$[25] = 91.09, p < .001). Although these results attest to the existence of a method effect, further analyses of factor loadings revealed that only 9.2% of items' variance was accounted for by the method factor, which is lower than the median amount of method variance (25%) reported in studies of self-reported perceptions at work (Williams, Cote and Buckley, 1989). This suggests that common method variance did not significantly affect our ability to test study hypotheses.

Hypothesis Testing Procedure

We used hierarchical multiple regression to test our hypotheses. We first regressed subjective career success on demographic and career characteristics (Model 1). In a second step (Model 2) we entered perceived gender discrimination to determine the incremental variance attributable to that variable (Hypothesis 1). Next, we entered the five career anchors variables (Model 3). Finally, we computed the product terms for the variables in our two-way interactions and entered them into the regression equation (Model 4), to test the hypothesized relationship between perceived gender discrimination and career anchors (Hypotheses 2 and 3). To minimize multicollinearity, all independent variables were mean-centered and the interaction terms were computed using these centered scores (Aiken and West, 1991).

Results

Table 1 provides the descriptive statistics, correlations, and scale reliabilities for the variables of the study. Perceived gender discrimination was negatively cor-related with perceived career success, but was not related to any demographic variable or career anchor, except for a positive correlation with the managerial anchor.

TABLE 1
Descriptive Statistics, Correlations, and Reliability

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1. Age	41.62	8.31	—																
2. Marital status (1 = married)	.53	.50	.10	—															
3. Number of children	1.41	1.04	-.05	.39**	—														
4. Place of work (1 = Paris area)	.46	.50	-.08	.03	.12*	—													
5. Company tenure	15.49	9.75	.82**	.09	.15**	.06	—												
6. Computer / IS division (= 1)	.57	.50	-.17**	.02	.09	.24**	-.23**	—											
7. Network systems division (= 1)	.15	.35	.19**	.00	.05	.05	.21**	-.47**	—										
8. Managerial position (1 = manager)	.65	.48	-.31**	.01	.04	.02	-.50**	.27**	-.13*	—									
9. Salary (log)	7.97	.28	-.03	.07	.16**	-.09	-.39**	.23**	-.02	.73**	—								
10. Willingness to relocate	2.57	1.17	-.19**	-.15*	-.17**	-.17**	-.25**	-.12*	-.03	.19**	.11*	(.90)							
11. Perceptions of personal gender discrimination	2.99	.92	-.05	-.10	.00	-.01	-.08	-.06	.00	.00	-.04	.08	(.82)						
12. Managerial anchor	3.09	.78	-.12*	-.04	-.06	-.02	-.17**	-.02	-.04	.12*	.09	.26**	.19**	(.84)					
13. Technical/functional anchor	3.71	.55	.13*	-.03	-.03	.02	.21**	-.01	-.09	-.28**	-.29**	-.09	.00	.01	(.65)				
14. Lifestyle anchor	3.82	.74	-.10	-.09	-.04	.08	-.01	-.02	.03	-.25**	-.23**	-.24**	-.01	-.26**	.25**	(.87)			
15. Security/stability anchor	3.67	.86	.07	-.01	-.09	.02	.22**	-.14*	.03	-.35**	-.43**	-.17**	.03	-.10	.40**	.57**	(.87)		
16. Autonomy/independence anchor	3.70	.62	.13*	-.17**	-.10	-.08	.12*	-.12*	.03	-.16**	-.07	.01	.09	.24**	.24**	.16**	.18**	(.71)	
17. Subjective career success	2.97	.58	-.22**	-.09	-.01	.08	-.32**	.11	.01	.34**	.28**	.11	-.28**	-.04	-.25**	-.11	-.12*	-.04	(.81)

Notes: N = 300. Values in parentheses along the diagonal are reliability estimates (Cronbach alpha).

$* p < 0.05; \; ** p < 0.01; \; *** p < 0.001$

The hierarchical multiple regression results are summarized in Table 2. In line with Hypothesis 1, perceived gender discrimination was negatively related to subjective career success (Model 2) and accounted for significant incremental variance beyond the demographic and objective career variables. Consistent with Hypothesis 2 and Hypothesis 3, we found that the five career anchors interacted significantly with perceived gender discrimination to influence subjective career success (Model 4).

TABLE 2

Results of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Women's Subjective Career Success[a]

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Demographic and career characteristics				
Marital status	- 0.07	- 0.10	- 0.10	- 0.13*
Number of children	- 0.03	- 0.02	- 0.02	- 0.00
Place of work	0.10	0.11	0.13*	0.10*
Company tenure	- 0.22**	- 0.25**	- 0.29***	- 0.28***
Computer and information systems division	0.02	- 0.00	0.01	- 0.02
Network systems division	0.08	0.08	0.06	0.03
Managerial position	0.17*	0.17*	0.15	0.14
Salary (log)	0.09	0.06	0.06	0.04
Willingness to relocate	0.02	0.03	0.03	0.02
Perceptions of personal gender discrimination and career anchors				
Perceptions of personal gender discrimination (A)	–	- 0.31***	- 0.31***	- 0.34***
Managerial anchor (B)	–	–	- 0.11*	- 0.11*
Technical/functional anchor (C)	–	–	- 0.17**	- 0.17**
Lifestyle anchor (D)	–	–	- 0.17*	- 0.15*
Security/stability anchor (E)	–	–	0.17*	0.16*
Autonomy/independence anchor (F)	–	–	0.10	0.10
Interaction terms				
A × B	–	–	–	- 0.22***
A × C	–	–	–	- 0.13*
A × D	–	–	–	- 0.18**
A × E	–	–	–	0.17*
A × F	–	–	–	0.15**
ΔR^2	–	0.10***	0.05**	0.07***
R^2	0.17***	0.26***	0.31***	0.38***
F	6.56	10.37	8.61	8.67

[a] N = 300. All beta coefficients reported are standardized. We investigated potential multicollinearity using variance inflation factors (VIFs). The maximum VIF obtained in any of the models did not exceed a value of 2.75.

 * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Using the procedure outlined by Aiken and West (1991), we plotted the high and low levels of each career anchor (one standard deviation above and below the mean). Figures 1 and 2 depict the pattern of moderated results related to Hypothesis 2, and Figures 3 to 5 the pattern of moderated results related to Hypothesis 3. Figures 1 and 2 suggest that while higher perceived gender

FIGURE 1

Interaction between Perceived Gender Discrimination and Managerial Anchor in Predicting Women's Subjective Career Success
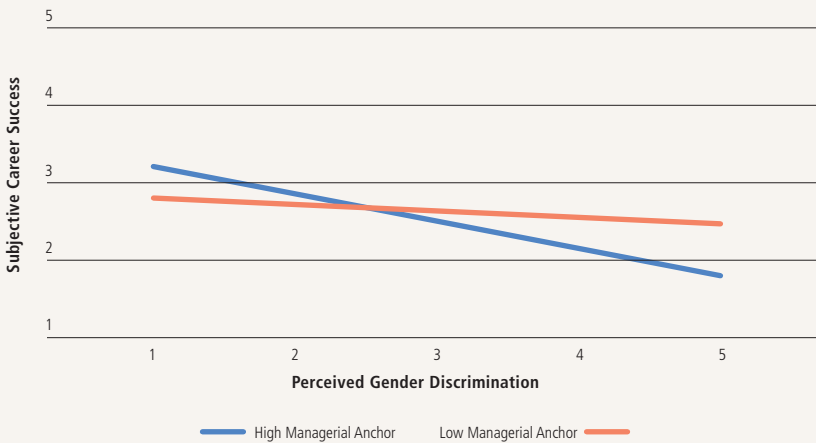
FIGURE 2

Interaction between Perceived Gender Discrimination and Technical/Functional Anchor in Predicting Women's Subjective Career Success
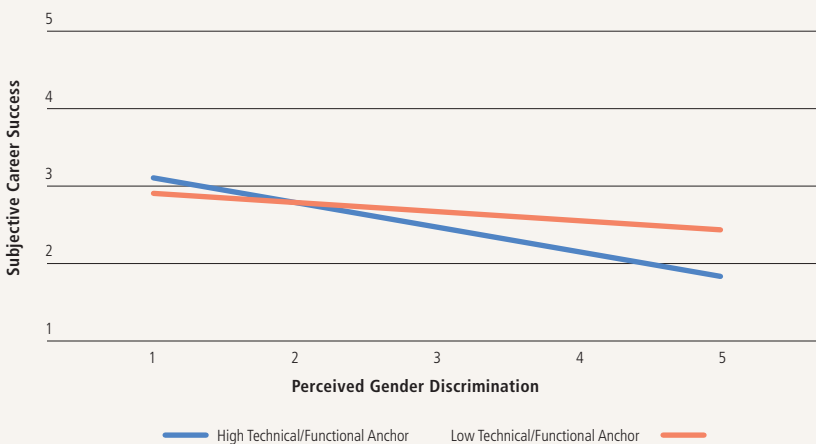
discrimination is associated with lower subjective career success, perceived gender discrimination is likely to be even more detrimental when an employee is managerially or technically anchored. We further conducted simple slopes tests. Our results confirmed that perceived gender discrimination has a stronger negative effect on subjective career success when the employee's managerial or technical anchor is high ($\beta = -.35$, t = -7.98, p < .001; $\beta = -.30$, t = -8.48, p < .001; respectively) than when such career anchors are low ($\beta = -.08$, t = -3.68, p < .05; $\beta = -.13$, t = -3.87, p < .05; respectively). Thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported.

Figures 4 and 5 suggest that the impact of perceived gender discrimination on subjective career success is weaker when the security and autonomy anchors are high than when they are low. Simple slopes tests confirmed that perceived gender discrimination has a weaker negative effect on subjective career success when security or autonomy anchors are high ($\beta = -.11$, t = -3.27, p < .05; $\beta = -.12$, t = -4.52, p < .05, respectively) than when security or autonomy anchors are low ($\beta = -.31$, t = -7.18, p < .001; $\beta = -.31$, t = -8.42, p < .001, respectively). However, as shown in Figure 3, this was not true for the lifestyle anchor because, contrary to our prediction, perceived gender discrimination had a stronger impact on subjective career success when it is high ($\beta = -.32$, t = -8.07, p < .001) and a lesser impact when it is low ($\beta = -.11$, t = -3.19, p < .05). Thus, Hypothesis 3 was only partially supported.

FIGURE 3

Interaction between Perceived Gender Discrimination and Lifestyle Anchor in Predicting Women's Subjective Career Success
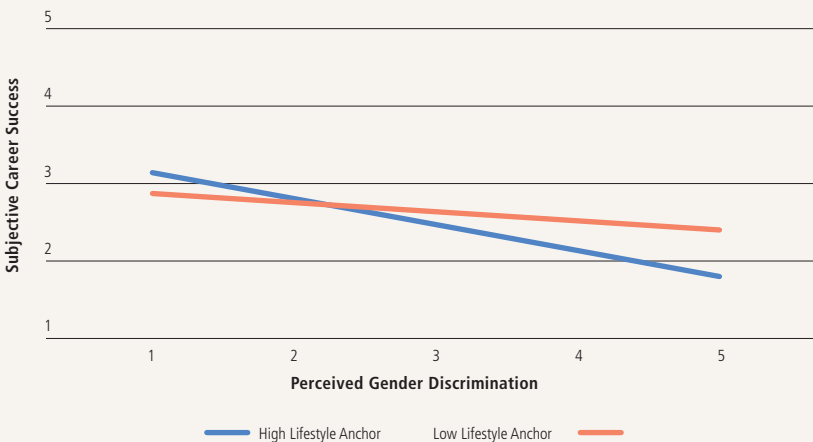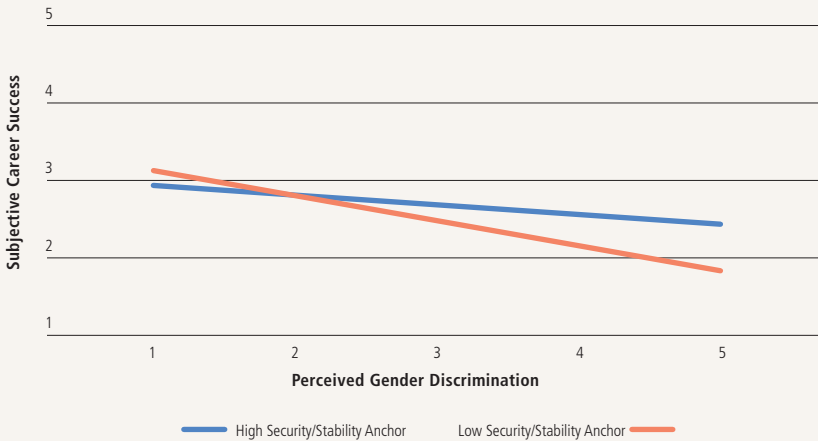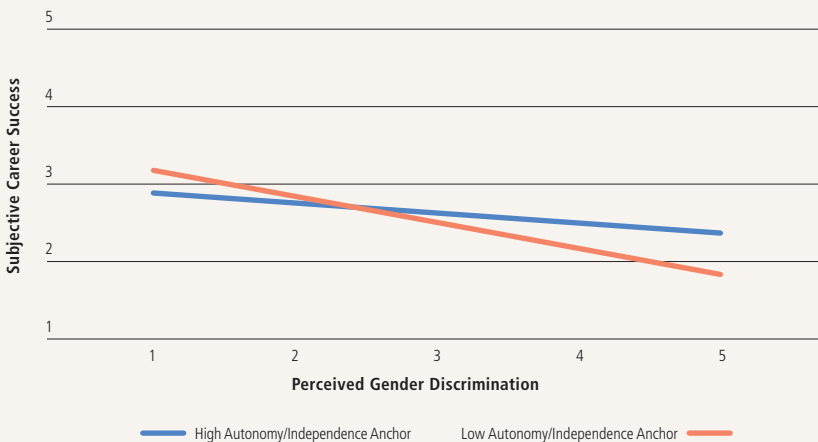
FIGURE 4

Interaction between Perceived Gender Discrimination and Security/Stability Anchor in Predicting Women's Subjective Career Success

FIGURE 5

Interaction between Perceived Gender Discrimination and Autonomy/Independence in Predicting Women's Subjective Career Success

Discussion

The present study has shown that subjective career success is negatively associated with perceived gender discrimination. This generally supports previous research about the negative consequences of discrimination, including gender discrimination, as preventing individuals from reaching their goals (Goldman *et*

al., 2008). However, the present study also provided evidence that career anchors moderate the influence of perceived gender discrimination on subjective career success. More precisely, we found that some anchors (i.e. managerial, technical and lifestyle) enhance the impact of perceived gender discrimination, while other anchors (i.e. security and autonomy) lessen it. The moderating effects that we found were generally coherent with our hypotheses, in the sense that talent-based anchors (managerial, technical) had an opposite effect compared to need-based anchors (security, autonomy).

Only the lifestyle anchor did not have the anticipated effect. While we expected it to have the same impact as the other need-based anchors, that is, to weaken the relationship between perceived gender discrimination and subjective career success, we found that women who score higher in the lifestyle anchor tend to react more strongly to perceived gender discrimination. A possible explanation for this is that the lifestyle anchor reflects individuals' attempt at achieving work-life balance and that employees expect to be able to achieve this balance. Thus, not being able to achieve it may be perceived as a form of "identity threat" for the women who experience it (Petriglieri, 2011). Indeed, one of the major issues of gender discrimination is related to companies' inability to take this factor into account (Gregory and Milner, 2009).

Our results are interesting in the first instance because they show how individual characteristics and expectations, reflected in the notion of career anchor, have an influence on how the work environment is interpreted. Of course, this leaves open the question of the nature of career anchors, and in particular their stability. Research has shown that women make adaptations to their career goals (e.g., Guillaume and Pochic, 2009) and it is debatable whether career anchors, though socially-grounded, are stable after the very early career years, or whether they may change according to later work experiences. This amounts to the question of whether women's "choices" indeed really are choices or just rationalized constraints (e.g., Crompton and Lyonette, 2011).

In addition, our results provide a potential explanation for the apparently contradictory findings of the literature on gender and career success. Indeed, as shown by Ng *et al*.'s meta-analysis (2005), compared to men, women tend to experience less objective success but equivalent subjective career success. How is it possible, then, that women have less objective career success but equivalent subjective career success? Career anchors may provide an explanation to that situation, because they may explain how the observed gender differences in objective career success do not translate into significant differences in subjective career success, because the career anchors of men and women are not structured in the same way. In other words, less objective career success is related to less subjective career success only in the case of individuals high in

"talent-based" anchors, and less so in the case of "need-based" anchors. As women have been shown to be lower in the former and higher in the latter (e.g. Danziger and Valency, 2006), gender discrimination's impact on the objective career of women does not systematically lead to a decrease in subjective career success.

Limitations and Research Perspectives

Several methodological limitations should be considered in the interpretation of our results. First, the cross-sectional design of our study does not allow us to draw conclusions regarding causality. It is possible that the relationship between perceived gender discrimination and subjective career success is reciprocal, or even the reverse of what we theorized. Future research could use longitudinal design to better grasp the interrelations between these two concepts. Second, we focused on five career anchors because this was coherent with our conceptualization of career success. However, it could be interesting to integrate the other career anchors, as well as take into the account the fact that some individuals may have one dominant anchor or a couple of dominant anchors as opposed to assessing individuals' scores on the full set of anchors.

Third, the major constructs in our study were collected using self-reports, which raises the possibility of same-source bias. Since these constructs (perceived gender discrimination, career anchors, and subjective career success) address individual's internal states, we would argue that it is logical to collect the data from participants themselves. A mitigating factor is that the demographic and career characteristics were collected from the company records. In addition, while method bias may have inflated the magnitude of the linear effects, our primary hypotheses focus on the interaction effects. Evans (1985) and Siemsen, Roth and Oliveira (2010) demonstrated that interaction effects cannot be an artifact of common method variance. This, combined with the fact we provided evidence of convergent and discriminant validity of our scales, suggests that our primary findings are not overly susceptible to method effects. A fourth limitation pertains to the measures used in the study, as we relied on part of validated scales. The full scales should be used in future research.

Fifth, data were collected within a single organization, which limits the observed variability and decreases the generalizability of the findings. Although conducting a study in a single organization has the advantage of controlling for potential organizational level confounding variables, future research in multiple organizational settings may increase the external validity of the findings to other types of organizations. In the same vein, the fact that our respondents belonged to the "Network, Operations and Information Systems" division of the company

has no doubt influenced the representation of the various career anchors in our sample. For instance, even though our sample consisted of 65% employees with managerial status, the average score for the managerial anchor was only 3.09. This would likely not have been the case in a different division or organization. Also, a different set of occupational levels and types could lead to a better understanding of the issue.

Finally, it is important to recall that the existence of perceived gender discrimination does not necessarily mean that the women who experience it have actually been discriminated against. Attribution theory can explain why at least some women would rather attribute their lack of success to gender discrimination (that is, an external attribution) rather than to their own shortcomings (that is, an internal attribution). However, previous research did not find support for this possibility (Metz and Moss, 2008).

Implications and Conclusion

As strongly asserted by Abele and Spurk (2009: 821), "subjective success is desirable for individuals and it seems to be desirable for organizations, too." While the present study was individual-focused, it also has implications for management and unions. Policy makers have been passing legislation about gender equality at work for a few decades now, especially in order to increase the number of women in management positions and develop women's careers. However, the outcomes of these policies did not live up to the expectations (e.g., Gresy, 2009; Kulich *et al.*, 2011; Yap and Konrad, 2009), in part because organizations did not sufficiently take into account how women actually perceive their own career success (Sturges, 1999).

Our research contributes to a better understanding of this issue, especially the results showing that three career anchors exacerbate the negative influence of perceived gender discrimination on subjective career success. They suggest that organizations should pay special attention not only to the work experiences of women who aspire to move up the hierarchy (i.e. those who are high in the managerial anchor), but also to the women who aspire to achieve a high level of competency at their job (i.e. are high in the technical anchor), or seek balance between their work life and their home life (i.e. high in the lifestyle anchor). This is consistent with the fact that women tend to define their career success more broadly than men do (Sturges, 1999: 247-248) and suggests that their career development should include this diversity.

In conclusion, given the importance of subjective career success for attracting and retaining employees (Erdogan, Kraimer and Liden, 2004), it is essential that organizations understand the factors associated with women's perceptions of

career success. As underlined by Sturges (1999: 251), "career development practices and career paths which do not reflect individuals' values and beliefs are not likely to deliver the levels of commitment and motivation which organizations today require from their managers." Organizations that respond to this challenge could better attract and retain talented women (Cabrera, 2009) and thus benefit from a competitive advantage.

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SUMMARY

Perceived Gender Discrimination and Women's Subjective Career Success: The Moderating Role of Career Anchors

Subjective career success reflects an individual's internal apprehension and evaluation of his or her career, across any dimensions that are perceived relevant by the individual. It has beneficial consequences on several individual and organizational outcomes, such as job performance, employee commitment, occupational retention as well as organizational retention. Given the pervasive result that women are subjected to gender discrimination in the workplace, we first wanted to check whether the level of perceived discrimination they report having faced is related to their subjective career success. We also wanted to check whether individual priorities, as evidenced in the concept of career anchor, have an influence on the relationship between perceived discrimination and career success.

Using a sample of 300 women employees working in a large French company, we therefore investigated the relationship between perceived gender discrimination, subjective career success and career anchors. We found that perceived gender discrimination was negatively related to subjective career success overall. However, the relationship between the two variables was moderated by career anchors. Some anchors (i.e. managerial, technical and lifestyle) enhanced the impact of perceived gender discrimination, while other anchors (i.e. security and autonomy) lessened it.

Our results show how individual expectations, reflected in the notion of career anchor, have an influence on how the work environment is interpreted. In addition, they provide a potential explanation for the apparently contradictory findings of the literature on gender and career success. Finally, our results suggest that organizations should pay special attention not only to the work experiences of women who aspire to move up the hierarchy, but also to the women who aspire to achieve a high level of competency at their job, or seek balance between their work life and their home life.

KEYWORDS: equal treatment, perceptions, women, career expectations, professional achievement

RÉSUMÉ

Discrimination sexuelle perçue et succès de carrière subjectif : l'effet modérateur des ancres de carrière

Le succès de carrière subjectif reflète l'évaluation globale par un individu de sa carrière en utilisant pour ce faire différents critères qu'il juge pertinents. Il a des conséquences bénéfiques sur plusieurs phénomènes individuels et organisationnels, tels que la performance, l'engagement au travail, le maintien dans la profession ou la fidélisation organisationnelle. Face au constat largement répandu que les

femmes sont sujettes à de la discrimination au travail, la présente recherche a pour objectif d'étudier s'il existe une relation entre la discrimination sexuelle perçue et le succès de carrière subjectif. Elle s'attache également à vérifier si les priorités individuelles, telles qu'elles se manifestent dans la notion d'ancre de carrière, ont une influence sur la relation entre la discrimination et le succès de carrière perçus.

En nous appuyant sur un échantillon de 300 femmes employées dans une grande entreprise française, nous montrons ainsi qu'il existe un lien négatif entre la discrimination sexuelle perçue et le succès de carrière subjectif. Toutefois la relation qui existe entre ces deux variables est modérée par les ancres de carrière. Certaines ancres (à savoir, les ancres management, technique, et qualité de vie) renforcent l'effet de la discrimination perçue, alors que d'autres la réduisent (à savoir, les ancres sécurité et autonomie).

Ces résultats montrent comment les attentes individuelles, telles que reflétées dans les ancres de carrière, ont une influence sur la manière dont l'environnement de travail est interprété. D'autre part, ils fournissent une explication possible aux résultats apparemment contradictoires de la littérature sur le genre et le succès de carrière. Enfin, ils suggèrent que les entreprises devraient non seulement prêter attention au développement de carrière des femmes qui aspirent à progresser dans la hiérarchie managériale, mais également à celui de celles qui cherchent à atteindre un niveau d'expertise élevé dans leur travail ou à préserver un équilibre entre leur vie professionnelle et personnelle.

MOTS CLÉS: égalité de traitement, perceptions, femmes, attentes de carrière, réussite professionnelle

RESUMEN

Discriminación sexual percibida y éxito subjetivo de la carrera: el efecto moderador de los anclajes de carrera

El éxito subjetivo de carrera refleja la evaluación global de un individuo sobre su carrera utilizando para ello diferentes criterios que el juzga pertinentes. Esto tiene consecuencias benéficas sobre varios fenómenos individuales y organizacionales tales como el rendimiento, la implicación en el trabajo, el mantenimiento en la profesión o la fidelidad organizacional. Dada la observación ampliamente difundida que las mujeres son sujetas a la discriminación laboral, la presente investigación tiene como objetivo de estudiar si existe una relación entre la discriminación sexual percibida y el éxito profesional percibido. Se propone de verificar igualmente si las prioridades individuales, tales como se manifiestan en la noción de anclaje de carrera, tienen una influencia en la relación entre la percepción de discriminación y el éxito percibido de carrera.

Con una muestra de 300 empleadas mujeres de una gran empresa francesa, se constata que existe un vínculo negativo entre la discriminación sexual percibida

y el éxito percibido de carrera. Sin embargo, la relación que existe entre las dos variables es moderada por los anclajes de carrera. Ciertos anclajes (esto es, los anclajes de gestión, técnicos y de calidad de vida) refuerzan el efecto de la discriminación percibida mientras que otros la reducen (esto es, los anclajes de seguridad y de autonomía).

Estos resultados muestran cómo las expectativas individuales, tal que reflejadas en los anclajes de carrera, tienen una influencia sobre la manera de interpretar el ambiente de trabajo. De otro lado, se provee una explicación posible a los resultados aparentemente contradictorios de los escritos científicos sobre el género y el éxito de carrera. Para terminar, se sugiere que las empresas deberían poner atención al desarrollo de carrera de las mujeres que aspiran a progresas en la jerarquía de dirección pero también al de aquellas que quieren alcanzar un nivel de experiencia elevada en su trabajo o preservar un equilibrio entre vida profesional y personal.

PALABRAS CLAVES: igualdad de trato, percepciones, mujeres, expectativas de carrera, éxito profesional