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### Perceived discrimination: why applicants and employees expect and perceive discrimination

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# MINORITY AND MAJORITY GROUP APPLICANTS' EXPECTATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS OF SELECTION DISCRIMINATION <sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

Whilst selection discrimination has often been investigated, less is known about job applicants' *perceptions* of discrimination. This paper discusses two studies on antecedents (subgroup identity, rejection sensitivity, core self-evaluations (CSE)) of perceived selection discrimination (PSD). In contrast to most research in this area, both studies were conducted in a field setting, with actual applicants. In study 1 our focus is on expectations of being discriminated against in a selection procedure and in study 2 on actual perceptions of PSD. As expected, in both studies, applicants from an ethnic minority rather than majority group, those with low rather than high core self-evaluations and those with high rather than low rejection sensitivity expected and reported more PSD. In addition, Study 2 found that being hired or rejected further influenced PSD outcomes. Finally, we found that General PSD versus PSD specific to the organization's recruiter were differently affected by these antecedents. In addition, three-way interactions, of ethnicity and hiring decision with both rejection sensitivity and CSE, were found in experiencing PSD, showing that when low on CSE and rejection sensitivity, Dutch rejected applicants tend to experience more PSD general and when high on CSE and Rejection Sensitivity, non Dutch rejected applicants tend to experience more PSD general.

Discrimination is an important problem that potentially disadvantages large numbers of people in the workforce. Discrimination also has both immediate and longer term negative effects on individuals' health and well-being. Exposure to discrimination may not only lead to rejected individuals being less likely to apply for subsequent job openings (Mays, Coleman & Jackson, 1996), but may also affect hired applicants' future work attitudes and behaviors (Barak, Cherin & Berkan, 1998). Employees who have been discriminated against may experience increase in work tension or suffer psychological problems such as lowered self-esteem, decreased well-being or reduced job satisfaction

<sup>1</sup> Part of this chapter was also presented at the 14<sup>th</sup> European Congress of Work and Organizational Psychology, Santiago de Compostela, Spain, 2009.

(e.g. Allport, 1954; Cooley, 1902; Erikson, 1956; Cassidy, Howe, Warden & O'Connor, 2004). They may also experience physical health problems (Mays, Cochran & Barnes, 2007). Furthermore, discrimination can lead to stigmatization (Avery, Wilson & McKay, 2008), which consequentially may increase unemployment rates in specific groups.

Discrimination is also potentially costly for firms. Potentially suitable and effective employees deciding not to join, or suited employees deciding to leave after experiencing discrimination, can be costly for firms and detrimental for organizational performance (e.g., Balser, 2000). Discrimination may also result in several key outcomes such as the organization running into high costs due to litigation, boycotting of the marketplace by the applicants, or spreading a bad company name (Viswesvaran & Ones, 2004; Gilliland, 1993).

Several ways exist to estimate the amount of discrimination in organizations, for instance, measuring actual proportions of minority and majority group applicants with the fourth-fifth rule of thumb (e.g. Harris et al., 2004; De Corte and Lievens, 2003) or investigating variables that lead individuals to commit to the decision to file an actual discrimination claim (e.g. Goldman, 2001; 2003). However, as Avery and his colleagues argue, an individual must *perceive* that discrimination has taken place before he or she files a discrimination claim (Avery, McKay & Wilson, 2007). Such perceptions of discrimination will also precede the adverse psychological effects of discrimination.

Here we focus on perceptions of discrimination. Two studies are presented in which we investigate perceptions relating to the expectation of (Study 1) and the experience of (Study 2) discrimination. Whether actual discrimination takes place is not always easy to ascertain when it comes to individual selection procedures and decisions. Regardless of whether actual discrimination takes place, individual applicants' perceptions of discrimination are likely to have an impact on the applicants and organizations involved. Our research focuses on these perceptions and our overall purpose is to better understand why applicants expect or perceive discrimination to occur during a selection procedure. Insight in this may help develop ideas on how such perceptions might be mitigated.

As workforces are culturally diversifying everywhere, it is essential to take a closer look at the ethnic minority perceptions of discrimination alongside the majority group applicants. In this study we delved into this important issue of individual perceptions as to whether a selection procedure is discriminatory, which has been proposed as a worthwhile extension to the literature on discrimination claiming (Harris, Lievens & Van Hove, 2004). Specifically, in our first study we investigated the expectations of being discriminated against and in our second study we investigated the experienced discrimination after the selection procedure had taken place. In the two studies presented here we do not focus on or test whether people are *actually* discriminated

against, but rather we focus on potential (psychological) antecedents that may affect people's expectations or experience of their *perceptions* of being discriminated against based on their background. Thus, we elaborate on a more specific form of perceived discrimination that has not yet received much attention, namely perceived selection discrimination (PSD).

In our first study, we investigated the anticipation of experiencing PSD and the role of subgroup identity, core self-evaluations and rejection sensitivity among actual applicants (from a single organization) early in a selection procedure. We tested whether there are differences in PSD expectations between majority and minority groups. Study 2 builds on and extends Study 1. The second study focused on a more diverse set of applicants (multiple organizations) and asked them to think back to the most recent experience in a selection procedure to investigate how applicants experienced PSD in relation to our psychological antecedents, thus focusing on experiences rather than expectations. This study additionally allowed us to investigate the influence of the recruiter as part of PSD and the influence of the selection outcome on PSD.

## Perceived Selection Discrimination

Whether or not actual discrimination has occurred in a selection situation is not always clear. Actual discrimination in the selection and assessment context has been identified as employers who discriminate against or refuse to hire or fire anyone on the basis of race, color, religion, gender or national origin (Guion, 1998; Arvey & Renz, 1992). As mentioned earlier, discrimination has been defined as differential treatment based on membership in a social grouping (Fiske, 1998). Harris and colleagues use the term *perceived* discrimination to refer to a situation where an individual believes he or she has been discriminated against and the discrimination is based on race, gender, age or other characteristics (Harris et al., 2004).

Perceived discrimination has been studied in the workplace context (e.g. Gutek, Cohen & Tsui, 1996; Basler, 2000; Ensher, Grant-Vallone & Donaldson, 2001; Sanchez & Brock, 1996; Avery, McKay & Wilson, 2008) and to attribute an event, such as the selection procedure, to discrimination, a person must feel that, based on their group membership or social identity, they have been treated differently (Major, Quinton & McCoy, 2002). Based on this notion and Harris and his colleagues' (2004) referral to the term perceived discrimination, we define PSD as the belief in having been discriminated against in a selection context, based on race, gender, age or other personal characteristics. Selection situations control entry to firms and are highly salient and often high-stakes situations for applicants that can have important consequences for individuals' careers and welfare. Thus, in addition to studying discrimination perceptions in the more

general workplace setting, specifically focusing on perceptions of discrimination at the entry point (i.e. the selection context) seems relevant.

We propose that in a selection situation, PSD can relate to both a more general perception of discrimination or can also take a more specific form caused by the impact of the more salient person in the procedure, namely the recruiter, which is investigated in our second study. The more general perception of discrimination which we expect to also be salient in selection procedures and which is investigated in both our studies, reflects the notion that a person has experienced discrimination in any kind of situation in the past and that such previous experience colors how subsequent events, thus also selection situations, are perceived. This effect of previous experience may also hold if the experience of discrimination was not personal but involved an in-group that one strongly identifies with. Thus, PSD general involves discrimination history and group identity. People who identify with a group which has repeatedly been exposed to discrimination in the past will be more prone to perceiving discrimination in any relevant context, thus also a selection context, than people who do not identify with such a historically disadvantaged group (Harris et al., 2004).

As Goldman (2001) suggests, ethnic minorities are more likely to have experienced more injustice in their lives and therefore have a different frame of reference with respect to perceiving discrimination. As a result, this history of (ethnic minority) applicants will affect their current perceptions. Landrine and Klonoff (1996) reported that people having a strong identity reported more recent and lifetime racist events and appraised these events as more stressful than people who were more acculturated in the mainstream society and thus have a weaker group identity. Thus, the previous experience of discrimination of oneself or of others part of the same group is likely to have consequences for applicant behavior as well as their perceptions and willingness to go through a selection procedure. Applicants may thus feel more easily discriminated against when belonging to such a group or having such a background and we include this by asking applicants whether their group connection had a negative effect on the process during the selection procedure.

The second element, PSD impact recruiter, forms a more contextual element of perceived discrimination due to the interpretation of interpersonal (dyadic) applicant - recruiter differences noticeable during the procedure.

### *PSD Impact recruiter*

During the applicant - recruiter interaction there is an interpersonal element involved. Consequently, the involved interaction can be interpreted differently from the applicants' as well as recruiters' perspective. Therefore, we define PSD impact recruiter as when an individual believes to have been discriminated against in a

selection context due to the different interaction of the recruiter with them and this different interaction is based on race, gender, age or other personal characteristics. As stated, feelings of discrimination or perceptions of discrimination exist when an individual or group, on the basis of their own subjective perceptions, define their situation as discriminatory. This, in part, depends on the individuals' perception of others' assessments of them (Hopkins, 1980).

According to the relative deprivation theory, feelings of discrimination depend on whom the individual compares their situation with (Crosby 1976; Dion 1986; Folger 1987). This comparison could either be the individual or the group. This individual or egoistic relative deprivation is activated when an individual believes that they have been discriminated against in comparison to others in their own group. Group or collectivistic relative deprivation is activated when an individual believes that they have been discriminated against in comparison of some other group(s) (Dion and Kawakami 1996; Banerjee, 2008). Research has shown that group deprivation results in stronger perceptions of discrimination than individual deprivation (Dion 1986; Walker and Mann 1987; Dion and Kawakami 1996; Banerjee, 2008). Thus, the sense of belonging to a cultural or ethnic group can trigger this perception (Cervantes, 1992), which suggests that in a recruitment context, the person of the recruiter can play a vital role in the perceptions of discrimination experienced by the applicant, especially when their ethnic or cultural background is dissimilar. For example, Wyse (1972) found that recruiter race did not affect the attitudes towards recruiters among white applicants but did have an influence on the attitudes of black applicants (Goldberg, 2003).

Here we suggest that even when not meant as such, incorrect interpretations of attitude or status differences with the recruiter can be experienced as disrespectful, which may lead to feelings of discrimination on part of the applicant. Thus, additional to more general feelings of discrimination investigated in Study 1, in Study 2 we also measured whether the applicants felt the recruiter they had personal contact with, discriminated against them. For instance, we asked when looking back at the procedure they thought the recruiter treated them differently or acted differently towards them.

Research on similarity also suggests that interpersonal interaction can play a role in perceiving discrimination. As Byrne (1971) mentions, interpersonal similarity seems to heighten mutual attraction between individuals. This similarity-attraction bias elaborates on the importance of the impact of the recruiter that previous applicant reaction studies have found (Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989; Goldberg, 2005; Prewett-Livingston, Field, Veres & Lewis, 1996; Stone, Hosoda, Lukaszewski & Phillips, 2008). This is in line with a model on statistical discrimination developed by Cornell and Welch (1996), which demonstrates that majority group members have the tendency to hire applicants whose cultural backgrounds are similar to their own even when they have no discriminatory preferences.

Graves and Powell (1995) likewise concluded that *perceived similarity* between recruiters and applicants relates to decisions to hire an applicant (Graves & Powell, 1995; Ensher et al., 2001; Stevens & Kristof, 1995). Also, those highly dissimilar to their colleagues are likely to have feelings of exclusion or marginalization (Avery et al., 2007).

To summarize, in our first study we study applicants in the early stages of a selection procedure and focus on their general expectation of being discriminated against in that selection procedure. In our second study, we ask applicants to look back at their last selection procedure and to indicate whether they experienced discrimination during that selection procedure. Furthermore, in our second study, we not only investigate the experience of this more general feeling of being discriminated against (PSD general), but also propose the additional element of PSD, namely impact of the recruiter, as a very salient person in the selection situation (PSD impact recruiter). As we expect PSD general and PSD impact recruiter to be influenced in the same direction by the antecedents, for matters of convenience, we will call it PSD (general and impact recruiter) in the development of our Hypotheses below. Because, in our second study we investigate the procedure in hindsight, we had the opportunity to investigate the influence of being rejected or accepted for the job concerning the selection procedure more thoroughly, which we thus also investigated in this second study.

### *PSD, ethnicity and outcome of the selection procedure*

As argued above, we expect that applicants of ethnic minority backgrounds are likely to experience higher levels of PSD than non-minority applicants. Both studies presented here were conducted in The Netherlands. The Netherlands has a wide variety of ethnic groups where the population with a non-western cultural background is about 11% of the population in 2010 (CBS, 2011). The major ethnic minority groups are from Turkish, Surinamese, Moroccan and Dutch Antillean descent (Delhaye, 2008). Surinamese and Dutch Antillean are immigrants from (former) Dutch colonies and the Turkish and Moroccan immigrants first arrived as guest workers in the 1960s and 1970s (Van Hooft, 2004). As the population diversified over the last few decades, more ethnic minorities have entered the workforce and increasing ethnic diversity is seen in organizations (De Vries & Pettigrew, 1998).

The majority of ethnic minorities currently still has a relatively low status in the Netherlands, indicated by high unemployment and overrepresentation in jobs at the lower end of the labor market (Dagevos, 2001, Te Nijenhuis & Van der Flier, 2005, Morgan & Várdy, 2009). Research suggests that indirect discrimination is present in the Netherlands (De Vries & Pettigrew, 1998, Van der Werf, 1992, Van Hooft, 2004). This suggests ethnic minorities will tend to have more direct or indirect experiences with discrimination than majority applicants, which is likely to enhance perceptions of

discrimination (as outlined above). Therefore, we expect that applicants of ethnic minority backgrounds are likely to experience higher levels of PSD than non-minority applicants. We hypothesize:

*Hypothesis 1a:* Ethnic minority applicants will expect (Study 1) and experience (Study 2) more PSD than non minority applicants.

In addition, we expect to find a relatively straightforward direct effect, that of selection outcome on PSD. Gilliland has mentioned previously that fairness perceptions are shaped by the selection outcome; hired applicants see the selection procedure more positively than rejected applicants (Gilliland, 1993). Moreover, the prototype model proposes that discrimination is perceived when an event is not in line with expectations (Inman and Baron 1996; Inman et al. 1998; Inman 2001; Major et al. 2002). According to this model the perceived harm caused by the decision (being rejected or accepted for the job) play a major role in whether or not individuals perceive discrimination (Swim et al. 2003). In line with this, in Study 2, we expect the PSD to be higher for those who do not get the job they applied for (i.e. an unfavorable outcome of the selection procedure they were involved in). Thus:

*Hypothesis 1b:* Rejected applicants will experience more PSD than hired applicants (Study 2).

## Personal psychological antecedents of PSD

In addition to ethnicity and selection outcome, PSD may partly be determined by other antecedents (e.g. Operario & Fiske, 2001). Another purpose of these studies, therefore, is to examine several additional antecedents that may explain the occurrence of perceptions of selection discrimination. As discrimination has been shown to be based on ethnicity (Avery et al., 2008) and tends to be differently attributed when an outcome is negative (Sommer & Baumeister, 2002), we also investigate whether perceptions of discrimination may be moderated by ethnicity (Study 1 and Study 2) and the selection outcome (Study 2). Elaborating on the previously mentioned prototype model that highlights the importance of the expectations of the individual to understand perceptions of discrimination, such as the intention of the decision maker (e.g. recruiter), demographics and individual differences (Inman & Baron, 1996) and based on the discrimination, culture and identity literature, we identified subgroup identity, core self-evaluations and rejection sensitivity as potentially important antecedents of PSD and included them in both studies one and two.



## *Subgroup identity*

According to Goldman, Gutek and Stein (2006), individuals' perceptions of discrimination are formed when looking at how others and especially other groups are treated. This suggests that a focus on intergroup relations relates to PSD. Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) suggests individuals derive personal meaning from their group membership. Individuals with a high group identity tend to incorporate aspects of that group in their self-concepts. This, in turn, influences their social perceptions or positive feelings about their in-group (Goldman et al., 2006, Operario & Fiske, 2001). An increased identification with one's group (e.g. women) may make individuals more aware of the potential injustice the group can experience (Major, Quinton & Schmader, 2003). To attribute an event to discrimination, a person must feel he or she has been treated unfairly and that the treatment was based on social identity or group membership (Major, Quinton & McCoy, 2002). The higher the group identification is, the more salient that specific group identity will be (Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton & Smith, 1997). Thus, strongly identifying with a (stigmatized) group is likely to have an impact on perceptions of discrimination during a selection procedure.

Therefore, we propose that people with a strong ethnic subgroup identity will more likely experience discrimination in their everyday lives and consequentially, also experience an 'identity mismatch' between themselves and the recruiter, who typically will have a different subgroup identity in the selection context. Consequently, we propose that those with a strong ethnic subgroup identity will tend to experience more PSD than those who have a weak subgroup identity.

*Hypothesis 2a:* Applicants with a strong subgroup identity will expect (Study 1) and experience (Study 2) more PSD than applicants with a weak subgroup identity.

As mentioned above, the more individuals identify with a historically stigmatized ethnic group, the more likely they are to attribute negative incidents to discrimination (e.g. Operario & Fiske 2001; Sellers & Shelton 2003). Ethnic minority groups who have a strong ethnic group identity are likely to use ethnicity as an important element of their identity and therefore will be more likely to be sensitive for unfair treatment based on their ethnicity (Banerjee, 2008). We also expect that the effect of subgroup identity is stronger for ethnic minority group applicants. Therefore we propose:

*Hypothesis 2b:* The relationship between subgroup identity and PSD is moderated by ethnicity. Ethnic minority applicants with a strong subgroup identity will experience more PSD than majority applicants and applicants with a weak subgroup identity (Study 1).

As mentioned besides ethnicity minority applicants and applicants with a strong subgroup identity, we also expect a stronger effect of PSD for rejected applicants because, as mentioned above, rejected applicants are likely to see the selection procedure more negatively and therefore are more likely to attribute this negative event to discrimination (Sommer & Baumeister, 2002). Thus, in Study 2 we hypothesize the following three-way interaction amongst subgroup identity, ethnicity and being hired or rejected for the job:

*Hypothesis 2c:* The relationship between subgroup identity and PSD is moderated by ethnicity and getting hired or rejected; rejected ethnic minority applicants with a strong subgroup identity will experience more PSD than other applicants (majority, accepted and weak subgroup identity) (Study 2).

### *Core self-evaluations*

Self-esteem represents the overall value one places on oneself as a person (e.g., Judge & Bono, 2001; Nikolaou & Judge, 2007). Self-esteem has been suggested to be important for perceived discrimination (e.g., Crocker & Major, 1989). Empirical evidence supports this idea. For example, research showed that the lower the self-esteem of Dutch adolescents, the more discrimination they perceived (Verkuyten & Brug, 2002). Self-esteem is considered as the most essential manifestation of the broader construct of core self-evaluations or CSE (Judge & Bono, 2001; Nikolaou & Judge, 2007). CSE has been defined as fundamental, bottom-line evaluations that individuals hold of people, events and things in relation to themselves. The core self-evaluations model includes four traits: neuroticism, self-esteem, locus of control, and generalized self-efficacy (Judge, Locke, & Durham, 1997).

Research has shown that people with low self-esteem, are likely to be more vulnerable to threatening information and will tend to evaluate themselves in relatively negative terms (Sommer & Baumeister, 2002). Therefore, we also expect applicants low on CSE to perceive more general PSD. Liden, Martin and Parsons (1993) showed that applicants high on self-esteem were more inclined to feel that they were responsible for the positive interaction between themselves and the recruiter. Thus, we also expect that applicants low on CSE to perceive more PSD impact recruiter.

Overall, individuals who scored high on CSE, appeared to be satisfied with their lives in general (Nikolaou & Judge, 2007). Research indicates that the way individuals make inferences about themselves, thus for example, score high on CSE, affects their emotional reactions to certain events and the way they form judgments about their satisfaction of life (Nikolaou & Judge, 2007). Thus, we expect people with high CSE to be more able to process the interaction in a positive manner and therefore to be

less likely to expect or attribute their experience of a selection procedure to discrimination.

*Hypothesis 3a:* Applicants high on CSE will expect (Study 1) and experience (Study 2) less PSD than applicants low on CSE, especially ethnic minority applicants.

As mentioned, ethnic minorities are more likely to have experienced more discrimination in their lives than the majority group (e.g., Goldman 2001). As the effect of discrimination leads to a lowered self esteem (Cassidy et al., 2004), we also expect to find a moderating effect of ethnicity such that members of minority groups will perceive more discrimination when low on CSE, formulating the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 3b:* The relationship between CSE on PSD is moderated by ethnicity. More specifically, when CSE is low, ethnic minority are more likely to experience PSD. When CSE is high, there will be less difference between the ethnic minority and majority applicants. However, the expectation is that rejected minority applicants will experience more PSD even when high on CSE (Study 1).

As individuals with high CSE are more satisfied with their lives and are more likely to process an event in a more positive manner (Nikolaou & Judge, 2007), in Study 2, we expect that a person with high CSE generally is less likely to attribute being rejected for the job to discrimination than a person with low CSE, thus:

*Hypothesis 3c:* The relationship between CSE on PSD is moderated by ethnicity and getting hired or rejected. More specifically, when CSE is low, ethnic minority but also majority, rejected applicants are more likely to experience PSD than those who are hired but PSD will be slightly higher for the minority group; when CSE is high, there will be less difference between the ethnic minority and majority applicants as well as between the rejected and hired applicants. However, the expectation is that rejected minority applicants will experience more PSD even when high on CSE (Study 2).

### ***Rejection sensitivity***

Research by Sommer and Baumeister (2002) has shown that rejection threat resulted in a pattern of withdrawal and failure. People sensitive to rejection also possess fewer resources for coping with experienced job rejections. Attributing negative feedback to discrimination may act as a mechanism for protecting one's self-esteem in the face of failure (Sommer & Baumeister, 2002), thus PSD can arise as a coping mechanism.

Blaming failure or rejection upon discrimination implies that control for outcomes rests with others and not with oneself (Verkuyten, 1998). A selection context is likely to be more difficult for people high on rejection sensitivity. Thus, we hypothesize that the less sensitive to rejection individuals are, the less PSD they experience:

*Hypothesis 4a:* Rejection sensitive applicants are more likely to expect (Study 1) and experience (Study 2) PSD than applicants who are low on rejection sensitivity.

As ethnic minority groups tend to be discriminated more often than majority groups (Opario & Fiske, 2001) we expect the sensitivity for rejection to be higher for this group especially when actually rejected. For our ethnicity interaction we expect:

*Hypothesis 4b:* The relationship between rejection sensitivity on PSD is moderated by ethnicity. More specifically, when rejection sensitivity is high, ethnic minority applicants are more likely to experience PSD than the majority group applicants. For those low on rejection sensitivity, there will be less difference between the ethnic minority and majority applicants (Study 1).

As mentioned above, especially ethnic minority applicants may fear rejection, as they have been rejected or discriminated against more often in the past (Goldman, 2001) and attributing negative feedback to discrimination is a form of protecting oneself (Sommer & Baumeister, 2002). Thus, blaming rejection upon discrimination as a form of self protection can arise, especially when sensitive for the rejection. In Study 2, we expect there to be an interaction effect of ethnicity and selection outcome on rejection sensitivity and PSD and hypothesize the following:

*Hypothesis 4c:* The relationship between rejection sensitivity on PSD is moderated by ethnicity and selection outcome. More specifically, when rejection sensitivity is high, ethnic minority, rejected applicants are more likely to experience PSD than the majority, those who are hired and for those low on rejection sensitivity; when rejection sensitivity is low, there will be less difference between the ethnic minority and majority applicants as well as between the rejected and hired applicants. However, the expectation is in the same direction as for the applicants high on rejection sensitivity (Study 2).

## Method Study 1 and 2

### *Sample and procedure*

#### **Study 1**

In study 1, participants were applicants for a traineeship program at a large banking organization in The Netherlands. The first invitation for applicants was sent by email. In this mail, they were asked to participate voluntarily in an independent study conducted by the university. If they agreed to participate, they could print the attached questionnaire and bring it along to the first meeting of the selection procedure and put it in a box confidentially (without the organization's recruiters seeing it). The voluntary and anonymous nature of participation was stressed in the invitation and a couple of gift certificates were given in return for participation. The questionnaire was about the applicants' expectations of PSD. The number of participants in this field study was 165. However, participants who had a Dutch and a Non-Dutch parent (12%) were excluded from further analyses which resulted in 146 participants. The demographic composition of the participants was: 38% female; Dutch 61%, Non-Dutch (Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese and other) 28%; the average age of the participants was 25 years old. In the questionnaire applicants were asked about the upcoming selection procedure while answering the questions. All questions were answered on 7-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree) unless mentioned otherwise.

#### **Study 2**

As we only had access to applicants before the procedure started in Study 1, Study 2 was conducted to investigate PSD after having gone through a selection procedure, thus focusing on evolved perceptions rather than on the expectation of PSD as in Study 1. Also, we wanted to investigate the influence of being rejected or accepted for a job on PSD. In addition, we investigated whether the recruiter played a role in perceiving discrimination. To increase the representativeness, we aimed for a diverse sample of employees from different areas of education, industries and professional backgrounds. Part-time students of two different universities who currently held jobs or had recently applied for one were invited to participate. They were asked to provide names of one or two of their contacts who were working or applying for a job and who might be willing to participate in this study. These contacts were invited to participate in a university study about applicants' perceptions of the selection procedure. The voluntary and anonymous nature of participation was stressed in the invitation and a couple of gift certificates were given away in return. Anyone who agreed to participate received a printed questionnaire which could be directly returned to the researchers.

In this field study (N= 349), participants who had a Dutch and a Non-Dutch parent (5%) were excluded from further analyses which resulted in 331 participants. The demographic composition of the participants was: 56% female; Dutch 56%, Non-Dutch (Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese and other) 44%. The average age was 23 years old. Only 21% were rejected for the job concerned. In the questionnaire, participants were instructed to think about their last job application and interview (successful or unsuccessful), while answering the questions.

## Measures

*Perceived Selection Discrimination.* As to our knowledge no measure for perceptions of discrimination exists that is specific to the selection context, a PSD scale was developed for this study and was partly based on information provided in previous discrimination studies in the field of education, career and society (McWhirter, 1997; Levin, Sidanius, Rabinowitz & Federico, 1998; Sanchez & Brock, 1996). Items were tailored to focus on the selection procedure. As a general introduction before the PSD items applicants were instructed to keep the ethnic group that they mostly identified with in mind, while answering these questions. We included 13 items, which measured general perceptions of discrimination in the selection context (e.g., “I feel people of a certain group usually don’t get fair treatment in a selection procedure” and “I feel disadvantaged because of my background” ( $\alpha = .94$ ).

In study 2 in addition to the general PSD scale, the impact of the recruiter on the applicant and the impression applicants had of recruiters’ behavior during the selection process were also measured (e.g., “During the selection procedure, I felt the recruiter acted as if (s)he was better than I am”). Principal Components Analysis (PCA) of all of the discrimination items resulted in 2 factors, of which the items accounted for 71% of the total variance. *Factor 1:* All 13 items of PSD *general* ( $\alpha = .95$ ). *Factor 2:* all 3 items intended to measure PSD *impact recruiter*. This scale comprised 3 items related to the impact of the recruiter during the selection process ( $\alpha = .84$ ). Although these factors were significantly correlated (in the varimax rotated solution) the correlation was only reasonably moderate,  $r = .57$ ,  $p = .001$  with PSD general. This indicated that PSD general and PSD recruiter are sufficiently distinct measures.

*Subgroup identity.* The Subgroup identity scale was based on Pennekamp, Doosje, Zebel, and Fischer (2007). It consisted of 5 items, for example: “Being a group member is an important part of the way I look at myself”. These 5 items resulted in an  $\alpha$  of .57, so we decided to exclude one item (“I am very happy being part of a group of people I identify myself with”) which resulted in an  $\alpha$  of .77. In study 2, no items had to be removed and Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  was .83.

*Core self-evaluations (CSE).* The 12 item scale developed by Judge, Erez and Bono (2002) was used to measure CSE. This scale measures the four core CSE traits: self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, locus of control and neuroticism. Items were rated on a 5-point scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree). The  $\alpha$  was .82 in study 1 and .70 in study 2.

*Rejection Sensitivity.* Most of the rejection sensitivity literature is in the intimate relationship context (e.g. Downey & Feldman, 1996) and as far as we know has never been measured in the selection and recruitment context. Therefore, the rejection sensitivity scale was developed for this study. After factor analysis, 3 factors were extracted explaining 58% of the total variance. After careful consideration of the items in the questionnaire, we decided to only use the items that loaded high on the first component, which resulted in 5 items measuring rejection sensitivity (e.g., "I really mind being rejected for a selection procedure"). The scale had a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of .70 in Study 1 and  $\alpha$  of .74 in Study 2.

*Demographic variables.* Several demographic characteristics were included as variables. Gender (0 = *female* and 1 = *male*) and age were used as control variables, as women and older applicants may perceive more PSD. Additionally, ethnicity as a demographic characteristic was included as a moderator variable and was measured by asking about the place of birth of their parents. Ethnicity was then coded as: 0 = *Non-Dutch, Minority* (i.e., respondents whose parents were born outside of the Netherlands) and 1 = *Dutch, Majority* (i.e., respondents whose parents were both born in the Netherlands).

*Outcome of the selection procedure.* The outcome of the procedure was included in Study 2 and coded as 0 = *rejected for the job in question* and 1 = *accepted for the job in question*.

## Results

### Study 1

As expected, Non-Dutch, ethnic minority applicants mean score ( $M = 1.90$ ) is higher on PSD general than that of the Dutch, majority group ( $M = 1.31$ ). Members of ethnic minority groups are more likely to expect PSD general than the majority group ( $t = 4.74$ ,  $df = 55.92$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ). This supports our first hypothesis that minority group members expect and experience more PSD general.

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics and correlations for the entire sample in study 1. Although subgroup identity was not significantly related to PSD general, ethnicity was. Dutch applicants expected less PSD general ( $r = -0.44$ ,  $n = 144$   $p = .00$ ) than Non-Dutch applicants, which is in line with hypothesis 1a. Hypothesis 2a was not supported; applicants with a strong subgroup identity did not expect more PSD than applicants with a weak subgroup identity. In line with hypothesis 3a, CSE was negatively correlated with PSD ( $r = -0.34$ ,  $n = 144$   $p = .00$ ). Thus, the higher an applicant on CSE the less PSD general is expected. Rejection sensitivity had a positive

relationship with PSD general ( $r = 0.20$ ,  $n = 144$ ,  $p = .02$ ). In line with hypothesis 4a, the more sensitive for rejection the more PSD general is expected.

Table 1 | Means, standard deviations and correlations of the variables used in study 1

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Perceived selection discrimination	1.50	0.63						
2. Subgroup identity	3.23	0.79	.09					
3. Core self evaluations	4.14	0.47	-.34**	-.15				
4. Rejection Sensitivity	2.90	0.74	.20*	.08	-.41**			
5. Gender <sup>a</sup>	0.62	0.49	-.11	.01	.02	-.19*		
6. Age	24.79	2.24	.03	-.14	-.07	.05	.05	
7. Ethnicity <sup>b</sup>	0.68	0.47	-.44**	.16	-.07	.00	.13	-.00

Note. Due to missing values  $N$  varies between 144 and 146. <sup>a</sup> 0 = female ( $n = 56$ ). 1 = male ( $n = 90$ ) <sup>b</sup> 0 = Non-Dutch, Minority ( $n = 46$ ). 1 = Dutch, Majority ( $n = 100$ ) \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

### Regression analyses study 1

We performed hierarchical regression analyses to examine the proportion of variance in the overall PSD general scores accounted for by the set of predictor variables, while also examining the potential direct and moderating effect of ethnicity. Following the suggestions of Cohen, Cohen, West, and Aiken (2003), Subgroup identity, Rejection Sensitivity, Core Self Evaluations and Ethnicity were means centered by subtracting the sample mean from all individuals' scores on the variable, getting a revised sample mean of 0 for that variable and for ethnicity coding it as 0-1 to test for moderation. The regression analyses consisted of three steps. Table 2 shows the regression results and reports standardized Beta weights in the three steps of the analysis, the  $R^2$ , and the  $F$ -change for each step. In Step 1, PSD general was regressed on the control variables gender and age. Next, ethnicity and the predictor variables (subgroup identity, rejection sensitivity, CSE) were entered into the regression equation in Step 2 to allow testing for independent main effects, followed by the two way interaction terms (predictor variable \* ethnicity). These moderated regressions allow testing whether differential impact of the psychological predictors is found for the different groups (i.e. minority and majority applicants).

Table 2 shows that 36% of the variance is explained in PSD general. In Step 1, none of the control variables produced statistically significant coefficients in the PSD general model. When looking at Step 2, the increase in explained variance by adding the predictor as well as moderator variables is significant ( $\Delta R^2 = .29$ ). However, in Step 2



Table 2 | Regression of perceived selection discrimination on age, gender, ethnicity, subgroup identity, core self evaluations and rejection sensitivity in study 1

	Perceptions of Selection Discrimination		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Age	.04	-.02	.02
Gender	-.11	-.03	-.04
R <sup>2</sup>	0.01		
Ethnicity		-.48*	-.48*
Subgroup identity		.11	.19
Core self evaluations		-.34*	-.30*
Rejection sensitivity		.04	.04
R <sup>2</sup> (F-change)		0.35 (17.51)	
Subgroup identity*Ethnicity			-.06
Core self evaluations*Ethnicity			.10
Rejection sensitivity*Ethnicity			.04
R <sup>2</sup> (F-change)			0.36 (0.84)

Note: \*  $p < .05$ . N= 143 for Perceptions of Selection Discrimination.

as well as in Step 3 only ethnicity ( $\beta = -.47, p = .00$ ), and CSE ( $\beta = -.25, p = .00$ ) was significantly related to PSD general (majority applicants and applicants high on SCE expecting less PSD general) and none of the interaction effects are significant. Therefore hypotheses 2b, 3b and 4b were rejected; ethnicity did not have a moderating role on the relation between subgroup identity and PSD general and neither did it affect the relationship of core self evaluations with PSD general or rejection sensitivity with PSD general. Thus, minority and majority groups did not differ in the influence of the predictor variables on PSD general.

## Study 2

In study 2 as expected, ethnic minority applicants mean score was higher on both PSD general and PSD impact recruiter than the mean score of the majority group. For PSD general the mean Non-Dutch was  $M = 2.55$  and for the Dutch  $M = 1.78$  and this difference is significant ( $t = 5.602, df = 204.29, p = 0.00$ ). However, the difference was not significant for PSD impact recruiter ( $t = 1.743, df = 257, p = 0.08$ ). Thus, this result partly supports our hypothesis 1a that members of ethnic minorities are more likely than the majority group to experience PSD as this is found for PSD general, but not PSD impact recruiter.

Hypothesis 1b, which suggested that rejected applicants were more likely to perceive

PSD than accepted applicants was supported. There were significant differences in the expected direction for both PSD general ( $t = 5.018$ ,  $df = 75.805$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ) and PSD impact recruiter ( $t = 4.569$ ,  $df = 82.543$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ).

Table 3 | Means, standard deviations and correlations of the variables used in study 2

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Perceived selection discrimination	2.21	1.19								
2. Perceived selection discrimination impact recruiter	2.67	1.41	.57**							
3. Subgroup identity	4.26	1.27	.10	.08						
4. Core self evaluations	3.61	.45	-.23**	-.25**	.00					
5. Rejection Sensitivity	3.72	1.13	.27**	.31**	.16**	-.42**				
6. Gender <sup>a</sup>	.44	.50	-.05	.00	.02	.12*	-.12*			
7. Age	23.78	6.11	.09	.00	.01	.02	.02	.09		
8. Ethnicity <sup>b</sup>	.56	.50	-.34**	-.11	-.09	.07	-.01	.16*	-.09	
9. Job <sup>c</sup>	.79	.41	-.33**	-.29**	.03	.11	-.18**	.01	-.10	.16**

Note. Due to missing values  $N$  varies between 252 and 331, <sup>a</sup> 0 = female ( $n = 182$ ). 1 = male ( $n = 145$ ), <sup>b</sup> 0 = Non-Dutch, Minority ( $n = 113$ ) 1 = Dutch, Majority ( $n = 146$ ), <sup>c</sup> 0=rejected ( $n = 60$ ) 1= accepted/hired ( $n = 229$ ), \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 3 presents descriptive statistics and correlations for the entire sample. Subgroup identity did not have a significant relationship with both PSD general and PSD impact recruiter. This means that hypothesis 2a is rejected in Study 2. CSE was negatively correlated with PSD general ( $r = -0.23$ ,  $n = 306$ ,  $p = .00$ ) as well as PSD impact recruiter ( $r = -0.25$ ,  $n = 310$ ,  $p = .00$ ) Thus, the higher an applicant on CSE, the less both these forms of PSD are experienced, which is in line with hypothesis 3a and with the results of Study 1. Rejection sensitivity had a positive relationship with PSD general ( $r = 0.27$ ,  $n = 312$ ,  $p = .00$ ) as well as PSD impact recruiter ( $r = 0.31$ ,  $n = 317$ ,  $p = .00$ ). The more sensitive to rejection an applicant is, the more PSD is experienced in a selection procedure, which is in line with hypothesis 4a.

### Regression analyses study 2

We performed hierarchical regression analyses to examine the proportion of the variance in the overall PSD impact recruiter and PSD general scores accounted for by the set of predictor variables, while also examining the potential moderating effect of outcome of the selection procedure (getting the job) and ethnicity. As the two way interactions are qualified by a three-way interaction we only interpret our three way interaction where ethnicity and getting accepted for the job are both included. Following

the suggestions of Cohen, Cohen, West, and Aiken (2003), Subgroup identity, Rejection Sensitivity, Core Self Evaluations, Ethnicity and Job (getting the job) were means centered to test for moderation. The regression analyses consisted of 4 steps. Table 4 shows the regression results for both PSD general and PSD impact recruiter. The table reports standardized Beta weights in the four steps of the analysis, the  $R^2$ , and the  $F$ -change for each step.

In Step 1, PSD general and PSD impact recruiter were regressed on the control variables gender and age. Next, ethnicity, outcome of the selection procedure (labeled job) and the predictor variables (subgroup identity, rejection sensitivity, CSE) were included into the equation in Step 2 to allow testing for independent main effects, followed by the two way interaction terms (job\*ethnicity, predictor variable\*ethnicity, predictor variable \*job) and finally the three way interaction (predictor variable\*ethnicity\*job) in Step 3 and 4 of the regression, respectively. These moderated regressions allow testing whether differential impact of the psychological predictors is found for the different groups (i.e. minority and majority and successful and unsuccessful applicants).

Table 4 shows that in Step 1, none of the control variables produced statistically significant coefficients in either model. When looking at Step 2 for PSD general, the increase in explained variance by adding predictor as well as moderator variables is significant ( $\Delta R^2 = .35$ ). The control variable age ( $\beta = -.15, p = .01$ ) was significant as well as the moderator variables ethnicity ( $\beta = -.30, p = .00$ ) and job ( $\beta = -.25, p = .00$ ). Older applicants as well as those who were rejected experienced more PSD general. Also our predictor variables, Rejection Sensitivity ( $\beta = .26, p = .00$ ), Subgroup identity ( $\beta = .12, p = .04$ ) and CSE ( $\beta = -.16, p = .01$ ), were all significantly related to PSD general. Applicants who are sensitive to rejection, have a strong subgroup identity and are low on CSE, experienced more PSD general. For PSD impact recruiter, the increase in explained variance by adding predictor as well as moderator variables is also significant ( $\Delta R^2 = .21$ ). Here, the impact of age was marginally significant ( $\beta = -.115, p = .05$ ). Of the moderator variables, only job ( $\beta = -.24, p = .00$ ) was significant, showing that rejected applicants experience more PSD impact recruiter. With the inclusion of all predictor variables, only Rejection Sensitivity ( $\beta = .28, p = .00$ ) was significantly related to PSD impact recruiter; the more sensitive to rejection the applicant was, the more the applicant experienced PSD impact recruiter.

The results of the last two steps of the regression for both PSD general and PSD impact recruiter suggest several interactions. As the two way interactions in Step 3 are qualified by a three-way interaction in step 4, these are not interpreted. One exception is the one for PSD impact recruiter and the two way interaction of subgroup identity

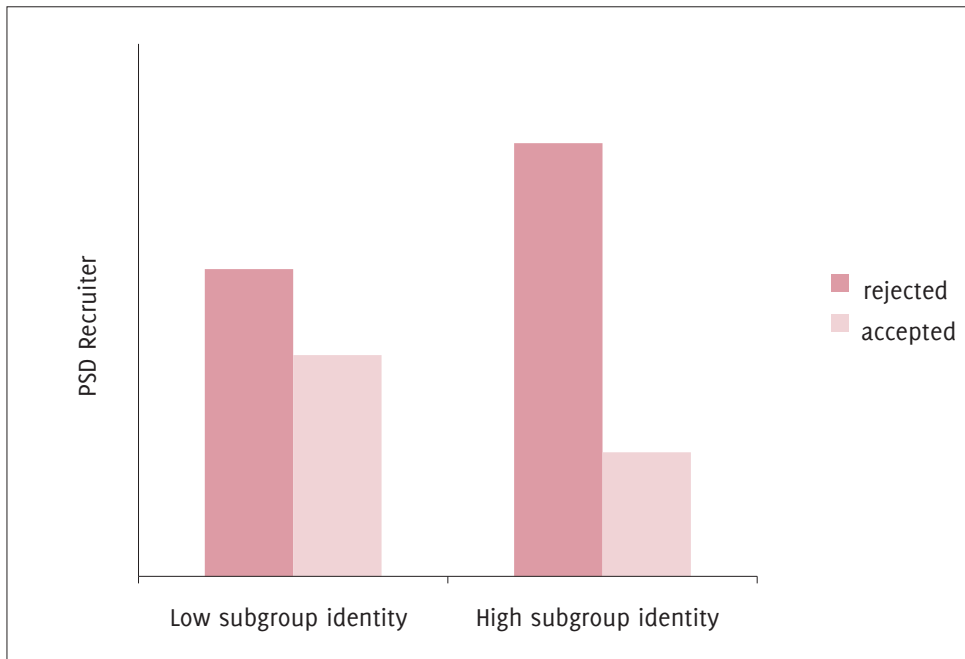
and job, which was significant. Thus, subgroup identity\*job ( $\beta = -.16, p = .04$ ) had a significant effect on PSD impact recruiter (see figure 1). The plot shows that, overall, rejected applicants experience more PSD impact recruiter. When low on subgroup identity, rejected applicants experience slightly more PSD impact recruiter than accepted applicants. For the applicants high on subgroup identity, being rejected is of greater influence for PSD impact recruiter; (as may be expected) rejected applicants experience far more PSD impact recruiter than accepted applicants. As our Hypothesis 2c is only significant for PSD general and not for PSD impact recruiter, it is partly supported: rejected ethnic minority applicants with a strong subgroup identity do experience more PSD general than other applicants (majority, accepted and weak subgroup identity).

Table 4 | Regression of perceived selection discrimination and perceived selection discrimination impact recruiter on age, gender, ethnicity, subgroup identity, core self evaluations rejection sensitivity and job in study 2

	Perceptions of Selection Discrimination				Perceptions of Selection Discrimination Impact Recruiter				
	Step1	Step2	Step3	Step 4	Step1	Step2	Step3	Step4	
Age	-.06	-.15*	-.13*	-.09	-.07	-.12	-.09	-.08	
Gender	-.07	.05	.02	.03	-.01	.05	.03	.03	
R <sup>2</sup>	.01				.01				
Ethnicity		-.30*	-.30*	-.28*		-.06	-.06	-.05	
Job		-.25*	-.22*	-.23*		-.24*	-.22*	-.22*	
Subgroup identity		.12*	.11	.12*		.05	.06	.05	
Core self evaluations		-.16*	-.17*	-.23*		-.11	-.11	-.12	
Rejection sensitivity		.26*	.22*	.17*		.28*	.25*	.23*	
R <sup>2</sup> (F-change)	.36(24.251)				.22(12.354)				
Subgroup identity*Ethnicity			.04	.05			.06	.06	
Core self evaluations*Ethnicity			-.04	-.05			-.07	-.08	
Rejection sensitivity*Ethnicity			-.15*	-.16*			-.05	-.06	
Ethnicity*job			.04	.04			.10	.09	
Subgroup identity*job			-.07	-.08			-.18*	-.16*	
Core self evaluations*job			-.01	.07			.01	.03	
Rejection sensitivity*job			-.00	.09			.11	.16	
R <sup>2</sup> (F-change)			.38(1.502)				.27(2.133)		
Subgroup identity*job*ethnicity				-.08				.00	
Core self evaluations*job*ethnicity				.19*				.03	
Rejection sensitivity*job*ethnicity				.20*				.09	
R <sup>2</sup> (F-change)				.42(3.998)				.30(.348)	

Note: \*  $p < .05$ . N = 314 for Perceptions of Selection Discrimination and N = 319 for Perceptions of Selection Discrimination Impact Recruiter.

Figure 1 | Graphic depiction of the two-way interaction between subgroup identity and job on perceived selection discrimination impact recruiter, Study 2.



For PSD general, the three way interactions for both CSE\*ethnicity\*job and rejection sensitivity\*ethnicity\*job and had a significant effect on PSD general ( $\beta = .19, p = .00$  and  $\beta = .20, p = .01$  respectively). Using the procedures suggested by Dawson and Richter (2006), we created a graphic illustration of these interactions (see Figures 2 and 3).

As the tree-way interaction, CSE x ethnicity x job, is significant, it is depicted in Figure 2. In the bar graph we can see that for applicants low on CSE, the group of rejected Dutch applicants experience more PSD general than rejected non Dutch, minority applicants, and we see the opposite effect in the high CSE situation; the non Dutch rejected applicants experience more PSD general than the non Dutch, minority accepted as well as both the rejected and accepted Dutch applicants. Thus being high on CSE decreases PSD general for the Dutch majority group but at the same time increases PSD general for non Dutch, minority rejected applicants. Although we thus did find a significant three way interaction, it was not in the direction we expected in Hypothesis 3c. We expected that when CSE is low, ethnic minority as well as majority, rejected applicants are more likely to experience PSD than those who are hired but PSD will be slightly higher for the minority group, as can be seen, this is not correct. We expected that for applicants with a high CSE less difference would exist between the ethnic minority and majority applicants as well as between the rejected and hired

Figure 2 | Graphic depiction of the three-way interaction between core self evaluations, ethnicity and job on perceived selection discrimination, Study 2.

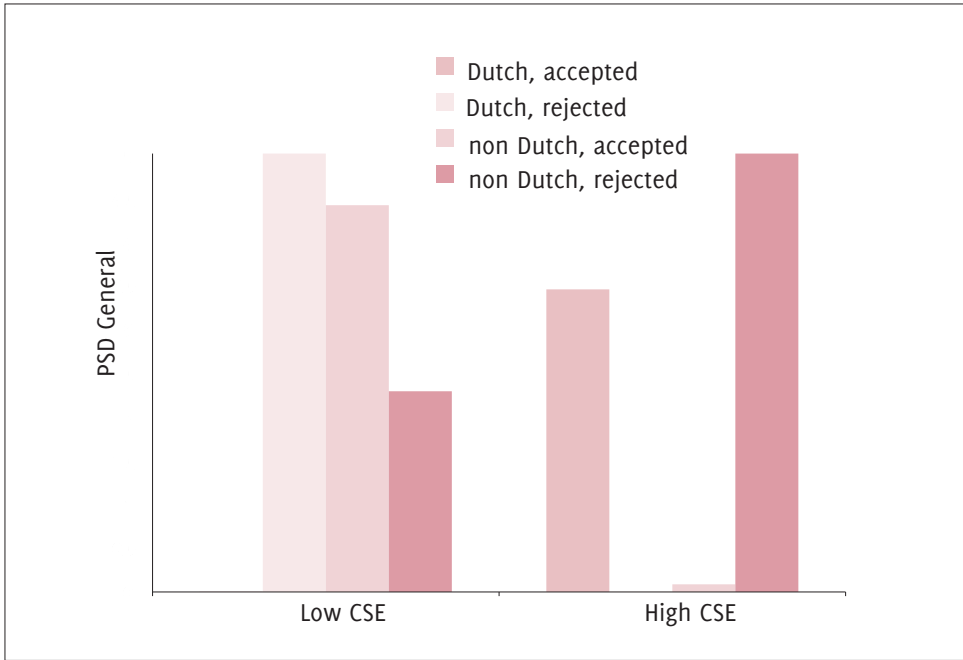
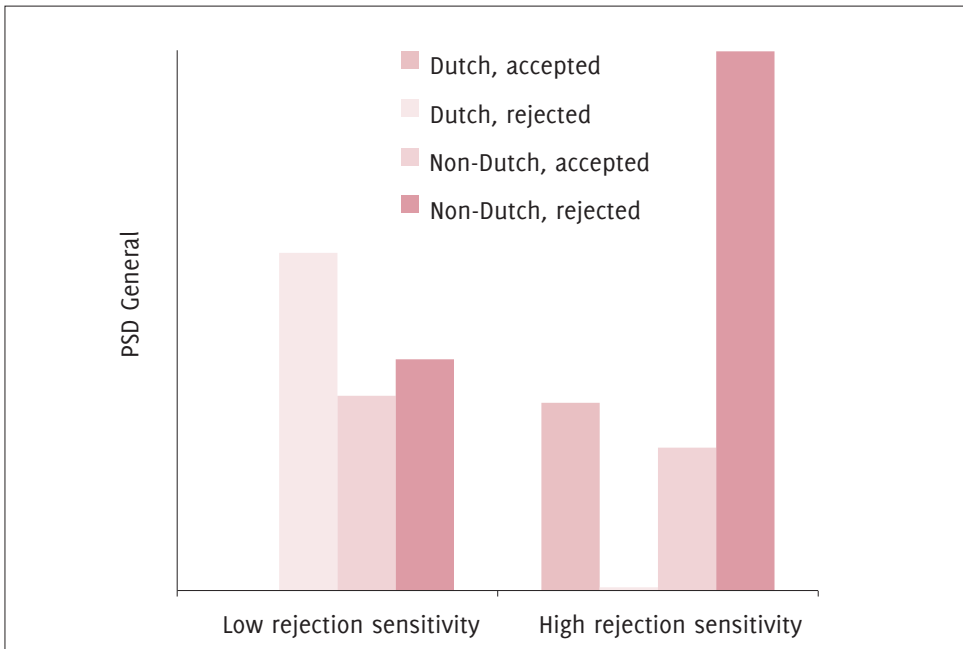


Figure 3 | Graphic depiction of the three-way interaction between ethnicity and outcome of the selection procedure in a situation of high and low rejection sensitivity, Study 2.



applicants, which was also not true. Hypothesis 3c is thus rejected. Unexpectedly, majority rejected applicants who are low on CSE experience more PSD general than minority rejected applicants. But when high on CSE, they experience most PSD general followed by the majority accepted applicants. We will discuss what this pattern of findings suggests below.

For PSD general, the nature of the interaction between ethnicity and outcome of the selection procedure in a situation of high and low rejection sensitivity is depicted in Figure 3. The graphic depiction of this interaction shows that, when looking at applicants with low rejection sensitivity, Dutch applicants experience more PSD general when rejected for a job than when they are accepted, whereas the for the non Dutch applicants, being rejected or accepted for the job does not have major influence on their perceptions of general discrimination. For applicants high on rejection sensitivity the plot shows that the Non-Dutch, minority applicants experience far more PSD general when rejected for the job, for the Dutch applicants high on rejection sensitivity getting the job does not seem to have an influence in experiencing PSD general. When applicants are accepted for the job, the difference between Dutch and Non-Dutch, minority applicants is not very large. It seems that when applicants are rejected for the job being high or low on rejection sensitivity has the opposite effect for majority and minority groups. For the majority, being high on sensitivity is more beneficial and for the minority, being low on rejection sensitivity is better for limiting the experience of PSD general. Hypothesis 4c is thus partly supported for PSD general; when rejection sensitivity is high, ethnic minority, rejected applicants are more likely to experience PSD than the Dutch majority group and also than those who are hired and low on rejection sensitivity; when rejection sensitivity is low, there we did not find the difference to be smaller between the ethnic minority and majority applicants as well as between the rejected and hired applicants.

## Discussion

Recent discussions in the field of IO psychology have highlighted the importance of investigating the determinants of individuals' discrimination perception (e.g., Harris et al., 2004). The existing literature has focused on the role of discrimination perceptions in the workplace context (e.g., Avery et al., 2008), but not yet in the selection context. This research examined applicants' discrimination perceptions related to selection procedures and tried to identify antecedents that affects perceiving more or less job discrimination in the selection context. Thus, our two studies contribute to both the selection and discrimination literature. Also, we do not yet know enough about the potential psychological antecedents of discrimination perceptions that go beyond ethnic background. Therefore, we aimed to start investigating potential psychological

antecedents of perceived selection discrimination (PSD).

Our first study assessed whether applicants with different backgrounds go into an actual procedure with the expectation that they will be discriminated against and the second asked employees to look back at their most recent recruitment experience and assessed PSD in that procedure. In both studies we explored potential psychological antecedents of PSD and whether these have differential impact on people from a majority or minority ethnic background. In the first, we only focused on general PSD and in the second study we also looked at the role of the recruiter as an element of PSD. In addition there, we included the outcome of the selection procedure and assessed how this affects PSD.

In line with our expectations, in both studies (one and two), we found that non Dutch minority group applicants experience more PSD than Dutch majority group applicants during the selection procedures. This even holds true for those applicants who were accepted for the job in our second study. Individual experiences of being discriminated against in the past as well as experiences of those of other in-group members seem to affect how individuals evaluate selection procedures. Our first study shows that there are already differences between minority and majority candidates' expectations of PSD when they enter a procedure. This highlights the importance of recognizing different mindsets in people from a different ethnic background. This is relevant information for both applicants as well as recruiters as it is the way recruiters and applicants perceive the interaction that may lead to positive or negative results. These results led us to highlight the practical importance of being aware of these existing differences and finding ways to deal with them to decrease PSD.

When looking at ethnicity as a moderator variable, the first study shows no interaction effect with ethnicity on any of the predictor variables and PSD general, but a main effect for both ethnicity and CSE in the regression analyses. In other words, besides ethnicity (we find Non-Dutch, minority applicants to expect more PSD general), CSE also relates to PSD general, such that applicants high on CSE also have lower expectations of being discriminated against, whereas applicants low on CSE do expect that discrimination will occur. This is in line with the generally more positive outlook on life and what happens to them that individuals high on CSE have.

In our first study, applicants were applying for a traineeship in a banking organization. This is a single organization that continually conducts the same way of organizing a selection procedure, which might very well influence our outcomes. Additionally, these results are based on what applicants *expect* of the procedure. The expectation of a procedure is of course not the same as experiencing the procedure. Therefore, we conducted our second study, where our subjects were from all kinds of different industries increasing representation and actually



formulating their experience of their last job application.

In our second study, we found some similar and some different results. The main effect of ethnicity on PSD was similar. Non Dutch, minority group applicants experience more PSD general. However the differences found for PSD impact recruiter were not significant. The most influential person in the selection procedure, the recruiter, was not generally experienced differently in relation to PSD by minority and majority group applicants. This suggests that indeed personal dyadic interaction rather than general perceptions or expectations are more important for the experience of PSD impact recruiter. Besides CSE, rejection sensitivity also shows the same trend with respect to PSD general in that generally more CSE related to less PSD impact recruiter, however, in this study we did find that the pattern differed significantly for the Dutch and the non Dutch, minority group. When low on CSE and rejection sensitivity, Dutch rejected applicants tend to experience more PSD general; when high on CSE and Rejection Sensitivity, non Dutch, minority, rejected applicants tend to experience more PSD general.

Clearly, both studies differ in that in Study 1 we focus on expected discrimination in the procedure, while in Study 2 the procedure had already taken place and therefore attribution of its outcome may explain the results. According to applicant-attribution reactions theory (Ployhart & Harold, 2004), attributions are a mechanism by which applicants form a reactions to a selection procedure they go through. Individuals can, for instance, experience attributional ambiguity. This is the uncertainty of whether the outcomes you receive are due to you as an individual or to you as part of a stigmatized group (Crocker & Major, 1989; Major, Quinton & Schmader, 2003). Our results for both antecedents are in line with this attribution theory which will be explained in the next paragraph.

Being less sensitive to rejection increases PSD for the Dutch applicants when they were rejected for the job and being highly sensitive to rejection has a greater impact on PSD for the rejected non Dutch applicants, their PSD is fairly high compared with all other groups. This result might have occurred because non Dutch, minority applicants have been rejected more often in the past (and that may have been due to discrimination) which can affect their current perceptions. In line with previous research, rejected non Dutch, minority applicants may attribute the rejection to discrimination in order to protect their self esteem (Sommer & Baumeister, 2002). Additionally, belonging to a certain group can influence attributional processing (Ployhart & Harold, 2004). The Dutch applicants do not have this history of discrimination and therefore, when being less sensitive to rejection but being rejected indeed, has the same effect; in order to protect ones' self esteem and ability, a less sensitive applicant may attribute the rejection to discrimination to cope with this job rejection and not blame it on their lack of ability.

Similarly, our findings show that when rejected, Dutch applicants who have low CSE experience most PSD. People high on CSE have a dispositional make up allowing them to see things more positively (Judge, Locke, Durnham & Kluger, 1998). Thus, Dutch, majority group applicants low on CSE will tend to view things in a less positive manner and therefore also likely perceive more discrimination, especially when rejected.

In contrast, in the non Dutch, minority group a different pattern emerges. In this group, rejected applicants high on CSE report more perceived discrimination than those low on CSE. Thus, here is a difference between non Dutch minority and Dutch majority group applicants and CSE, when rejected. Lind and Tyler's (1988) relational model of authority tries to explain the findings of in-group importance and posits that for example group belongingness provides for self esteem and social identity (van Prooijen, van den Bos & Wilke, 2004). Additionally, a persons' self-esteem is usually higher if he or she is part of a group and group belongingness is used as a protective factor (Rowley, Sellers, Chavous & Smith, 1998) Members of stigmatized groups are also more sensitive to the *possibility* of being discriminated against and therefore blame the negative outcomes to discrimination if there are possible grounds for this (Major et al., 2003). Thus, a non Dutch ethnic minority applicant who feels that he or she is suitable for the job and feels confident is more likely to perceive discrimination. These applicants might find it difficult to accept that the rejection is due to their lack in capability and will be more likely attribute the negative outcome externally, in this case to discrimination. Indeed, research has indicated that blaming discrimination for failure or rejection implies that control for outcomes rests with others and not with oneself (Verkuyten, 1998).

In our second study, we also investigated the influence of the recruiter by measuring PSD impact recruiter, thus the impact the recruiter may have on the PSD of an applicant. Regression analysis showed that differences in PSD impact recruiter were strongest when looking at subgroup identity and especially when looking at rejected applicants. The perceptions of discrimination for the rejected applicants with a strong subgroup identity are most noticeable during the interaction with the recruiter as compared to rejected applicants with a weak subgroup identity and applicants who are hired. This is in line with the *perceived similarity* bias between recruiters and applicants (Graves & Powell, 1995; Ensher et al., 2001; Stevens & Kristof, 1995). Previous research has shown that perceptions of discrimination are linked to the notion that a person feels he or she has been treated unfairly and that this unfair treatment was based on social identity or group membership (Major, Quinton & McCoy, 2002). However, our result is more nuanced than the expectation that non Dutch minorities will have a stronger group identity than Dutch applicants and therefore would perceive more PSD. It illustrates the importance of feeling group membership in determining peoples' reactions and attributions especially when rejected.

## *Limitations*

Although both studies have several strengths and are among the first to try to address antecedents of PSD in the field, they also have limitations. First of all, the single source nature of the data. This was hard to avoid given the perceptual nature of our main variable (PSD) and our interest in the psychological antecedents of this variable such as CSE and rejection sensitivity. Such information would be hard for other raters to provide. Another limitation of both studies was the lack of possibilities to do independent comparisons of different minority ethnic groups. In our second study, we were also not able to distinguish between the different kinds of jobs people were applying for. Establishing a link between PSD and actual discrimination and learning more about how to counter perceptions of PSD to avoid their negative impact on applicants would also be of interest.

A specific limitation of our first study is the fact that respondents were applying for a traineeship. This means mostly relatively young, just graduated applicants where applying for the position. Therefore, their previous experience in recruitment and selection on which they base the expectancies of PSD might be very limited. A specific limitation of our second study is the post-hoc nature of the data as it was gathered by asking respondents to rate a recent past experience. However, due to the salient nature of these procedures, individuals are likely to recall them vividly. In our second study it must also be noted that only 21% of the applicants was rejected. However, due to the sample size this was still enough to analyze our interaction effect.

## *Implications and Conclusion*

Our findings offer an interesting starting point for future longitudinal and multi-source research as well as thinking about how we can reduce feelings of PSD in practice. Being aware of personal and group differences between majority and minority groups from the recruiter's perspective may lead to less PSD from the applicants' perspective. Additionally, ethnic minorities can be aware of the reason PSD arises during a selection procedure and therefore take it into account when they attribute certain perceptions of a selection procedure.