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Perceived discrimination: why applicants and employees expect and perceive discrimination

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PERCEIVED DISCRIMINATION AND ORGANIZATIONAL ATTRACTIVENESS AMONG MINORITY AND MAJORITY GROUP REJECTED APPLICANTS: THE ROLE OF DIVERSITY STATEMENTS, IDENTITY STRENGTH AND ATTRIBUTION STYLE²

Abstract

This field experiment among actual applicants with a large governmental organization in The Netherlands investigates the effect of a mild and realistic diversity statement on perceptions of selection discrimination and organizational attractiveness of rejected minority and majority applicants ($N = 294$). Results show that diversity statements overall do not alter perceptions of selection discrimination and organizational attractiveness. However, diversity statements do affect applicants' perceptions when psychological variables such as identity strength and attribution style are taken into account. For example, results indicate that diversity statements increase perceptions of selection discrimination among rejected minority group applicants who attribute the outcome internally. Organizations must therefore keep in mind that diversity statement may trigger perceptions of selection discrimination in some rejected applicants, depending on their attribution style.

In many countries, the changing composition of the labor force implies organizations will need to become more successful at recruiting employees from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Especially, because currently ethnic minority groups are underrepresented in most firms (McKay & Avery, 2006). One way in which organizations try to reach out to minority groups is by having diversity policies and communicating these to applicants. Research shows that presenting a diversity policy can help to attract a diverse applicant pool (e.g., Avery & Morris, 2008; McKay & Avery, 2006). Applicants who value diversity

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are more likely to have positive organizational perceptions when an organization stresses striving for diversity, and these applicants are more likely to apply for job openings in such an organization (McKay & Avery, 2006).

Diversity policies need to be communicated to applicants if they are to have an impact on applicants' perceptions and attitudes. Increasingly, firms include a diversity statement policy message in recruitment materials to try to enhance organizational attractiveness and pursuit intentions among potential applicants (Vignovic, Thompson, Bresnahan & Behrend, 2007). For example, firms can explicitly state their diversity policy in recruitment ads, on recruitment websites, or they can include statements on their diversity values and policies in the materials candidates are sent during the application process. However, we do not yet know enough about whether and how such statements affect minority as well as majority applicants. Some argue that the implementation of a diversity statement will increase successful recruitment from a diverse applicant pool (Cox & Blake, 1991; Kim & Gelfand, 2003). Others warn that the inclusion of a diversity policy statement may have a negative impact on majority applicants' perception of organizational attractiveness and their willingness to apply for a position within the organization (Dass & Parker, 1999; Walker, Feild, Giles, Bernerth, & Jones-Farmer, 2007). However, the general notion is that a diversity policy has more benefits than costs (Crosby, Iyer, Clayton, & Downing, 2003), and that a diversity policy is needed to assure diversity in the workplace (Crosby, Iyer, & Sincharoen, 2006).

Previous research has shown that perceptions of recruitment and selection procedures affect how the applicants view the organization (Hausknecht, Day, & Thomas, 2004). However, research on the wider impact of diversity statements in recruitment and selection is scarce (Walker et al., 2007). We especially lack knowledge on how diversity messages might affect the large group of applicants who are rejected. The available studies on diversity statements focus on hiring practices and as far as we know, no research has investigated the group of rejected applicants in this context. Insight in this is relevant since this group of rejected applicants is often much larger than the group of hired applicants. Rejection may cause applicants to change their views on organizational attractiveness. Also, research shows that perceptions of selection discrimination are more prevalent among rejected than accepted candidates (e.g., Abu Ghazaleh, Den Hartog & Schinkel, 2009). Understanding what drives perceptions of selection discrimination and organizational attractiveness from the rejected applicants' perspective is relevant because an organization might have to deal with litigation issues or spreading of a bad company name if applicants feel badly treated in recruitment (Gilliland, 1993; Viswesvaran & Ones, 2004). Thus, the present study was designed to examine how including a diversity message in recruitment affects rejected applicants' perceptions of organizational attractiveness and of selection discrimination.

The current study is a field experiment among actual applicants for a management trainee position with a large governmental organization in The Netherlands. Through the random inclusion or exclusion of a diversity statement in an email sent after applicants received the selection outcome, we tested whether a diversity policy statement differentially affected rejected applicants' perceptions of selection discrimination and organizational attractiveness and whether these effects depend on applicants' ethnicity, identity strength, and attribution style.

The present study makes an important contribution to the recruitment literature for the following reasons. First, we investigate the effects of communicating a mild diversity policy. Harrison and his colleagues (2006) mention that more research on using mild diversity statements is needed if we want to learn more about the way employees react towards more realistic diversity statements. Second, we acknowledge the importance highlighted to focus on perceiver characteristics, which will very likely aid organizations who need to anticipate on overall reactions towards diversity statements and also hire the best applicants from the applicant pool (Walker et al., 2007; Harrison, Kravitz, Mayer, Leslie, & Lev-Arey, 2006). And finally, previous research on affirmative action has mostly been conducted with college student samples (e.g., Aberson, 2007; Kravitz & Platania, 1993; Levi & Fried, 2008), which might misrepresent actual applicants' feelings towards affirmative action policies. Here, we focus on such applicants.

Diversity Policy Statements

Different types of applicants tend to be attracted to different types of organizations. The first element of Schneider's (1987) 'Attraction-Selection-Attrition' (ASA) framework suggests that attraction depends on the personal demographics of applicants such as their interests, needs, personality or norms and values. Thus, different types of recruitment forms, messages or programs are likely to appeal to different types of potential applicants. As indicated above, when it comes to attracting ethnically diverse applicants, some researchers suggest communicating a carefully considered diversity policy during recruitment could increase attractiveness of the organization (McKay & Avery, 2006, Vignovic et al., 2007). However, others warn this may also backfire, for example by making the organization less attractive to majority group applicants (Dass & Parker, 1999; Walker et al., 2007). Not enough is known about the impact of communicating such policies in recruitment.

Diversity policies are a form of affirmative action. Affirmative action policy programs cover a wide range of different practices and implementations and are based on the idea that to merely remove group membership as a factor in decision making and equal treatment is not enough (Campbell, 1996). Affirmative action has become a controversial policy, especially within the United States, because many preferential forms of affirmative

action are seen as illegal (Crosby et al., 2003; Kravitz, 2008). When looking at ethnic group differences, affirmative action policies are usually evaluated more positively by minority than majority group members. Resistance from the majority group applicants against such a policy is especially seen when the focus is on the underrepresentation of the minority group (Harrison et al., 2006; Kim & Gelfand, 2003; Levi & Fried, 2008). Even for the minority group, a certain amount of ambivalence towards such policies has been shown (Levi & Fried, 2008).

This somewhat ambiguous effect on applicants' attitudes seems to depend (at least in part) on the 'strength' of the affirmative action policy that is in place (Crosby, 2004; Harrison et al., 2006; Kravitz, Bludau, & Klineberg, 2008). The strength of such a policy can vary from 'weak' to 'strong'. An example of a weak form is opportunity enhancement (such as a well-defined diversity statement that makes clear that candidates from different backgrounds have equal opportunities) aimed to stimulate minority group members to enter the pool of qualified candidates. An example of a strong form is having a strong preferential treatment of members of a minority group, even when less qualified for the job in question when making decisions or using specific goals, quota, and timetables for hiring specific candidates from groups such as women and minorities (Harrison et al., 2006; Levi & Fried, 2008).

Research suggests that the stronger the policy, the more likely it is that group differences exist in the amount of support and the more negative attitudes are seen (Harrison et al., 2006; Kravitz, 2008; Kravitz et al., 2008; Kravitz & Klineberg, 2002). More specifically, research in the USA indicated that individuals from the majority (i.e., white) group responded more negatively to the strong affirmative action policy than to the weak form. The prediction that African Americans would prefer the strongest affirmative action policy also turned out to be incorrect; the moderate form elicited more positive reactions from the minority group as opposed to the strong or weak form (Levi & Fried, 2008). In another study, a weak form did not yield such clear results and differences in preference for the policy between majority and minority group (Kravitz et al., 2008). A meta-analysis by Harrison et al. (2006) shows the consistent finding that the majority white group usually opposes strong policies. In contrast, the minority (black) group tends to be more supportive of the strong policy, but also shows some ambivalence (Harrison et al., 2006; Levi & Fried, 2008). Finally, research shows that racial identity does not predict attitudes toward a specific affirmative action policy for those who do not feel threatened by the policy (Lowery, Unzueta, Knowles, & Goff, 2006), again highlighting the importance of minority and majority applicants' perceptions.

The research cited above clearly suggests different forms of affirmative action policies can have different effects on different groups. For weak forms, minority and majority

attitudes towards such a policy are not always clear and we do not yet know whether or how such policies may affect organizational attractiveness and discrimination in the eyes of minority and majority applicants. Additionally, most research in this area does not involve actual job applicants. Most studies utilize scenario-based experimental designs with different diversity statement manipulations in stimulus materials such as fictitious job advertisements, recruitment brochures or company policies (e.g., Gamliel, 2007; Kim & Gelfand, 2003; Levi & Fried, 2008). Other studies investigate more general attitudes towards Affirmative Action Plans (e.g., Aberson & Haag, 2003; Kravitz & Platania, 1993; Weathers & Truxillo, 2006). Only few studies focus on the perceptions of actual (and especially rejected) job applicants.

In this study among actual job applicants, we specifically focus on the influence of a weak diversity policy statement, because these are most often used by organizations (Harrison et al., 2006). The statement used in the present study emphasized that the organization strives for diversity and attempts to select a workforce that is diverse. This relatively weak and subtle diversity policy statement formulation was based on work of Ployhart and colleagues (1999). We investigated whether the inclusion of such a diversity policy statement affects perceptions of discrimination as well as organizational attractiveness among the applicants that were rejected.

Perceptions of Discrimination and Organizational Attractiveness

As mentioned, we study the impact of a diversity statement on two outcome variables, namely applicants' perceptions of discrimination and organizational attractiveness. Recent work on discrimination has called upon researchers to consider applicants' perceptions of discrimination (e.g., Avery, McKay, & Wilson, 2008; Harris, Lievens, & Van Hove, 2004). Harris and colleagues (2004) defined *perceived* discrimination as 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. Both actual and perceived discrimination have negative effects on applicants (e.g., Abu Ghazaleh et al., 2009). As Banerjee (2008) suggests, exploring the role of perceptions allows us to explore the subjective side of discrimination. Although, as she points out, it is difficult to determine whether perceptions accurately reflect discriminatory treatment, perceptions do characterize a reality for individuals who report them and therefore have real consequences for workers and employers (Banerjee, 2008). Perceptions do often have a stronger impact on individuals' decision making than objective conditions (McKay & Avery, 2006; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). As perceived discrimination has a negative impact on minority groups and can occur even if actual discrimination did not take place, understanding why perceptions of discrimination occur and how they can be minimized is important.

Rejected applicants (logically) tend to perceive more discrimination than hired applicants (Abu Ghazaleh et al., 2009). This also affects them in subsequent steps. Rejected applicants have to continue their job hunt; (perceived) exposure to discrimination can hinder them to apply for subsequent job openings (Mays, Coleman, & Jackson, 1996). Perceived discrimination has been shown to be influential in determining how an individual evaluates affirmative action programs (Linton & Christiansen, 2006). Research shows that there is support for affirmative action when the belief is that discrimination still exists (Harrison et al., 2006; Kravitz, 2008) and that this belief depends on the amount of discrimination respondents perceive ((Kravitz & Klineberg, 2000). 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 (Goldman, 2001). The personal history of (ethnic minority) applicants as well as that of their in-group members is thus likely to affect their current perceptions. Thus, as ethnic minority applicants often have higher expectations of being discriminated against (e.g. McFay & Avery, 2006), whether or not discrimination actually takes place in a specific procedure, we expect minority applicants are more likely to value the explicit attention for diversity which will lead to a decrease in perceptions of selection discrimination.

In addition to affecting perceptions of discrimination, diversity policy statements are expected to influence perceptions of organizational attractiveness among ethnic minority applicants. Organizational attractiveness in our study refers to having a positive attitude towards and positive opinion of the company as a potential employer. Research demonstrates a more positive evaluation among minority group members of organizations with diversity statements than those without such statements (McNab & Johnston, 2002; Perkins, Thomas, & Taylor, 2000; Williams & Bauer, 1994). In line with this, we expect that such a statement will enhance organizational attractiveness for minority group members. As the policy here is weak and likely to be non-threatening for the majority group, we expect that the diversity statement we study will have less effect on them as compared to the minority group. We hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1: The presence of diversity statements interacts with ethnicity in predicting (a) perceptions of selection discrimination and (b) organizational attractiveness, such that the inclusion of a diversity statement will decrease perceptions of selection discrimination and increase organizational attractiveness more for the ethnic minority group than for the majority group.

Perceiver Characteristics

Because different groups are likely to hold dissimilar attitudes, show different levels of support toward affirmative action plans and thus to respond differently to diversity statements (e.g., Harrison et al., 2006; Kravitz & Klineberg, 2000), a full understanding of the impact of a diversity policy on applicants requires inclusion of the perceiver's characteristics (Harrison et al., 2006). Thus, in addition to ethnicity we also take several other characteristics into account that may affect the perception of selection discrimination and organizational attractiveness. More specifically, we test whether the level of ethnic *identity strength* and *attribution style* alter the level of perceived selection discrimination and organizational attractiveness for minority and majority group rejected applicants and most importantly, whether these characteristics affect the relationship of a diversity policy message with these outcomes.

Identity Strength

Identity strength refers to the degree to which individuals identify with and feel a part of their racial or ethnic group. Some applicants may more strongly define themselves in terms of their ethnicity and stress the norms and values of the traditions of their ethnic group; others may not identify themselves as strongly with their ethnic background (Kim & Gelfand, 2003; Phinney, 1996). Significant differences in identity strength among members of any given ethnic minority or majority group are thus likely to exist. These differences may explain different reactions within these groups towards a diversity policy. However, the role of identity strength has not yet received much research attention in this area (e.g. see Snyder, Cleveland, & Thornton, 2006). An exception is the study by Kim and Gelfand (2003) on ethnic identity (a part of an individual's self-concept that is derived from their knowledge, value and emotional significance of their ethnic group membership; cf. Phinney, 1992; Kim & Gelfand, 2003) and diversity statements in recruitment brochures. Their research shows that individuals higher on ethnic identity make more positive inferences about the organization when a diversity statement is included compared to a no diversity statement brochure.

Although minority as well as majority group individuals can have a high identity strength, based on self-categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) and social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), we expect minority group applicants to generally have a stronger identity strength than majority group applicants. This is because they are a minority group compared to the general majority group status. This notion aligns with the finding that employees dissimilar to the White male prototype (that being the majority group) are more likely to perceive discrimination than White men (Avery et al., 2008). Because of their generally lower status, ethnic minority groups are more concerned about identity affirmation. As a result they tend

to be motivated to feel positive about themselves by incorporating group membership as a important part of their self identification. Therefore, they will more strongly define themselves in terms of what is relevant to their ethnic minority group. The higher the group identification, the more salient the group identity is (Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997). Additionally, minority group members tend to express higher levels of ethnic identity and support for affirmative action initiatives (Snyder et al., 2006). Identity strength thus seems to be an important perceiver characteristic which may affect both perceptions of selection discrimination and organization perceptions and interact with ethnicity and a diversity policy.

We expect that the inclusion of a diversity policy will not decrease the amount perceptions of selection discrimination experienced by rejected applicants who have low identity strength. These applicants do not define themselves strongly in terms of their ethnic background and therefore a diversity policy stressing such group membership will not have an impact on their perceptions of selection discrimination or organizational attractiveness. In contrast, the inclusion of a diversity policy is expected to reduce perceptions of selection discrimination experienced among rejected applicants with high identity strength. The policy will decrease blaming the cause of rejection on their ethnic identity due to the explicit value the company places on attracting minority applicants shown through the policy. Consequentially, the inclusion of the policy will also prevent rejected applicants to decrease their view on organizational attractiveness. As mentioned, we expect this effect to be stronger for ethnic minority rejected applicants than majority applicants because they are the ones on which the policy focuses and they are more likely to value and support the diversity policy statement. Thus, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 2: The presence of diversity statements interacts with ethnicity and identity strength in predicting (a) perceptions of selection discrimination and (b) organizational attractiveness, such that the inclusion of a diversity statement will decrease perceived selection discrimination and increase organizational attractiveness more for those high on identity strength than for those with a weak identity strength, especially for the minority group rejected applicants.

Attribution

Lastly, we expect that attribution styles influence the effects of a diversity policy statement among rejected applicants. Attribution style is expected to affect the way minority and majority group members perceive discrimination and form an attitude towards the organization. According to applicant-attribution reaction theory (Ployhart & Harold, 2004), attributions are a mechanism by which applicants form a reaction to

a selection procedure. When faced with a negative outcome, such as a job rejection, a person is more likely to blame this rejection on an external factor (such as discrimination) than on the self (Major, Kaiser, & McCoy, 2003; Major, Quinton, & Schmader, 2003). Studies show that attributional styles for positive and negative events are distinct variables with a different process for each style (Proudfoot, Corr, Guest, & Gray, 2001; Xenikou, 2005). In this study, we focus on the negative event of rejection. Research on failure attribution shows variability. Some studies show that failure is attributed internally, others find that it is mainly attributed externally, which might be caused by unidentified moderators (Duval & Silvia, 2002).

Belonging to a particular (ethnic) group can influence attributional processing (Ployhart & Harold, 2004), such that the attribution process can protect both individuals' self esteem and social identity (Forsyth, 1980; Proudfoot, et al., 2001). For example, belonging to a particular ethnic minority group can trigger a difference in the experience of 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, Kaiser, et al., 2003). Attributing a negative outcome to discrimination involves two judgments: The individual or the group was treated unjust and this treatment was based on social identity or group membership (Major et al., 2003). Individuals who typically attribute failure externally will likely perceive more discrimination when rejected during an application process and hence will also have a more negative perception of the organization than those who attribute failure to themselves.

Using Proudfoot et al.'s (2001) one-dimensional operationalization of attribution style, with high scores indicating internal attribution and low scores indicating external attribution, we expect that the inclusion of a diversity statement will decrease perceptions of selection discrimination and increase organizational attractiveness more strongly for ethnic minority group members attributing a negative outcome externally than for those who attribute internally. The diversity policy statement will trigger less perceptions of selection discrimination because rejection is less likely to be interpreted as caused by the applicant's connection to a stigmatized ethnic minority group if the organization values diversity.

Conversely, we expect the inclusion of a diversity statement to be more subtle for both internal and external attribution when investigating the majority group rejected applicants. Overall however, we propose that the inclusion of a statement is likely to slightly increase perceptions of selection discrimination and decrease organizational attractiveness. Majority group members can see the statement as an explanation for getting rejected since the policy is not directed at them, but at enhancing the position of the minority group they do not belong to (Garcia, Erskine, Hawn, & Casmay, 1981).

Due to these attributional differences we expect that absence of the statement will lead to lower perceptions of selection discrimination and an increase in organizational attractiveness for the majority group and for the minority group the effects will be opposite.

Hypothesis 3: The presence of diversity statements interacts with ethnicity and attribution style in predicting (a) perceptions of selection discrimination and (b) organizational attractiveness, such that the inclusion of a diversity statement will decrease perceptions of selection discrimination and increase organizational attractiveness more strongly for ethnic minority group members attributing a negative outcome externally than for those who attribute internally; and to slightly increase perceptions of selection discrimination and decrease organizational attractiveness but in a much more subtle way for both internal and external attribution when investigating the majority group rejected applicants.

Method

Sample, Procedure, and Manipulation

Participants were applicants applying for a traineeship program at a large local government organization in The Netherlands. The first step in the recruitment procedure was online. Through a website applicants could apply for a traineeship, and submit their resume. On the website, applicants were also asked if they would like to participate voluntarily in an independent study conducted by the university. If applicants agreed to participate, their email address was forwarded to us so that we could contact them after the selection procedure. This way we were able to send all applicants who agreed to participate a questionnaire concerning the selection procedure. Data were collected in two selection rounds. In total, 982 participants spread over the two selection procedures initially agreed to participate. All applicants who had agreed to participate were sent an email after they received their selection outcome. The email contained information about the study and a link to an online questionnaire.

The voluntary nature of participation and confidentiality of responses were stressed both on the recruitment website and in the email they received from the researchers. Four hundred and five participants filled out the online questionnaires (response rate of 41.2%). Of the participants, 292 applicants were rejected in the selection procedure, constituting our final sample. Of the participants in the final sample, 25% were men; 20% had an ethnic minority background, and the mean age of the respondents was 27 years ($SD = 3.74$). All respondents participated voluntarily and anonymously and could win a movie coupon in return for participation.

In a randomly selected half of the emails the following *diversity statement* was included: 'As you might know, local government X strives for diversity within their organization, and attempt to select a workforce that is diverse'. The diversity statement did not appear in the other random half of the emails. The diversity statement was based on Ployhart and colleagues (1999), and can be considered a relatively weak and subtle diversity statement.

Measures

Demographic variables collected included gender and ethnicity. Gender was rated as 0 = *female* and 1 = *male*. Ethnicity was measured by asking the participants to which ethnic group(s) they considered themselves to belong (Van Hooft & De Jong, 2009). Response options were Dutch, Surinamese, Antillean, Turkish, Moroccan, and Other. Respondents could select more than one option. Ethnicity was then coded as: 0 = *ethnic minority* (i.e., respondents who considered themselves as belonging to one or more ethnic minority groups) and 1 = *Dutch majority* (i.e., respondents who indicated they considered themselves Dutch only). For the other items, answers were given on 5-point Likert-scales, such that higher numbers indicate higher agreement/quantity of the attribute.

Perceptions of selection discrimination was measured with thirteen items (Abu Ghazaleh et al., 2009) and had an alpha of .95. Sample items are 'I feel people of a certain group usually don't get fair treatment in a selection procedure', 'Because of who I am, I am often treated unfairly' and 'I still do not have a job because I am often disadvantaged'. The items focus on group membership, treatment and being disadvantaged in a more general manner.

Organizational attractiveness was measured with four items (e.g., "In my opinion, government X is attractive as an employer") based on Ployhart, Ryan and Bennet (1999). Cronbach's alpha was .93.

Identity strength was measured with two items based on Berry's (1997) acculturation scale (e.g., "It is important to me to maintain the norms and values of my culture"; $\alpha = .79$).

Attribution style was measured by using the Attributional Style Questionnaire for financial services of Proudfoot and her colleagues (2001). Originally, this scale consists of positive and negative attributions. However, consistent with the purpose of the study, we focused on the negative attributions since our main interest was in the attribution of the negative event; being rejected for the job in question. Participants were instructed to think about the selection procedure in general and how they would respond to the following situations of a selection procedure. We slightly altered some of the items to fit the selection procedure. It consisted of five items, for example: "You are criticized by

the recruiter". Low scores on this measure (1 = not attributable to me) indicated an external attribution style and high scores (5 = completely attributable to me) an internal one. Cronbach's alpha in this study was .60. We could have deleted item 6 "you cannot finish a selection test in time" to increase alpha to .63, but decided not to as the reliability is also found reasonable from .60 and it is an existing questionnaire.

Results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations for all measures used in the study are presented in Table 1. Perceived selection discrimination correlates positively with attribution style and age. The more internally attributed and the older, the more discrimination is experienced. Perceived selection discrimination is negatively correlated with ethnicity, indicating that Dutch applicants experience less perceived selection discrimination than ethnic minority participants. For organizational attractiveness, identity strength had a positive correlation and gender a negative correlation. Thus, the stronger participants' identity, the more they perceived the organization to be attractive and males see the organization as less attractive than females do.

Next, we performed hierarchical moderated regression analyses to test the hypothesized interactions of the diversity statement with ethnicity and the two individual difference variables (identity strength and attribution style) in relation to perceptions of selection discrimination and organizational attractiveness. Following the suggestions of Cohen, Cohen, West, and Aiken (2003), independent variables were centered around their mean and the interaction terms were based on these mean centered scores.

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

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Perceived selection discrimination	1.89	0.85							
2. Organizational attractiveness	4.30	0.76	-.11						
3. Attribution style	2.33	0.70	.19**	-.07					
4. Identity strength	3.73	0.81	.02	.17**	.09				
5. Diversity statement ^a	0.39	0.49	.01	.07	.01	.05			
6. Gender ^b	0.25	0.43	.10	-.18**	.13*	-.06	.07		
7. Age	26.71	3.74	.19**	-.03	.07	.02	.05	.14*	
8. Ethnicity ^c	0.80	0.40	-.14*	-.03	-.02	-.11	-.18**	-.07	-.12*

Note. Due to incidental missing values *N* varies between 262 and 292. ^a 0 = without a diversity statement (*n* = 178). 1 = with a diversity statement (*n* = 114). ^b 0 = female (*n* = 218). 1 = male (*n* = 73). ^c 0 = non-Dutch (*n* = 56). 1 = Dutch (*n* = 219). * *p* < .05. ** *p* < .01.

Table 2 reports beta weights of the four steps of the analysis with the Adjusted R^2 , and the F -change for each step. We entered the control variables age and gender in Step 1, and diversity statement, ethnicity, identity strength, and attribution style in Step 2. The 2-way interaction terms of ethnicity * diversity statement, attribution style * ethnicity, attribution style* diversity statement, identity strength* ethnicity, and identity strength* diversity statement were added in Step 3, and the 3-way interaction terms ethnicity * diversity statement* individual variable (attribution and ethnic identity strength) were added in the fourth and final step.

For perceptions of selection discrimination, age ($\beta = .21, p < .05$) was significantly positively related to perceptions of selection discrimination, implying that the older the applicant, the more they perceive selection discrimination. In Step 2 besides age, attribution style ($\beta = .13, p < .05$) was also significant, such that the more internal an applicant's attribution style, the more selection discrimination is perceived. Of the 2-way interactions in Step 3, only the identity strength by diversity statement ($\beta = -.15, p < .05$) was significant.

Table 2 | Regressions of perceived selection discrimination and organizational attractiveness on age, gender, ethnicity, diversity statement, attribution style and identity strength

	Perceptions of Selection Discrimination				Organizational Attractiveness			
	Step1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
Age	.21*	.18*	.16*	.14*	-.02	-.02	-.02	-.02
Gender	.07	.04	.04	.04	-.17*	-.16*	-.16*	-.16*
R^2	0.05				0.0			
Ethnicity		-.12	-.11	-.13*		-.03	-.03	-.03
Diversity Statement		.00	.00	-.00		.07	.06	.07
Attribution		.13*	.13*	.11		-.07	-.08	-.06
Identity Strength		.01	.01	.00		.15*	.15*	.15*
R^2 (F-change)	.08 (2.22)				0.06 (2.11)			
Attribution*Ethnicity			-.10	-.06			-.03	-.06
Attribution* Diversity statement			.04	.04			.06	.07
Identity Strength*Ethnicity			.05	.06			-.03	-.03
Identity Strength* Diversity statement			-.15*	-.15*			-.15*	-.15*
Ethnicity*Diversity Statement			-.10	-.09			-.04	-.06
R^2 (F-change)	12 (2.23)				0.09(1.45)			
Attribution*Ethnicity*Diversity Statement				-.14*				.08
Identity Strength* Ethnicity*Diversity Statement				.05				.09
R^2 (F-change)	.14 (2.46)				0.10 (1.95)			

Note: * $p < .05$. $N = 260$ for Perceptions of Selection Discrimination and $N = 261$ for Organizational Attractiveness.

Regarding organizational attractiveness, in Step 1, of the control variables, gender ($\beta = -.17, p < .05$) was significantly related to organizational attractiveness, such that men have a more negative view of the organization than women. In Step 2 besides gender, identity strength ($\beta = .15, p < .05$) was significant, such that the stronger peoples' identity, the more attractive they perceive the organization to be. Of the 2-way interactions in Step 3, again only the identity strength by diversity statement was significant ($\beta = -.15, p < .05$).

Since the diversity statement*ethnicity interaction was not significant, Hypothesis 1 positing that the presence of a diversity statement would have an interaction effect such that the inclusion of a diversity statement will decrease perceptions of selection discrimination and increase organizational attractiveness more for the ethnic minority group than the majority group, was not supported. There was no overall difference between the majority and minority group in organizational attractiveness and perceptions of discrimination as a function of the diversity statement. However, for both perceived selection discrimination and organizational attractiveness we found an interaction effect between diversity statement and identity strength rather than ethnicity. To explore these effects in more detail, we depicted the two-way interactions in Figure 1 and 2.

Figure 1 shows that without a diversity statement more perceptions of selection discrimination are experienced by applicants high on identity strength than those low on identity strength. The condition with a diversity statement showed the opposite effect, such that perceptions of selection discrimination were lower for those high on identity strength than for those low on identity strength.

The interaction for organizational attractiveness is shown in Figure 2. Organizational attractiveness is lowest for those applicants low on identity strength and with no diversity policy present. The inclusion of a diversity statement increases organizational attractiveness for this group. However unexpectedly, applicants high on identity strength, showed results in the opposite direction. The organization was perceived as more attractive without a diversity policy present than with a diversity policy present.

Hypothesis 2 and 3 refer to three-way interactions between diversity statement, ethnicity, and personal characteristics in predicting perceptions of selection discrimination and organizational attractiveness. Hypothesis 2 posited that the inclusion of a diversity statement will decrease perceptions of selection discrimination and increase organizational attractiveness more for those strong on identity strength than those rejected applicants with a weak identity strength, especially for the minority group rejected applicants. This hypothesis was tested by adding three-way interactions in the fourth step of the regression analysis (see Table 2). We did not find a significant effect of identity strength by ethnicity by diversity statement in the prediction of either

Figure 1 | Graphic depiction of the two-way interaction between diversity statement and identity strength on perceived selection discrimination

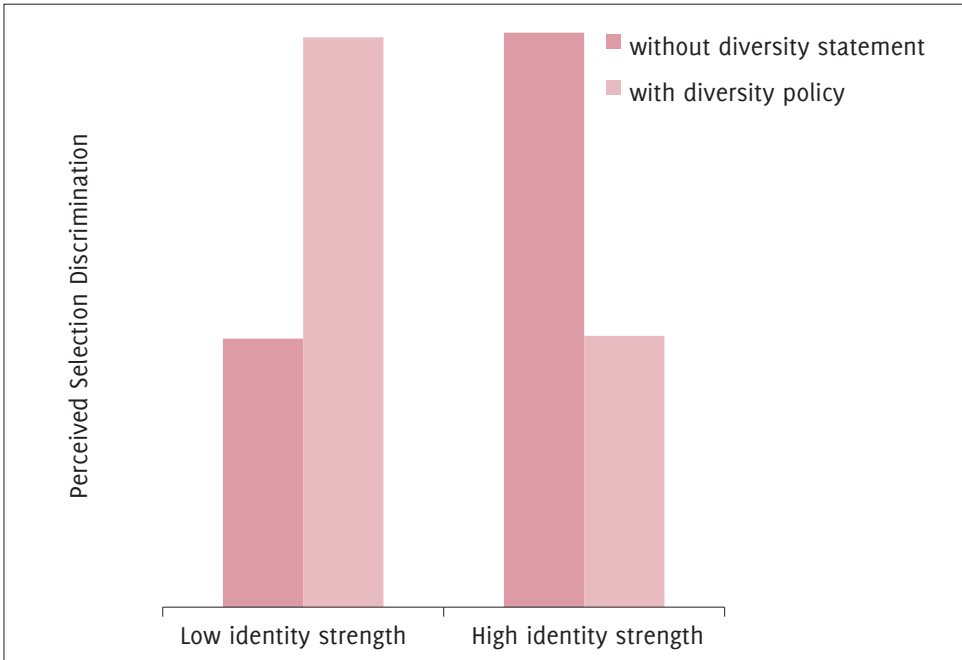
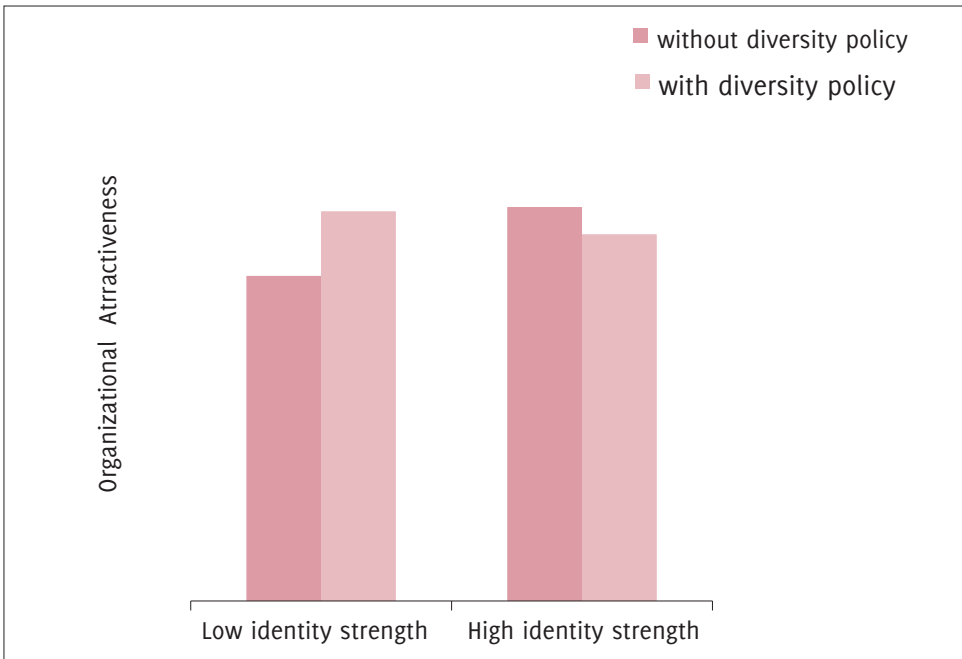


Figure 2 | Graphic depiction of the two-way interaction between diversity statement and identity strength on organizational attractiveness

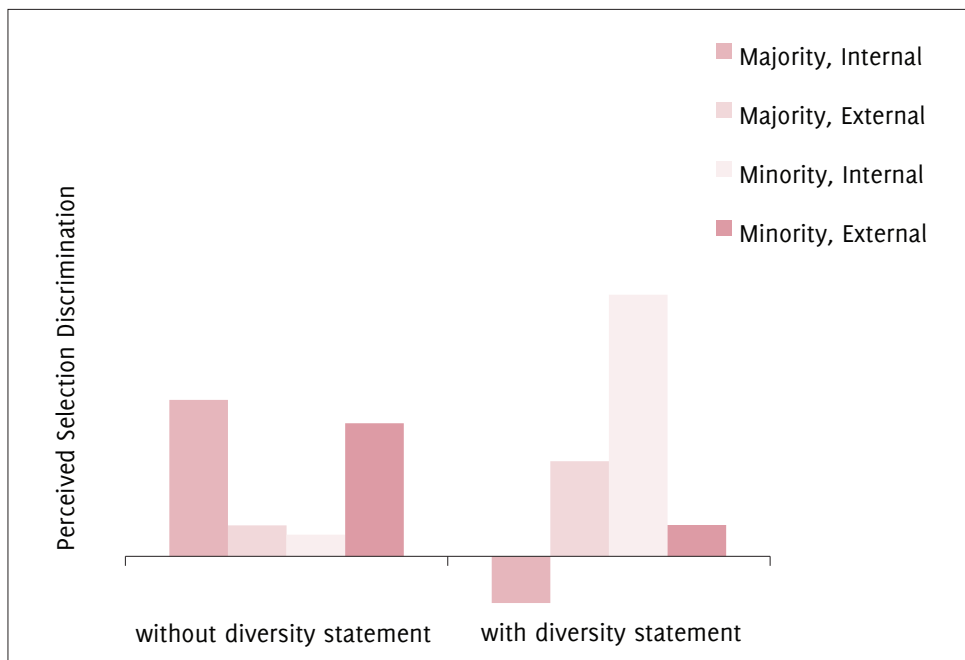


organizational attractiveness or perceptions of selection discrimination, so Hypothesis 2 was not supported. Thus, the differences as depicted in Figure 1 and 2 are not affected by the participants' ethnicity.

Regarding Hypothesis 3, the three-way interaction of attribution style by ethnicity by diversity statement was significant in predicting perceptions of selection discrimination ($\beta = -.14, p < .05$) but not for organizational attractiveness. The form of the three-way interaction was further analyzed using the procedures suggested by Dawson and Richter (2006).

The graphic depiction of this interaction as displayed in Figure 3 shows that whether the inclusion of a diversity policy affects the perceptions of discrimination depends on the ethnicity of the participants combined with their attribution style. The inclusion of a diversity statement for minority group rejected applicants who attribute externally, leads to lower perceptions of selection discrimination, which is in line with our expectations. However, for those who attribute internally, inclusion of a diversity statement leads to higher perceptions of selection discrimination. For the majority group applicants, we see an opposite effect.

Figure 3 | Plot of the three way interaction for perceived selection discrimination, diversity statement and attribution style



The inclusion of a diversity policy leads to higher perceptions of selection discrimination for majority applicants who attribute externally, whereas it leads to lower perceptions of discrimination for those who attribute internally. Thus, in line with our expectations there is a slight increase in perceptions of selection discrimination for the majority group with a diversity policy, but only for those in the majority group who attribute rejection externally. Furthermore, the inclusion of a policy indeed is especially relevant in decreasing perceptions of selection discrimination for the minority group rejected applicants, but only for those who attribute rejection externally.

Discussion

This study investigated the effects of including a diversity statement on perceptions of selection discrimination and organizational attractiveness of rejected applicants. The main contribution of our study is the finding that although overall the inclusion of a diversity statement did not affect the amount of experienced selection discrimination or the way rejected applicants perceived the organization, it did affect applicants' perceptions differentially depending on people's attribution style and identity strength. For example, rejected ethnic minorities with an internal attribution style perceived more selection discrimination when a diversity statement was included than when there was no such statement.

Our result showing that the presence of a diversity statement does not increase organizational attractiveness may show that the ASA framework (which suggests that attraction depends on the personal demographics of applicants) does not hold when rejection is the given reality; applicants who value a diversity policy do not necessarily seem to see an organization that stresses one as more attractive when rejected. Thus, although applicants are attracted to a certain organization and may initially apply for a job opening if such a policy is present, a mild diversity policy does not seem to affect applicants' organizational attractiveness when they are rejected.

To our knowledge, no previous research has examined the direct effect of a diversity policy on perceptions of selection discrimination among actual applicants. Research in this area usually either focuses on students or on general attitudes of the population. However, we found that when looking at actual applicants for a specific organization rather than general attitudes or student experiments, the direct impact of a mild diversity statement is not as big as one might expect it to be for both the majority and minority rejected applicants. This is interesting since the weak form is often a more realistic and more commonly accepted one and companies using this more weak form may not have to worry as much about affecting perceptions of selection discrimination or organizational attractiveness when using this form. However, simply triggering the notion of a diversity effect did change certain applicants' perceptions of perceptions of selection discrimination

and organizational attractiveness when looking at interaction effects.

As indicated, when taking attribution style into account, a different pattern emerged. Theory suggests that applicants will typically see rejection as due to an external factor (Ployhart & Harold, 2004), individual applicants may vary in their attribution styles. Our field study demonstrated that such variation importantly affects perceptions of selection discrimination. More specifically, rejected applicants who attribute the outcome more internally generally perceive most selection discrimination. However, when a diversity statement is included, only applicants with an internal attribution style in the ethnic minority group perceived more selection discrimination. This finding may suggest that experiencing discrimination has a self-protective function. If people feel they cannot change the situation, keeping only an internal attribution for the rejection would create an irreducible self discrepancy resulting in negative affect (Silvia & Duval, 2001), which does not help the situation or future situations when applying for a new job opening. Thus, for those with an internal attribution style, also seeing more perceptions of selection discrimination seems a more optimal psychological situation not only for not having to blame the rejection to a lack of own competency but also for continuing applying for job openings (in other organizations). It should be noted that the reliability of our attribution scale was not very high. We recommend future researchers to investigate this questionnaire in more detail by performing an CFA in their analysis.

Furthermore, our findings demonstrate that the majority Dutch group who attributed the job rejection externally, perceived more selection discrimination than the minority group when a diversity statement was included. For the majority group, there is a very clear external cause for their rejection, namely the diversity policy. People who are rarely confronted with discrimination (majority group) may very well use discrimination as a justification for their failure, in a context where such an attribution is conceivable (Bourguignon, Seron, Yzerbyt, & Herman, 2006). Thus a potential drawback of diversity policies may be that majority group members who are rejected experience more selection discrimination (especially those who attribute externally).

The opposite pattern was found when a diversity statement is absent. Then it is the minority group that experiences the most perceptions of selection discrimination. They have no reason to believe that they were not discriminated against and as mentioned in previous literature, an external cause is more easily given to a negative outcome. For those applicants who attribute internally, the results show an interesting effect. The inclusion of a diversity statement shows that for the minority group applicants who attribute internally experiences the most perceptions of selection discrimination when rejected; the majority group does not experience perceptions of selection discrimination. One explanation for the ethnic minority group result here is situational ambiguity (when the identification of discrimination is less obvious due to certain cues during the

situation) (Ruggiero & Taylor, 1995; Major et al., 2003). With this notion, in our study, a diversity policy should supposedly make it more difficult for ethnic minority applicants to be rejected (Garcia et al., 1981). Thus, if even with the diversity statement being present, they are still rejected, it must be discrimination; disadvantaged people usually only attribute their failure to discrimination when they feel rather certain that they have been discriminated against (Kaiser & Miller, 2003; Ruggiero & Taylor, 1995). Without the statement, we again find opposite effects, the majority group experiences more perceptions of selection discrimination than the minority group, which may again be due to a defense mechanism to protect a positive self.

When looking at ethnic identity strength, our findings suggest that it does not matter whether applicants are part of the minority or majority group, but it did matter how much they value their identity. Specifically, without a statement present, applicants who strongly value their identity, perceived more discrimination than those who value their identity less. The inclusion of a diversity statement, however, led to the reverse pattern, such that perceptions of selection discrimination were lower in the strong identity group as compared to the low identity group. The inclusion of a diversity statement is thus only beneficial for rejected applicants with high identity strength. When looking at organizational attractiveness the absence of a statement also increases organizational attractiveness especially for the strong identity group. This result was not expected and is not in line with results found by Kim and Gelfand (2003), who showed that individuals higher on ethnic identity make more positive inferences about the organization when a diversity statement is included in the organization brochure. Perhaps this is a slight 'backfire' result/effect of the inclusion or exclusion of a diversity policy statement (Dass & Parker, 1999; Walker et al., 2007), when already rejected, by making the organization less attractive to low identity applicants without a policy and high identity applicants without a diversity policy statement. Additionally, the sample of Kim and Gelfand (2003) consisted of a student sample, showing a difference in results when taking real life applicants into account, which perhaps highlights the importance of not looking at identity from a simple categorizational conceptualization of ethnicity (Kim & Gelfand, 2003).

In sum, these results reveal that attributions for failure appear to have more persistent consequences for perceptions of selection without a diversity policy than with one and the effect of the inclusion of a statement is stronger for the high ethnic identity group. Conceivably, failure induces greater thought or reflection of the procedure to protect a positive self (McFarland & Ross, 1982).

Limitations

Though a strength of the study is the use of a real world sample of actual applicants, the sample consisted of relatively young applicants and applicants who applied for an opening for the first time since a traineeship is an excellent starting job for recent graduates. Future research is needed to examine to what extent our results generalize to older and more experienced samples of rejected applicants. Another limitation of this study is that we do not know to what extent the group without the diversity statement saw the organization as valuing diversity. Given that we used a weak and realistic diversity statement, we could not ask them about this as this would blur the distinction between the conditions. Furthermore, our sample may have been specific as it was a sample of applicants to a governmental organization in a multicultural city. Therefore, our sample may in general be more likely to value diversity as compared to applicants to a non-governmental organization. Future research is therefore needed, using applicants to different jobs and organizations. Lastly, although we included several important individual differences (i.e., ethnicity, identity strength, attribution style), it is also very conceivable to think of other psychological variables that influence perceptions of selection discrimination and organizational attractiveness that also need to be investigated.

Implications and Conclusion

Our results suggest that across all rejected applicants a mild diversity statement did not strongly change organizational perceptions. Thus, organizations may not have to worry too much about dealing with increased litigation issues or spreading of a bad company name (see e.g. Gilliland, 1993; Viswesvaran & Ones, 2004) by the rejected applicants when comparing a selection process with or without a diversity statement. In general, rejected applicants do not perceive the company as less attractive or perceive more discrimination if such a statement is or is not included. However, organizations must certainly keep in mind that the inclusion of a statement does seem to trigger perceptions of selection discrimination in some rejected applicants, depending on the attributions applicants make for the reason of failure. Careful and clear information about the reasons for rejection and the diversity policy should be given explicitly to reduce attribution of rejection to discrimination for different groups, especially for those rejected applicants who value their identity.