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GENERAL DISCUSSION

Conclusion and Discussion

The current dissertation presented four studies on perceptions of discrimination. These studies investigated what psychological antecedents relate to applicants' and employees' perceptions of discrimination, perceptions of organizational attractiveness, job performance ratings and turnover intentions. Furthermore, the studies also investigate whether there is a minority-majority group difference, a difference in being rejected or accepted for the job and in the inclusion or exclusion of a diversity policy statement during the early stages of recruitment changes outcomes. The studies where inspired by the notion that the workforce in many countries around the world is becoming more diverse and this has consequences (Avery & McKay, 2010). Organizations will need to become not only more successful in recruiting employees from diverse ethnic backgrounds, but also in maintaining and motivating this diverse workforce once applicants are hired. As such, organizations need to prevent perceptions of discrimination from occurring (Avery, McKay & Wilson, 2008).

We start with a summary of the main findings of discrimination perceptions in this dissertation. Next, the findings of the effect of the predictor variables on the outcome variables will be summarized. Rather than summarizing the findings for each chapter separately, these findings will be presented in two parts. The first part concerns the findings regarding group differences. We discuss the results of the psychological antecedents, subgroup identity, identity strength and perceived similarity. The second part deals with the individual differences which influenced the outcome variables, namely, rejection sensitivity, core self evaluations, attributions style and ethical leadership.

In sum, in this concluding chapter we summarize the main results and contribute to our understanding of minority majority group differences in perceived discrimination and elaborate on the influence of being unsuccessful or successful for the job one is applying for and the inclusion or exclusion of a diversity policy in recruitment. Moreover, we discuss the practical and theoretical implications within these two parts. Below, we summarize the main findings of our studies, and discuss the theoretical and practical implications of these findings. Finally, the limitations of our work will be considered and directions for future research will be suggested.

Summary of the main findings

Perceptions of Discrimination

First of all, all four studies presented in the three empirical chapters support the relationship of ethnicity and perceptions of discrimination. This was not only found in the two studies reported in the first chapter where it was one of the hypotheses, but also in the other studies. The ethnicity-perceptions of discrimination relationship we found in the four studies ranged from -.14 (Chapter 3) to -. 44 (Chapter 2). This result was found during the selection procedure as well as at the workplace. These correlations are in line with previous research on perceived discrimination; where related work perceived discrimination was also significantly more prevalent among minority groups than among majority groups (e.g., Avery et al., 2008; Banerjee, 2008). In this dissertation we show that this also holds true for the Dutch context. Perceptions of discrimination are still very much present in the Netherlands and ethnic minority groups still feel more discriminated against than their majority counterparts both in selection procedures and at work. Our results are in line with recent outcomes of Dutch studies that also conclude that perceptions of discrimination are still present (Monitor rassendiscriminatie, 2009) and ethnic minorities are still underrepresented in the work force compared to the majority Dutch group (CBS, 2010). Next we will discuss our findings concerning subgroup identity, identity strength and perceived deeper level similarity.

Findings regarding psychological antecedents based on group differences

Based on the social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, 1987), self categorization theory (Turner, 1982) and the similarity-attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1971), we expected applicants as well as employees to classify themselves and others into categories based on noticeable features such as race or gender but also in terms of group prototypes. These prototypes reflect belief sets, attitudes, norms, values and behaviors (Hogg, 2001) and form 'in-groups' and 'out-groups'. Because interpersonal similarity among in-group members tends to heighten attraction between individuals (Byrne, 1971), bias in favor of similar in-group members and bias against out-group members is created (Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002). It consequentially decreases liking and increases the use of stereotypes for the out-group members (Ragins, 1997; Lankau, Riordan & Thomas, 2005).

In addition, as lower status minority groups hold greater concern about identity affirmation than do members of higher status majority groups (Tajfel, 1982), we expected minority group applicants to generally have a stronger identity strength than majority

group applicants (Avery et al., 2008). The higher the group identification, the more salient the group identity is (Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997). Therefore, as applied to an applicant-recruiter and employee-supervisor dyad within an recruitment or organizational setting, the above mentioned would suggests that the more applicants and employees feel connected to their subgroup, the more strongly they feel connected with their (subgroup) identity and the less similar they perceive themselves to be to the recruiter or leader that do not belong to the same subgroup. The less similar they feel, the more discrimination they tend to perceive, which will thus likely be especially salient for ethnic minority groups.

Results show that in selection, the higher ones' subgroup identity the more (general) discrimination is perceived by both rejected and accepted applicants. Identity strength was not significantly related to perceptions of discrimination when looking at rejected applicants (Chapter 3). For both variables there were no differences in ethnicity. This was not in line with our expectations. Nevertheless, a diversity statement or getting accepted for the job did change the relation of subgroup identity and identity strength with perceptions of discrimination.

When ones' subgroup identity is high and an applicant is being rejected, more discrimination due to impact recruiter is perceived (Chapter 2). Interestingly in Chapter 3, identity strength was triggered when a mild diversity policy was included. Thus, applicants who value their identity, irrespective of their ethnicity, seem to be triggered by the inclusion of a diversity policy. When a diversity policy was present, it did not only lower perceptions of discrimination but also lowered organizational attractiveness for those high on identity strength. When a diversity policy was not present, perceptions of discrimination and organizational attractiveness are increased. The opposite was shown for those low on identity strength for both outcome variables.

We also expected that interpersonal deeper level similarity among in-group members tend to heighten attraction between individuals (Byrne, 1971) and thus decrease perceptions of discrimination (Chapter 4). Deeper level similarity did seem to be perceived differently by people with different ethnicities. Since we expected there to still be a dissimilarity in deeper level values from people with different ethnic backgrounds due to difference in culture, the effect should be stronger in an ethnic minority member and majority member interaction. Indeed, when supervisors perceived their minority employees as not very similar, perceptions of discrimination was highest for this group and lowest for the majority group. When supervisors perceived their employees as similar, perceptions of discrimination were not very different for both groups. Minority group members feel more discriminated against at work, even when deep level similarity with the leader is taken into account. Furthermore, when looking at job performance ratings, supervisors gave higher job performance ratings to

employees whom they perceive as similar. Supervisors must keep in mind that they can influence the decrease of perceptions of discrimination for minority group employees and also influence the job performance ratings by perceiving the employee as more similar; however, it should be noted that this conclusion is based on same source data which may influence our outcomes. Even so, the findings do suggests that supervisors should probably be trained to look beyond similarity in ethnicity and also to be careful in the way they rate their employees when perceived similarity is high.

To conclude, we see that minority and majority groups experience discrimination differently, as minority groups tend to perceive more discrimination in general, in applicant-recruiter interaction and also when working with their supervisor. However, when looking at our psychological variables, subgroup identity and identity strength, it was not the moderating effect of ethnicity that changed their perceptions of discrimination. Our results show that this notion is much more nuanced, the difference in perceptions of discrimination is not due to ethnicity differences per se, nor solely based on feeling strongly connected and identified to ones group. Thus, organizations should take the effect of a diversity policy into account as well as treating rejected applicants with care to prevent perceptions of discrimination from occurring. They should be wary about whom they want to show the value of explicit attention for diversity during selection. As it is not the ethnic minority group per se, it is the group that values their identity strength, who benefits most from the inclusion of a policy as they are less prone to feel discriminated against when rejected. Next to the influence of the value of explicit attention for diversity during selection on perceptions of discrimination, our results also indicate that organizational attractiveness is changed in the same direction. Organizations should very explicitly investigate whether the inclusion of a diversity policy is a worthwhile investment, given our results that it changes when applicant value their identity strength. Also, very clear feedback about the reason for rejection might reduce triggering discrimination when a rejected applicant has a strong subgroup identity. Applicants should recognize that discrimination can be triggered unintentionally and should take this into account when they attribute certain perceptions of a selection procedure.

As ethnicity might not interact with the relation of our antecedents and outcome variables discussed above, our final study was done on the work floor and in this study ethnicity does seem to be of influence on the relation of similarity with perceptions of discrimination. Perceived supervisor similarity was related to perceptions of discrimination, where the minority group that is perceived as dissimilar by the recruiter rates highest on perceived workplace discrimination (Chapter 4). Social identity theory and the similarity attraction bias argue that leaders and their employees are more attracted to each other if they are of a similar cultural background due to common life

experiences, beliefs and values (Xu & Jiang, 2010). Avery and his colleagues (2008) also showed that employee- supervisor ethnic similarity leads to less perceived discrimination than employee-supervisor ethnic dissimilarity. Our results also support the bias and go one step further by showing support for deeper level dissimilarity. However, our results only show support for supervisor rated similarity and not for employee rated similarity. There is a relation with leaders who perceive their employees as similar in deeper level values and ethnic minority and majority employees' perceptions of discrimination. Additionally, perceptions of discrimination may increase turnover since we found that the more discrimination was perceived, the higher workers' turnover intentions were. High turnover can be costly for organizations.

Thus, supervisors, even more than recruiters, need to be careful in the way they interact with minority groups and they could try to decrease discrimination by reducing dissimilarity perceptions of minority groups and be as objective as possible when rating their employees on job performance. Supervisors could, for example, be trained to in principle try to perceive all employees as similar in deeper level values and not to pay attention to differences in ethnicity. Recent research, has already shown that training can have a positive impact; employees, whose leaders received a leadership training perceived higher levels of fairness. However, employees who had the same cultural background as their leader perceived even more fairness (Xu & Jiang, 2010). Future research should further investigate ways to diminish this cultural or ethnic difference, which is also found in our research. And as all supervisors in our study were from a majority background, research is also needed to investigate whether perceived supervisor rated similarity also relates to perceptions of discrimination and job performance ratings for minority and majority group employees when the supervisors are from a minority background.

Findings regarding psychological antecedents based on individual differences

As mentioned before, perceptions of discrimination are not only induced by triggering psychological group-related antecedents. Individual antecedents can also trigger perceived discrimination. Previous rejection or repeatedly being rejected for a job might eventually hurt a persons' self confidence. Research by Sommer and Baumeister (2002) has shown that rejection threat resulted in a pattern of withdrawal and failure. People sensitive to rejection also posses 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 perceiving discrimination 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).

Our results show that applicants high on core self evaluations and low rejection sensitivity perceive less discrimination (general and impact recruiter). When individuals are low on core self evaluations and highly sensitive to rejection, more discrimination is perceived. In Chapter 2, our second study shows that ethnicity and getting the job or not also affect these results: when low on core self evaluations and rejection sensitivity, majority group rejected applicants tend to experience more discrimination; when high on core self evaluations and rejection sensitivity, minority group rejected applicants tend to experience more discrimination. Major and her colleagues (2003) mention that members of stigmatized groups (often minority groups) are more sensitive to the possibility of being discriminated against. If there is a ground to attribute rejection to discrimination, minority groups tend to be more likely to do this. From these results, it can also be assumed that applicants experience attributional ambiguity (Crocker & Major, 1989; Major, Quinton & Schmader, 2003). The results we found for both rejection sensitivity and core self evaluations also suggest the occurrence of this process: individual variables also tend to differ in the influence on perceptions of discrimination if applicants have a different ethnicity and gets accepted or rejected for the job position. According to the applicant-attribution reaction theory (Ployhart & Harold, 2004), rejected applicants are more likely to attribute this rejection to external factors such as discrimination, thus have an external attribution style, than blaming rejection on the self, having a more internal attribution style (Major, Kaiser, & McCoy, 2003; Major, Quinton, & Schmader, 2003). Although, our findings were not in line with the theory. As Duvall and Silva (2002) mention, some studies show that failure is attributed internally, and others find that it is mainly attributed externally, this may be caused by yet to be discovered moderators. Additionally, being part of an ethnic group can influence attributional processing (Ployhart & Harold, 2004). Here, we can also recommend clear feedback about the reason for rejection, to decrease the likelihood of perceiving discrimination.

In Chapter 3, we further investigated the role of attribution style when rejected for a job. The results show that the more internal an applicants' attribution style, the more selection discrimination is perceived. The results also show that when the absence or presence of diversity policy statement and ethnicity is taken into account, perceptions of discrimination vary. There is a slight increase in perceptions of 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 turns out to be especially relevant in decreasing perceptions of discrimination for the minority group rejected applicants, but only for those who attribute rejection externally.

Not only individual characteristics of the perceiver are likely to trigger perceptions of discrimination. Characteristics and behaviors of the leader also seem to influence perceived discrimination, for example, leaders may affect such perceptions through the ethical style expressed to their employees. In chapter 4, we investigated how having an ethical leadership style related to perception of discrimination and found that the more the leader was perceived as ethical, the less discrimination was perceived, even when controlled for perceived similarity. Ethnic minority or majority group membership did not influence this notion; ethnic minority or majority employees did not differentiate between themselves and other employees in what they consider to be important and appropriate ethical leadership (Trevino et al., 2003). This is of importance since value congruence amongst employees and leaders is important as they will perceive stimuli in the same way (Kalshoven, 2010).

The main purpose of the present dissertation was to contribute to the knowledge of psychological antecedents explaining differences in perceptions of discrimination between minority and majority applicants' and employees'. Below, we discuss how the results affect understanding perceptions of discrimination and the practical implications of these results.

Limitations

While the studies provide a number of valuable insights into the way applicants and employees perceive discrimination, it also has limitations that have to be kept in mind when interpreting the presented results. In this section some of these limitations of our studies will be discussed briefly.

A first limitation, is that all of our studies are conducted in the Netherlands. Results could very well differ in other countries where ethnic minority groups left their country of origin much longer go than most ethnic minority groups in the Netherlands.

Extending this first limitation is the second limitation. Not only did we conduct our studies in the Netherlands, but also within our studies, we do not distinguish between different ethnic minority group applicants and employees and we were not able to do independent comparisons of different ethnic groups. Which highlights our second limitation. In the Netherlands, there is a difference in culture between, for example, ethnic minority groups from Suriname who have a historical tie with the Netherlands or minority groups from Turkey or Morocco. One may argue that for example, applicants and employees from these countries will have different experiences and also respond differently to issues in our questionnaire than Suriname or Antilleans. Because each of these groups where relatively small, we could not investigate each group separately. Moreover, an important limitation that needs to be addressed is that no ethnic minority recruiters and supervisors were included in this study.

Furthermore, the studies have been conducted in turbulent times in which events in the Netherlands and globally (e.g. the making of the movie Fitna by Geert Wilders) have negatively impacted the relationship between ethnic minority and majority groups in the Netherlands. We did not take these impactful events into consideration in our research, which provides us with a third limitation.

A fourth limitation is that to measure perceptions of discrimination, we have relied solely on self report measures. These measures have the advantage that they are easily assessable especially since our studies have all been field studies. However, this self report measurement can be criticized as it introduces the possibility that common method variance influenced the results (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). However, some researchers argue that self reports might be the only trustworthy way to measure subject experience of emotions (Feldman & Barret, 2004).

Another limitation is that we do not measure actual discrimination. For example, in our studies in chapter 1 and chapter 2, we did not investigate whether actual proportions of minority group applicants are not selected, by using the fourth-fifth rules of the thumb. That way, we would have had the opportunity to even better advice organizations who actually do not discriminate, to be aware of personal and group differences between majority and minority groups that may lead to less PSD from the applicants' perspective. Additionally, we could also better advice that ethnic minorities should be aware of why perceptions of discrimination can arise during a selection procedure and therefore take it into account when they attribute certain perceptions of a selection procedure.

A sixth limitation is that we did not conduct longitudinal research, so that we could make a distinction in, for example, recruitment, applicants feelings beforehand, afterwards and, for example, after three months when rejected or accepted for the job and working within the organization. That we could have more closely investigated when perceptions of discrimination are triggered and when these perceptions are most pronounced or if they diminish over time.

Finally, the studies in this dissertation are exploratory in nature; it is very likely that there are many other psychological antecedents that were not incorporated. Future research on perceptions of discrimination should take different variables into account. For example, Berry's (1997) acculturation model shows that there are four different acculturation strategies: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. The difference in strategy means a difference in adaptation. We believe, that differences in acculturation strategy could influence perceptions of discrimination and acculturation is one of the many variables that could be studied in future research.

Final conclusion

In this dissertation we have investigated perceptions of discrimination. We have shown discrimination exists in the eyes of applicants and employees and especially when from an ethnic minority group. There are psychological variables that influence these perceptions differently for minority and majority groups but the groups are not per se based on ethnicity as they also depend on whether one feels connected with ones' subgroup and whether one values this identity. People tend to differ in how sensitive they are to rejection and in being high or low on core self evaluations or in the way they attribute events. This affects their level of perceived discrimination and affects perceptions of discrimination differently for ethnic groups, for groups that are rejected or accepted for a job, and affects reactions when a diversity policy is included or excluded in recruitment. At work, the role of the leader also turned out to be of importance as, for both minority and majority groups, deeper level similarity was related to perceptions of discrimination. Finally, the findings in this dissertation offer a starting point for future research as well as for thinking about how further feelings of perceived discrimination can be reduced in practice.