**Fairness Perceptions Among Applicants in the Netherlands: Examining the Role of Ethnic Identity and Perceived Discrimination Across Structured and Unstructured Applications**

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**Abstract**

Standardised application procedures, such as structured forms, are recognised for minimising the recruiter bias that occurs in unstructured procedures, such as curriculum vitae applications. In line with research that increasingly targets applicant perceptions of such procedures, the current study specifically investigates the role of ethnic identity centrality, negative public regard, and perceived discrimination in fairness perceptions of a structured and an unstructured application. In total, $N = 41$ participants with a majority ethnic identity (Dutch) and $N = 33$ participants with a minority ethnic identity (non-Dutch) applied for a fictional job using a curriculum vitae and a structured form, and filled out a questionnaire about fairness perceptions, ethnic identity centrality, negative public regard, and perceived discrimination. Paired samples $t$-tests showed that, in general, applicants perceived the structured application form as fairer than the curriculum vitae. However, simple linear regression analyses indicated that identity centrality and negative public regard did not predict fairness perceptions for minority applicants and perceived discrimination was not a significant mediator. Surprisingly, for majority applicants, additional mediation analyses demonstrated a significant negative indirect effect of negative public regard on overall fairness perceptions and opportunity to perform, through perceived discrimination. The results provide a more comprehensive understanding of applicant fairness perceptions in personnel selection procedures and issue important theoretical and practical implications.

*Keywords:* applicant perception, fairness, ethnic identity, centrality, public regard, perceived discrimination, recruitment, personnel selection, structure

**Fairness Perceptions Among Applicants in the Netherlands: Examining the Role of Ethnic Identity and Perceived Discrimination Across Structured and Unstructured Applications**

As part of ongoing debate, the political landscape advancing the Dutch general election in 2023 was coloured with highly polarised discussions on immigration policies. While media coverage and political debates highlight the impact of immigration on topics such as the Dutch labour market, the daily experiences of those belonging to ethnic minority groups frequently remain overshadowed (Essed, 1991). Nevertheless, job applicants with a minority status are persistently disadvantaged in the job selection process. Among the working population in the Netherlands in the first quarter of 2022, 6% of ethnic minority individuals (i.e., those with at least one parent born outside of the Netherlands) were unemployed, compared to 3% of the majority individuals (i.e., those with both parents born in the Netherlands; Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2022), illustrating the importance of investigating their experienced barriers to hiring prospects.

An essential step in the selection process is the initial screening of the applicant pool. Recruiters commonly conduct an unstructured, curriculum vitae (CV) assessment to determine which applicant to take into further consideration (Dipboye & Jackson, 1999). These assessments evaluate candidates' experience, knowledge, and skills and may lead to invitations for follow-up interviews. However, besides job-relevant information, CV applications provide room for irrelevant information, such as ethnicity, which may lead to unfounded rejections and discrimination (Derous & Ryan, 2019). Consequently, minority applicants need to send about 50% more applications than majority applicants with comparable qualities to be invited for an interview (Zschirnt & Ruedin, 2016). A structured form application offers a standardised alternative to the traditional CV application. With this method, each applicant must answer an identical set of questions, which improves recruiters' ability to rely on job-relevant criteria

when making selection decisions, while minimising biases that arise from personal information (Derous & Ryan, 2019; Wolgast et al., 2017). Besides reducing recruiter bias, standardisation may also affect applicant perceptions of fairness. In fact, research has increasingly concentrated on the applicant perspective of selection procedures, including its fairness, beyond the traditional focus on organisational and recruiter decision-making (Hausknecht et al., 2004; Hülsheger & Anderson, 2009; Ryan & Ployhart, 2000). This shift sheds light on a valuable aspect of selection fairness as applicant perceptions may affect rejection, acceptance, and post-offer intentions such as recommendation or litigation.

Fairness perceptions of job application methods appear similar across countries, with indications that within-country variability of perceptions may be more pronounced than between-country variability (Anderson et al., 2010). There may be distinctions in fairness perceptions among subgroups based on personal characteristics, such as gender or ethnicity (Anderson & Witvliet, 2008), as well as variability within these groups (Harris et al., 2004). For example, the extent to which ethnicity is incorporated in one's self-concept (i.e., identity centrality; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014) and the extent to which one feels that others view their ethnicity negatively (i.e., negative public regard; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014) may play a role. However, limited research has addressed this nuance. Additionally, research in applicant perception studies has been encouraged to increase focus on antecedents (Hausknecht et al., 2004) and individual differences (Schleicher et al., 2006).

Following these gaps in research, the current study examines how applicants perceive the fairness of structured forms, compared to CV applications in the Netherlands. Moreover, this study addresses to what extent ethnic identity centrality and negative public regard affect minorities' fairness perceptions through perceived discrimination. By doing so, the study elaborates on the initial step of the selection process, the application, where hiring bias may occur in decision-making on which applicant to take into further consideration. This extents

past fairness research on the selection interview where initial recruiter bias may have already occurred through invitation decisions. In addition, the study extends prior research on general fairness perceptions by investigating individual differences within minority groups, distinguishing various types of fairness, and evaluating the role of perceived discrimination, thereby offering a more nuanced perspective.

## Theoretical Background

The relevant concepts of the current study will be discussed in the following paragraphs. First, the structuring of job applications and its consequences for fairness perceptions will be addressed. Subsequently, ethnic identity will be conceptualised, while focusing on its facets identity centrality and negative public regard, and to what extent these dimensions may influence minority applicants' fairness perceptions. Finally, the concept of perceived discrimination will be described, emphasising its potential mediating role in the hypothesised relationships.

### Fairness Perceptions in Structured and Unstructured Applications

Fairness perceptions can be conceptualised according to Gilliland's (1993) model of applicant reactions to employment-selection systems, which is based on the rationale that violation of process-related (i.e., procedural) and outcome-related (i.e., distributive) justice rules affect fairness reactions. It has been argued that initial justice information, such as the procedure, has more influence on fairness perceptions than subsequent information, such as the outcome (van den Bos et al., 1997). Therefore, the current study focuses on aspects of procedural justice, which has moderate to strong relations with behavioural and perceptive outcomes such as organisational commitment, negative reactions, and performance (Colquitt et al., 2001). Gilliland's (1993) model describes three dimensions of procedural justice rules that influence fairness perceptions. First, formal characteristics refer to the structural aspects of the selection process (i.e., job relatedness, the opportunity to perform, the opportunity for

reconsideration, and consistency of administration). Second, explanation refers to aspects such as feedback or selection information. Third, interpersonal treatment consists of aspects such as interpersonal effectiveness or two-way communication. Given that explanation and interpersonal contact do not play a large role in CV applications or structured forms, the current study focuses on the formal characteristics. While the opportunity for reconsideration is a crucial aspect of the formal characteristics of fairness perceptions, it holds no relevance in the present study, which consists of an unassessed fictional application. Therefore, this aspect is not part of the current examination.

Fairness perceptions may be higher when the application is structured compared to unstructured. There is a prevailing consensus in the literature supporting the idea that standardised procedures reduce bias and discrimination in job selection (e.g., Derous & Ryan, 2019; Levasina et al., 2014; Sackett et al., 2023; Wolgast et al., 2017). Considering that structured forms allow for fairer procedures, it is worth investigating whether applicants perceive them as such. Prior research suggests that applicants perceive a structured form as fairer than a CV application (Heard et al., 2002; Odijk et al., 2024; Westwood et al., 2008). More specifically, Odijk et al. (2024) found that applicants perceived a standardised application form as exhibiting higher face and predictive validity (i.e., job relatedness), as well as higher consistency, opportunity to perform, and overall fairness. Face validity refers to the extent of overlap between the content of the selection method and the content of the job characteristics and predictive validity is the extent to which the selection content appears to predict future job performance (Smither et al., 1993). Perceived face and predictive validity may be more extensive for structured forms than for CV applications because the standardised questions in structured forms directly address core job requirements. In contrast, CVs may contain information such as personal demographics or the location of one's educational background, which may be perceived as less directly relating to the required job characteristics.

Furthermore, the structured form can be seen as a selection procedure that allows for more consistent treatment of applicants than the CV application because all applicants receive identical questions. In contrast, CV applications may contain varying information for different applicants considering that its content is open to interpretation. Moreover, opportunity to perform relates to the perceived chance that applicants can influence selection decisions by showing their knowledge, skills, and abilities (Bauer et al., 2001). Applicants may perceive more room for thorough articulation of their capabilities in a written question-and-answer format, compared to the list-like format of CV applications. Lastly, overall fairness perceptions are affected by the extent to which any fairness characteristics are present in the application procedure (Cropanzano & Wright, 2003). Therefore, they are expected to be higher in the structured form compared to the CV application. With the aim to confirm the findings of Odijk et al. (2024) by comparing CV applications and structured application forms on their perceived fairness, I hypothesise that:

*Hypothesis 1:* Applicants perceive the structured form as fairer overall (1a), and as exhibiting higher face validity (1b), consistency (1c), predictive validity (1d), and opportunity to perform (1e), compared to the CV application.

**Ethnic Identity**

The effect of structure on fairness perceptions may be more substantial for minority applicants than majority applicants (Heard et al., 2002; Odijk et al., 2024). Specifically, Odijk et al. (2024) found that minority applicants perceived the CV application as less fair than majority applicants in terms of predictive validity and opportunity to perform. Evaluating whether differences in ethnic identity explain these varying perceptions sheds light on the role of individual differences in the salience of fairness perceptions (Schleicher et al., 2006).

Relative deprivation theory (Davis, 1959) provides a framework for understanding how individuals assess their circumstances in comparison to others and their subsequent fairness

perceptions. Specifically, individuals experience relative deprivation when they receive less of what they believe they are as entitled to as the comparison group. For example, when a minority applicant replies to a job vacancy with their CV, which typically includes information that could point towards their minority status such as a name or a photograph, relative deprivation theory posits that the applicant may notice a relative disadvantage when comparing themselves to majority applicants. This may lead to reduced fairness perceptions compared to a situation in which the applicant applies with a structured form that omits references to ethnicity and may limit comparison with majority applicants.

Relative deprivation may primarily occur when the minority applicant's ethnic identity is central to their self-concept and when they have the belief that others view their ethnicity negatively. In line with social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), which describes the role of individuals' social identities in social behaviour, Herriot (2004) argues that applicants bring a collection of identities to a job selection procedure. These identities can be personal or social. Personal identities refer to an individual's beliefs about their individual characteristics, such as personality or interests, whereas social identities refer to an individual's beliefs about the social categories that they subscribe to, such as ethnicity or race. The primary focus of the current study is ethnicity, which is typically associated with shared ancestry and culture, rather than race, which is often linked to inherent physical and biological traits (Roth et al., 2023). Despite these differences, the concepts are highly related and not mutually exclusive (Alba, 1999; Perez & Hirschman, 2009; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014; Yip et al., 2014). Some argue that race is a form of ethnicity (Brubaker, 2009). As highlighted by Umaña-Taylor et al. (2014) and Yip et al. (2014), research on ethnic and racial identity often depends on the population's demographic and cultural makeup. For example, studies that address Asian and Latinx samples frequently emphasise ethnic identity (Phinney, 1992), whereas studies focusing on African and European American samples tend to emphasise racial identity (Sellers et al., 1998). In the Netherlands,

immigration increased after 1945 due to de-colonisation (e.g., from Indonesia and the former Dutch West Indies), labour recruitment (e.g., from Turkey and Morocco), and asylum migration (e.g., from Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan; Doomernik, 2008). These immigrants brought distinct traditions, cultures, and languages and formed ethnic communities in the Netherlands. Thus, a focus on ethnic identity may be particularly relevant for the current study.

While recognising that they are distinct concepts, given the considerable overlap in their definitions and practical significance, research from both racial and ethnic identity are used in forming the theoretical foundations of the current study. This facilitates the development of the present rationale regarding the elements of ethnic identity that could affect fairness perceptions of job applications, drawing upon a larger body of theories and models, including the multidimensional model of racial identity (MMRI; Sellers et al., 1998). It has been suggested that components of ethnic identity should be examined separately because they are unique constructs (Gonzales-Backen et al., 2018). The MMRI dissects racial identity into four components: salience, centrality, ideology, and regard. In the current research, I focus on identity centrality and negative public regard. Research by Brenner et al. (2014) indicates that identity centrality foregoes salience. Although it was acknowledged that this may vary across situations, their findings suggest that the value attributed to a specific identity may precede its activation in varying contexts. Therefore, in the current study, I address centrality and not salience. Centrality is relevant as it refers to the stable ranking of ethnic identity in relation to one's self-concept. For example, individuals with a high centrality position their ethnic identity proximal to their self-definition. This is relevant in the job application context because recruiters determine whether they believe the applicant could be a good fit for the position. Therefore, the manner in which applicants frame their identity might affect their candidacy. Moreover, the emphasis of this study is on investigating perceptions rather than underlying beliefs or convictions. Therefore, ideology appears irrelevant. However, negative public regard

is pertinent because it directly relates to the extent to which others view one's social group negatively. As one is consciously evaluated in the job selection process, public regard emphasises the role of how individuals are perceived by potential employers. In turn, this may impact the applicant's chance of securing employment opportunities. Thus, the current focus is on how the centrality of one's ethnic identity and the degree of negative public regard relate to perceptions of fairness.

### Identity Centrality

The self-concept has individual, relational, and collective levels (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). The extent to which one's collective (ethnic) identity plays a role in shaping one's self-concept across situations refers to identity centrality (Crocker et al., 1994; Sellers et al., 1998). With a collective self-concept, one's motivations, goals, and norms are shaped by the prosperity of the ethnic group that one subscribes to, thereby rendering group-level information and treatment particularly important (Jackson et al., 2006). In line with this, Leach et al. (2008) found that individuals with high social identity centrality are more sensitised to group-based threats, such as mistreatment. Additionally, the collective self-concept has been found to positively relate to the importance of procedural justice, which may affect applicants' attitudes and behaviours, such as a more careful evaluation of the application procedure (Johnson et al., 2006). This implies that applicants with a highly central ethnic identity may be more aware of the potential limited predictive value and opportunity to perform in the CV application compared to the structured form, leading to lower fairness perceptions. However, Odijk et al. (2024) did not find different fairness perceptions for minority compared to majority applicants in terms of face validity or consistency. Therefore, they are not expected to be affected by ethnicity-related factors such as identity centrality. Thus, I hypothesise:

*Hypothesis 2:* Ethnic identity centrality negatively relates to fairness perceptions of ethnic minority applicants (overall (a), in terms of predictive validity (b), and in terms of

opportunity to perform (c), but not in terms of face validity (d) or consistency (e)), yet this only holds true for the CV application, and not for the structured form.

### Negative Public Regard

Beyond centrality, Gong et al. (2017) encouraged future research to explore other aspects of ethnic identity, such as negative public regard, to gain a more nuanced understanding of the interplay between ethnic identity and fairness perceptions. In the current context, regard refers to the extent to which one feels positively or negatively about one's ethnicity, which can manifest in public and private manners (Sellers et al., 1998). Private regard relates to an individual's personal feelings about their ethnicity, whereas public regard concerns how an individual perceives that others view their ethnicity. For instance, Moroccan teenagers in the Netherlands expected Dutch majority individuals to think of them as criminal, aggressive, and Muslim extremists (Kamans et al., 2009), illustrating a negative public regard.

Individuals aim to obtain feedback that aligns with their identity (Swann, 1983). This implies that applicants may be particularly sensitive to information that confirms the stereotypes they believe others have of their ethnicity (Anseel, 2011). Accordingly, it can be argued that negative public regard predisposes minority applicants to anticipate being evaluated more negatively due to their ethnicity, rather than being assessed based on their skills. This means the applicants may perceive the selection procedure as failing to predict their future job performance and to provide them with the chance to show their abilities, diminishing their fairness appraisal of the selection process. Considering that CV applications allow for ethnic-relevant information to be shown, whereas structured application forms do not, I expect negative public regard to negatively affect fairness perceptions of a CV application, but not of a structured form. Similar to Hypothesis 2, face validity and consistency are not expected to be affected by negative public regard, as Odijk et al. (2024) did not find differences in fairness perceptions between minority and majority applicants for these aspects. I expect that:

*Hypothesis 3:* Negative public regard negatively relates to fairness perceptions of ethnic minority applicants (overall (a), in terms of predictive validity (b), and in terms of opportunity to perform (c), but not in terms of face validity (d) or consistency (e)), yet this only holds true for the CV application, and not for the structured form.

**Perceived Discrimination**

Considering that individuals' ethnic identity may influence fairness perceptions, it is crucial to investigate the factors contributing to this effect. In the current study, perceived discrimination is proposed to explain the potential relation between ethnic identity and fairness perceptions. Discrimination is perceived when an individual experiences unfair treatment, such as microaggression or degradation, due to their membership to a disadvantaged social group (Williams et al., 1997). In line with Weiner's attribution theory (1985), Patterson and Zibarras (2011) argue that applicants may be prompted to seek an understanding of potential causes or results of important situations such as a selection procedure. It has been suggested that applicants with a strong group identity may interpret these situations as potentially discriminatory and, consequently, be more sceptical of procedural fairness (Harris et al., 2004). Based on these attributions, applicants with a strong ethnic identity may perceive a higher level of unfairness in the selection procedure.

Other studies suggest a consistent pattern where perceived discrimination acts as a mechanism through which ethnic identity influences perceptions and behaviours, such as substance abuse or stress (Miller-Roenigk et al., 2021; Sellers et al., 2003). Similarly, perceived discrimination may explain differences in fairness perceptions of selection procedures in individuals with varying levels of ethnic identity. Accordingly, Operario and Fiske (2001) argued that individuals are more likely to perceive discrimination when their ethnicity is relevant to their identity (i.e., centrality) and they are aware of their group's stigma in society (i.e., negative public regard) due to their increased sensitivity to ethnicity-related cues in the

environment. When applicants perceive more discrimination, they may similarly attribute anticipated negative experiences, such as hiring rejection, to unfairness. However, research on these propositions is still lacking, emphasising the need to empirically investigate the proposed relationships. Therefore, I examine whether perceived discrimination mediates the expected relationship between ethnic identity and fairness perceptions (see Figure 1). I hypothesise that:

*Hypothesis 4:* Perceived discrimination mediates the relationship between ethnic minorities' ethnic identity (identity centrality (a) and negative public regard (b)) and fairness perceptions (overall, predictive validity, and opportunity to perform), but only for the CV application, and not the structured form.

**Figure 1**

*Hypothesised Mediation Model*



**Methods**
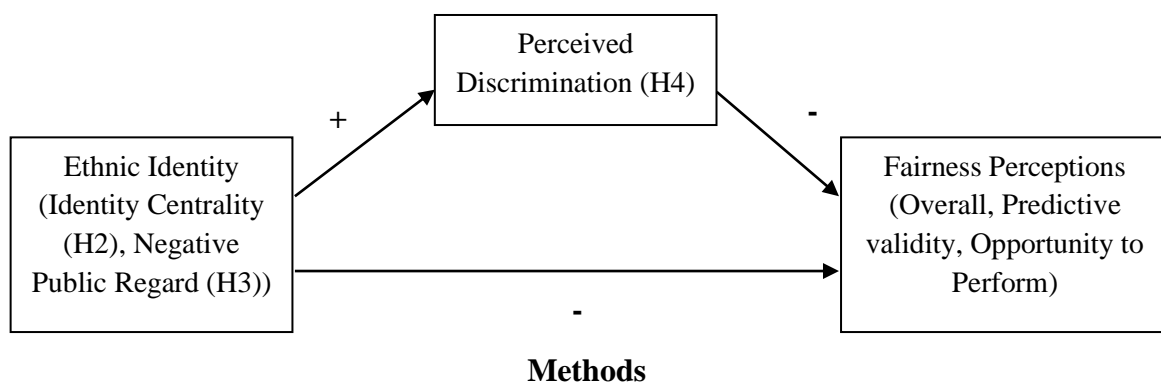
**Participants and Procedure**

A total of $N = 76$ participants were recruited for the study through several strategies. First, participants were approached via convenience sampling (e.g., social media, personal contacts; Demerouti & Rispens, 2014). Second, students from the Erasmus University Rotterdam were recruited via an online university-related platform. Students received two test subject hours for their participation. Third, informative flyers were spread, containing details about the nature of the study. Out of the total sample, two participants filled out less than half

of the open questions on the structured form, leading to their exclusion from further analysis. Accordingly, the analyses were conducted with a total of $N = 74$ participants ($N = 41$ majority, $N = 33$ minority).

It should be noted that eighteen of the recruited participants (24.3%) failed an attention check ("I indicate that I complete the survey with attention. Choose: fully applies to me"). Yet, these participants were not excluded from the analysis because the phrasing of the item may have influenced them to self-report the degree of attention they believed they allocated to completing the survey. Consequently, the item may have resulted in an indication of individual differences (e.g., conscientiousness) rather than accurately identifying those participants who provided inattentive responses. However, the findings should be interpreted cautiously, as participants may not have been fully attentive when filling out the survey.

Participants had a mean age of $M = 30.69$ ($SD = 13.37$), ranging from 19 to 68 years. Of the participants, 60.8% identified as female and 39.2% as male. While 55.4% of the participants identified as part of the Dutch ethnic majority, 44.6% identified as belonging to an ethnic minority group (6.8% Turkish, 6.8% Surinamese, 1.4% Moroccan, 1.4% Antillean, 9.5% multiple ethnic groups, and 18.9% other). The highest level of obtained education was research-oriented higher education for 64.9% of the participants, professional higher education for 25.7% of the participants, secondary education for 5.4% of the participants, and vocational education and training for 4.1% of the participants. Table A (Appendix A) shows participants' demographic information distinguished by minority and majority status.

Participants were presented information about the study, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. Subsequently, they were asked to respond to a job vacancy by sending their CV and filling out a structured application form. They were then asked to fill out a survey about their ethnic identity, fairness perceptions, and perceived discrimination, including several questions regarding their demographics.

**Materials**

*Job Vacancy and Application Form*

The fictional vacancy used was Traineeship Retail Management Higher Education, retrieved from Odijk et al. (2024; based on Albert Heijn, n.d.; see Appendix B). The structured form (SF) was retrieved from the same study and was based on the required job competencies that were mentioned in the vacancy (analytical skills, commercial insight and customer orientation, and networking abilities; Appendix C).

*Overall Fairness Perceptions*

Overall fairness was measured using three items derived from Wang et al. (2019). The original scale was aimed at interviews. As the present study addressed initial application, the items were changed to refer to application type (i.e., CV, SF) instead of interview. An example item is, "Generally speaking, I feel this application type is fair." Scale-items of all measures can be found in Appendix D. The overall fairness perception measure had a rating scale ranging from 1 (does not apply to me at all) to 5 (fully applies to me) and a reliability of $\alpha_{CV} = .94$, and $\alpha_{SF} = .94$, demonstrating high internal consistency.

*Predictive Validity*

To assess predictive validity, four items were derived from Smither et al. (1993). An example item from this scale is, "If one fails to pass the first selection, this clearly indicates one cannot handle the job." The measure had a rating scale ranging from 1 (does not apply to me at all) to 5 (fully applies to me) and showed a medium to high internal consistency ($\alpha_{CV} = .84$ & $\alpha_{SF} = .82$).

*Face Validity*

Face validity was measured with four items derived from Smither et al. (1993). An example item is, "It would be clear to anyone that this selection procedure is related to the job." The rating scale ranged from 1 (does not apply to me at all) to 5 (fully applies to me). In the

current sample, the scale showed a medium internal consistency ($\alpha_{CV}$ = .72 & $\alpha_{SF}$ = .68).

### Opportunity to Perform

To measure opportunity to perform, four items were derived from Bauer et al. (2001). An example item from this scale is, "I could really show my skills and capacities by means of this application type." The measure had a rating scale ranging from 1 (does not apply to me at all) to 5 (fully applies to me) and a high internal consistency of $\alpha_{CV}$ = .91, and $\alpha_{SF}$ = .90.

### Consistency of Administration

Consistency of administration was measured using three items derived from Bauer et al. (2001). An example item is, "This application type is executed in the same way for all applicants." The rating scale ranged from 1 (does not apply to me at all) to 5 (fully applies to me). The scale showed a medium to high internal consistency ($\alpha_{CV}$ = .81 & $\alpha_{SF}$ = .88).

### Identity Centrality

Ethnic identity centrality was measured using three items derived from Leach et al. (2008). An example item is, "I often think about the fact that I am a member of my ethnic-cultural group." The measure had a rating scale ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 7 (totally agree) and a high internal consistency of $\alpha$ = .92.

### Negative Public Regard

Negative public regard was measured using four items of the public regard subscale derived from Luhtanen and Crocker's (1992) collective self-esteem scale. The original scale was aimed at social groups. To specifically target ethnic identity in the current study, these terms were changed to relate to ethnicity. An example item is, "Overall, my ethnic-cultural group is considered good by others." The measure had a rating scale ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 7 (totally agree) and a medium to high internal consistency of $\alpha$ = .82.

*Perceived Discrimination*

To assess perceived discrimination, nine items were derived from Williams et al. (1997). An example item from this scale is, "You are being treated less politely than other people." The measure had a rating scale ranging from 1 (never) to 4 (often) and a high internal consistency of $\alpha = .91$.

**Data Analysis**

Before data collection, a G*Power analysis was conducted to determine the sample size required to detect an effect with a medium effect size. The analysis showed that, given a *power* of .90, α-level of .05, and assuming an effect size of $f^2 = 0.15$, using a multiple regression analysis would require a minimum sample size of 107 participants to detect an effect. As the current sample size falls short, the results should be treated with caution.

Reverse-coded items were transformed before all item scores were averaged per scale. Preceding the analyses, the corresponding assumptions were checked. Scales for consistency in the CV application, negative public regard, and perceived discrimination displayed more than 5% of the standardised residuals with a greater absolute value than 1.96, indicating potential outliers (Field, 2018). However, no standardised residual passed the 3.29 cut-off score. Thus, the cases were retained in the dataset. One participant appeared to exhibit extreme scoring by consistently selecting scores of 1 or 5 on the fairness scales. Although this may have influenced the results, no Mahalanobis or Cook's distance threshold was surpassed (Field, 2018). Therefore, they remained part of the dataset. Still, the results should be interpreted with caution. Lastly, several scales showed heteroscedasticity with more variability in residuals for low predicted values. Therefore, the analyses were corrected for heteroscedasticity.

All analyses were conducted in SPSS IBM 29 and included a cut-off score for statistical significance of $p < .05$. For Hypothesis 1, paired samples *t*-tests were conducted to examine whether applicants perceive the structured form as fairer overall and as having higher face

validity, consistency, predictive validity, and opportunity to perform compared to the CV application. By doing so, means of fairness perceptions of the structured form were compared with means of fairness perceptions of the CV application, with application type being the within-subjects factor. For Hypotheses 2 and 3, simple linear regressions were conducted. First, identity centrality was examined as predictor and fairness perceptions (overall, face validity, consistency, predictive validity, and opportunity to perform) as outcomes for Hypothesis 2. Second, for Hypothesis 3, negative public regard was examined as predictor, and fairness perceptions (overall, face validity, consistency, predictive validity, and opportunity to perform) as outcomes. Hypothesis 4 was tested with several mediation analyses, performed in the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2022). Each mediation analysis included 5000 bootstrapped samples and a 95% confidence interval. Identity centrality and negative public regard represented the independent variables, with perceived discrimination representing the mediator and overall fairness, predictive validity, and opportunity to perform representing the dependent variables.

## Results

### Descriptives

Means, standard deviations, and correlations of the study variables are displayed in Table 1a for the whole sample and in Table 1b for minority and majority applicants separately. As shown, minority applicants scored higher on ethnic centrality ($r = .42$, $p < .001$), experienced more negative public regard ($r = .42$, $p < .001$), and more perceived discrimination ($r = .32$, $p = .005$) than majority applicants. Moreover, age correlated negatively with sex for both minority ($r = -.48$, $p = .004$) and majority ($r = -.44$, $p = .004$) applicants, indicating that the sample contained a relatively large representation of older male participants in both groups. Additionally, higher negative public regard was associated with greater perceived discrimination for both minority ($r = .53$, $p = .002$) and majority ($r = .35$, $p = .025$) applicants.

Furthermore, for minority applicants, higher identity centrality was associated with higher face validity of the CV application ($r = .39$, $p = .027$) and perceived discrimination was close to being negatively related with consistency of the structured form ($r = -.34$, $p = .051$), indicating that applicants may perceive lower consistency in the structured form when they experience more discrimination. For majority applicants, higher negative public regard was associated with lower overall fairness ($r = -.39$, $p = .012$) and consistency ($r = -.32$, $p = .040$) of the structured form. Similarly, higher perceived discrimination was associated with lower overall fairness ($r = -.45$, $p = .003$), predictive validity ($r = -.34$, $p = .032$), and opportunity to perform ($r = -.32$, $p = .043$) of the CV application for majority applicants. Lastly, higher age was associated with higher predictive validity of the CV and the structured form (respectively, $r = .31$, $p = .046$; $r = .45$, $p = .004$) and with higher opportunity to perform of the CV and the structured form (respectively, $r = .31$, $p = .050$; $r = .53$, $p < .001$) for majority applicants.

**Hypotheses Testing**

For Hypothesis 1, applicants were expected to perceive the structured form as fairer (overall, face validity, consistency, predictive validity, and opportunity to perform) than the CV application. As shown in Table 2, the results show that applicants viewed the structured form as fairer overall ($t(73) = 2.33$, $p = .023$, $d = .27$, 95% CI [0.05, 0.59]), as having higher face validity, ($t(73) = 4.49$, $p < .001$, $d = .52$, 95% CI [0.26, 0.67]), as having higher consistency, ($t(73) = 3.62$, $p < .001$, $d = .42$, 95% CI [0.24, 0.84]), and as having higher predictive validity ($t(73) = 2.51$, $p = .014$, $d = .29$, 95% CI [0.05, 0.43]) than the CV application. However, applicants experienced the structured form and the CV application as comparable regarding opportunity to perform ($t(73) = 1.40$, $p = .166$, $d = .16$, 95% CI [-0.07, 0.41]). Therefore, Hypothesis 1(a-d) was supported, but Hypothesis 1e was not.

**Table 1a**

*Overall Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations*

| Variables | *M* | *SD* | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Sex | 1.61 | 0.49 | - | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Age | 30.69 | 13.37 | -.46* | - | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Education | 3.50 | 0.82 | -.19 | -.11 | - | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4. Ethnicity | 1.45 | 0.50 | -.06 | .05 | .15 | - | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5. IC | 3.31 | 1.60 | .06 | .01 | .09 | .42* | (.92) | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6. NPR | 2.70 | 1.19 | -.05 | -.02 | .14 | .42* | .25* | (.82) | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 7. PD | 1.66 | 0.62 | -.03 | .07 | .11 | .32* | .06 | .53* | (.91) | | | | | | | | | | |
| 8. OF CV | 3.08 | 0.95 | -.01 | .14 | -.15 | .19 | .18 | .15 | -.14 | (.94) | | | | | | | | | |
| 9. OF SF | 3.40 | 1.00 | .11 | .16 | -.15 | -.04 | -.23* | -.21 | -.15 | .29* | (.94) | | | | | | | | |
| 10. PV CV | 2.41 | 0.82 | -.19 | .15 | -.08 | .11 | .02 | -.12 | -.13 | .56* | .12 | (.84) | | | | | | | |
| 11. PV SF | 2.65 | 0.81 | -.12 | .21 | -.13 | .02 | -.10 | -.12 | -.01 | .19 | .41* | .49* | (.82) | | | | | | |
| 12. FV CV | 3.42 | 0.87 | .04 | .00 | -.16 | -.10 | .03 | -.10 | .01 | .17 | -.04 | .33* | .07 | (.72) | | | | | |
| 13. FV SF | 3.88 | 0.70 | .10 | .08 | .08 | -.14 | .03 | -.15 | -.09 | .01 | .29* | -.02 | .18 | .38* | (.68) | | | | |
| 14. OTP CV | 2.74 | 0.94 | -.13 | .18 | -.22 | .16 | -.05 | .07 | -.06 | .41* | .21 | .59* | .47* | .20 | .07 | (.91) | | | |
| 15. OTP SF | 2.91 | 0.92 | -.17 | .21 | -.04 | .08 | -.02 | .02 | .05 | .15 | .41* | .32* | .59* | .11 | .34* | .37* | (.90) | | |
| 16. C CV | 2.87 | 1.03 | -.01 | .15 | -.12 | .13 | .04 | -.04 | -.11 | .58* | .19 | .46* | .15 | .13 | -.01 | .14 | .11 | (.81) | |
| 17. C SF | 3.41 | 1.03 | .12 | -.02 | .02 | -.08 | -.24* | -.26* | -.27* | .16 | .63* | .10 | .40* | .01 | .19 | .06 | .23* | .22 | (.88) |

*Note.* *N* = 74. Reliabilities (α) are presented on the diagonal. The variables are coded as follows: Sex (1 = male, 2 = female), Education (1 = secondary education, 2 = vocational education and training, 3 = professional higher education, 4 = research-oriented higher education), Ethnicity (1 = majority, 2 = minority). CV = curriculum vitae, SF = structured form, IC = identity centrality, NPR = negative public regard, PD = perceived discrimination, OF = overall fairness, PV = predictive validity, FV = face validity, OTP = opportunity to perform, C = consistency. *$p < .05$.

**Table 1b**

*Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for Ethnic Majority and Minority Groups*

| Variables | M<br>Maj.; Min. | SD<br>Maj.; Min. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Sex | 1.63; 1.58 | 0.49; 0.50 | - | -.48* | -.10 | .32 | .15 | -.03 | .13 | -.02 | -.21 | -.13 | -.19 | .07 | -.30 | -.16 | .06 | -.05 |
| 2. Age | 30.07; 31.45 | 13.81; 12.97 | -.44* | - | -.09 | .01 | -.09 | .27 | -.09 | -.02 | -.10 | -.10 | .15 | .01 | .00 | -.20 | -.04 | -.25 |
| 3. Education | 3.39; 3.64 | 0.92; 0.65 | -.23 | -.14 | - | -.13 | .06 | .04 | -.27 | -.26 | -.07 | -.24 | -.11 | .08 | -.29 | .02 | .06 | -.15 |
| 4. IC | 4.05; 2.71 | 1.38; 1.56 | -.11 | -.04 | .15 | - | .18 | -.10 | .21 | -.27 | -.06 | -.04 | .39* | .22 | -.06 | -.01 | .13 | -.14 |
| 5. NPR | 2.25; 3.26 | 0.97; 1.21 | -.20 | -.02 | .11 | -0.1 | - | .53* | .18 | -.05 | -.24 | -.06 | -.06 | .01 | -.13 | .23 | -.09 | -.19 |
| 6. PD | 1.49; 1.89 | 0.42; 0.75 | .01 | -.21 | .11 | -.09 | .35* | - | -.07 | -.08 | -.08 | .12 | -.01 | -.11 | .00 | .17 | -.17 | -.34 |
| 7. OF CV | 2.92; 3.28 | 0.95; 0.93 | -.10 | .28 | -.13 | .03 | -.01 | -.45* | - | .49* | .32 | .18 | .12 | .15 | .06 | -.02 | .55* | .40* |
| 8. OF SF | 3.43; 3.35 | 0.97; 1.06 | .22 | .31 | -.08 | -.21 | -.39* | -.25 | .15 | - | .18 | .30 | -.11 | .32 | .22 | .19 | .29 | .56* |
| 9. PV CV | 2.32; 2.51 | 0.86; 0.77 | -.16 | .31* | -.11 | .00 | -.15 | -.34* | .72* | .08 | - | .69* | .30 | .01 | .40* | .30 | .24 | .32 |
| 10. PV SF | 2.67; 2.63 | 0.82; 0.80 | -.11 | .45* | -.08 | -.20 | -.23 | -.21 | .19 | .51* | .35* | - | .24 | .14 | .45* | .52* | .14 | .37* |
| 11. FV CV | 3.50; 3.32 | 0.90; 0.84 | .20 | -.10 | -.17 | -.18 | -.07 | .14 | .25 | .02 | .37* | -.04 | - | .54* | .30 | .22 | .13 | .09 |
| 12. FV SF | 3.97; 3.77 | 0.66; 0.75 | .12 | .16 | .11 | -.02 | -.23 | .06 | -.06 | .26 | -.01 | .22 | .24 | - | .20 | .34 | .10 | .25 |
| 13. OTP CV | 2.61; 2.91 | 0.93; 0.93 | .04 | .31* | -.23 | -.19 | .14 | -.32* | .65* | .23 | .71* | .48* | .17 | -.00 | - | .44* | -.34 | .12 |
| 14. OTP SF | 2.85; 2.99 | 0.91; 0.94 | -.17 | .53* | -.10 | -.10 | -.27 | -.20 | .26 | .62* | .33* | .64* | .04 | .37* | .30 | - | -.11 | .16 |
| 15. C CV | 2.75; 3.02 | 1.10; 0.92 | -.05 | .25 | -.25 | -.14 | -.14 | -.17 | .58* | .13 | .58* | .15 | .16 | -.07 | .43* | .24 | - | .49* |
| 16. C SF | 3.48; 3.32 | 1.00; 1.08 | .27 | .18 | .14 | -.32* | -.32* | -.15 | -.01 | .69* | -.05 | .44* | -.06 | .12 | .03 | .30 | .05 | - |

*Note.* Correlations above the diagonal relate to ethnic minority applicants (*N* = 33), correlations below the diagonal relate to ethnic majority applicants (*N* = 41). The variables are coded as follows: Sex (1 = male, 2 = female), Education (1 = secondary education, 2 = vocational education and training, 3 = professional higher education, 4 = research-oriented higher education). Maj. = majority, Min. = minority, CV = curriculum vitae, SF = structured form, IC = identity centrality, NPR = negative public regard, PD = perceived discrimination, OF = overall fairness, PV = predictive validity, FV = face validity, OTP = opportunity to perform, C = consistency. *$p$ < .05.

**Table 2**

*Paired Samples T-test Results for Fairness Perceptions of Structured Forms and Curriculum Vitae Applications*

| Dependent Variables | SF | | CV | | $t(73)$ | $p$ | Cohen's $d$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *M* | *SD* | *M* | *SD* | | | |
| Overall fairness | 3.30 | 1.01 | 3.08 | 0.95 | 2.33 | .023* | .27 |
| Predictive validity | 2.65 | 0.81 | 2.41 | 0.82 | 2.51 | .014* | .29 |
| Opportunity to perform | 2.91 | 0.92 | 2.74 | 0.94 | 1.40 | .166 | .16 |
| Face validity | 3.88 | 0.70 | 3.42 | 0.87 | 4.49 | < .001* | .52 |
| Consistency | 3.41 | 1.03 | 2.87 | 1.03 | 3.62 | < .001* | .42 |

*Note.* $N = 74$. SF = structured form, CV = curriculum vitae. *$p < .05$.

Hypotheses 2 and 3 proposed that minority applicants' ethnic identity (respectively, identity centrality and negative public regard) negatively relates to fairness perceptions (a) overall, (b) in terms of predictive validity, and (c) in terms of opportunity to perform, but does not relate to face validity (d) or consistency (e) of the CV application, and not to fairness perceptions of the structured form. The results show no significant relations for minorities' ethnic identity centrality and overall fairness of the CV application ($R^2 = .05$, $F(1, 31) = 1.46$, $p = .236$), and the structured form ($R^2 = .07$, $F(1, 31) = 2.44$, $p = .129$). Similarly, there was no significant relation between identity centrality and predictive validity for the CV application ($R^2 = .00$, $F(1, 31) = 0.10$, $p = .755$) or for the structured form ($R^2 = .00$, $F(1, 31) = 0.05$, $p = .824$). No significant relations were found between identity centrality and opportunity to perform in the CV application ($R^2 = .00$, $F(1, 31) = 0.10$, $p = .757$), or in the structured form ($R^2 = .00$, $F(1, 31) = 0.00$, $p = .970$). However, the relationship between identity centrality and face validity was found to be positive and significant for the CV application ($R^2 = .15$, $F(1, 31) = 5.41$, $p = .027$), but not for the structured form ($R^2 = .05$, $F(1, 31) = 1.61$, $p = .214$). These results do not provide support for Hypothesis 2 (a-d). Additionally, no significant relations were found between identity centrality and consistency in the CV application ($R^2 =$

.02, $F$ (1, 31) = 0.57, $p$ = .456), or the structured form ($R^2$ = .02, $F$ (1, 31) = 0.60, $p$ = .446), supporting Hypothesis 2e.

Similarly, no significant relations were found between minorities' negative public regard and overall fairness in the CV application ($R^2$ = .03, $F$ (1, 31) = .99, $p$ = .327), and in the structured form ($R^2$ = .00, $F$ (1, 31) = .06, $p$ = .806). In addition, no significant relations were found for negative public regard and predictive validity of the CV application ($R^2$ = .06, $F$ (1, 31) = 1.86, $p$ = .182), and the structured form ($R^2$ = .00, $F$ (1, 31) = .11, $p$ = .742). Moreover, there were no significant relations between negative public regard and opportunity to perform in the CV application ($R^2$ = .02, $F$ (1, 31) = .51, $p$ = .479), and in the structured form ($R^2$ = .05, $F$ (1, 31) = 1.74, $p$ = .197). Lastly, both face validity and consistency were not significantly related to negative public regard in the CV application (respectively, $R^2$ = .00, $F$ (1, 31) = 0.12, $p$ = .731; $R^2$ = .01, $F$ (1, 31) = 0.23, $p$ = .632) or in the structured form (respectively, $R^2$ = .00, $F$ (1, 31) = 0.01, $p$ = .944; $R^2$ = .03, $F$ (1, 31) = 1.09, $p$ = .304). The results are not in line with Hypothesis 3(a-c), but provide support for Hypothesis 3d and 3e.

According to Hypothesis 4, perceived discrimination mediates the expected relation between minority applicant's ethnic identity (centrality and negative public regard) and fairness perceptions (overall, predictive validity, and opportunity to perform) for the CV application, but not for the structured form. The previous results do not show significant relations between ethnic identity and fairness perceptions, thereby not satisfying the required conditions for mediation (Field, 2018). Nevertheless, indirect effects could still provide insight in potential pathways and nuances of how ethnic identity might influence fairness perceptions. As such, the indirect effect was explored. As shown in Table 3, results indicate that the indirect effects of identity centrality on fairness perceptions (overall, predictive validity, and opportunity to perform) through perceived discrimination were not significant for either the CV application (respectively, $b$ = .00, BootSE = .02, Boot95% CI [-0.03, 0.06], $b$ = .00, BootSE = .02,

Boot95% CI [-0.05, 0.04], $b$ = .00, BootSE = .02, Boot95% CI [-0.05, 0.05]), or the structured form (respectively, $b$ = .01, BootSE = .03, Boot95% CI [-0.03, 0.07], $b$ = -.01, BootSE = .02, Boot95% CI [-0.06, 0.03], $b$ = -.01, BootSE = .03, Boot95% CI [-0.06, 0.05]). Thus, Hypothesis 4a was not supported. Similarly, indirect effects of negative public regard on fairness perceptions (overall, predictive validity, and opportunity to perform) through perceived discrimination were not significant for either the CV application (respectively, $b$ = -.09, BootSE = .11, Boot95% CI [-0.35, 0.09], $b$ = .02, BootSE = .07, Boot95% CI [-0.12, 0.17], $b$ = .04, BootSE = .10, Boot95% CI [-0.13, 0.29]), or the structured form (respectively, $b$ = -.04, BootSE = .11, Boot95% CI [-0.25, 0.20], $b$ = .07, BootSE = .10, Boot95% CI [-0.11, 0.29], $b$ = .03, BootSE = .10, Boot95% CI [-0.18, 0.25]). Therefore, Hypothesis 4b was also not supported.

**Table 3**

*Indirect Effects of Ethnic Identity on Minority Applicants' Fairness Perceptions Through Perceived Discrimination*

| Independent and Dependent Variables | CV | | | SF | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Indirect Effect (BootSE) | Boot95% CI | | Indirect Effect (BootSE) | Boot95% CI | |
| | | *LL* | *UL* | | *LL* | *UL* |
| Identity centrality | | | | | | |
| Overall fairness | .00 (.02) | -0.03 | 0.06 | .01 (.03) | -0.03 | 0.07 |
| Predictive validity | .00 (.02) | -0.05 | 0.04 | -.01 (.02) | -0.06 | 0.03 |
| Opportunity to perform | .00 (.02) | -0.05 | 0.05 | -.01 (.03) | -0.06 | 0.05 |
| Negative public regard | | | | | | |
| Overall fairness | -.09 (.11) | -0.35 | 0.09 | -.04 (.11) | -0.25 | 0.20 |
| Predictive validity | .02 (.07) | -0.12 | 0.17 | .07 (.10) | -0.11 | 0.29 |
| Opportunity to perform | .04 (.10) | -0.13 | 0.29 | .03 (.10) | -0.18 | 0.25 |

*Note.* $N$ = 33. BootSE = bootstrapped estimations of the standard error, LL = lower limit, UL = upper limit, Boot95% CI = bootstrapped estimation of the confidence interval. The indirect effect is statistically significant when the confidence interval does not include zero.

**Additional Analyses**

Given the significant positive correlation between ethnicity (i.e., majority, minority) for identity centrality, negative public regard, and perceived discrimination, additional analyses were conducted to explore mean differences in these variables between minority and majority groups. Moreover, in light of results of Odijk et al. (2024), I explored whether there were differences in fairness perceptions between these groups. Results of independent *t*-tests are portrayed in Table E (Appendix E). Compared to majority applicants, minority applicants experienced more identity centrality ($t(72) = -3.92$, $p < .001$, $d = -.92$, 95% CI [-2.03, -0.66]), negative public regard ($t(72) = -3.97$, $p < .001$, $d = -.93$, 95% CI [-1.51, -0.50]), and perceived discrimination ($t(72) = -2.73$, $p = .009$, $d = -.68$, 95% CI [-0.69, -0.11]). No significant group differences were found in the various fairness perceptions.

Although no significant mediation effect was found for minority applicants, negative public regard among majority applicants was positively correlated with perceived discrimination, which in turn was negatively correlated with overall fairness, predictive validity, and opportunity to perform for the CV application. Therefore, I performed additional analyses to explore an indirect mediation effect. Considering the positive correlation between age and predictive validity and opportunity to perform of the CV and the structured form (see Table 1b), it was included as a control variable. The analyses showed significant negative indirect effects for negative public regard through perceived discrimination on overall fairness ($b = -.16$, BootSE = .08, Boot95% CI [-0.34, -0.02]), and opportunity to perform ($b = -.12$, BootSE = .07, Boot95% CI [-0.27, -0.02]) for the CV application. In contrast, there was no significant indirect effect of negative public regard on predictive validity of the CV application through perceived discrimination ($b = -.08$, BootSE = .06, Boot95% CI [-0.24, 0.00]). These results indicate that, for majority applicants, negative public regard indirectly and negatively

influences fairness perceptions of the CV application (overall and opportunity to perform, but not predictive validity) through perceived discrimination.

## Discussion

Applicant fairness perceptions of job selection procedures have important consequences for reactions such as rejection, acceptance, and post-offer intentions (Hausknecht et al., 2004; Ryan & Ployhart, 2000). By investigating the impact of ethnic identity, I aimed to examine how individual differences within minority groups affect fairness perceptions regarding the CV application and the structured form. Drawing on relative deprivation theory (Davis, 1959), I expected that variations in ethnic identity centrality and negative public regard would influence fairness perceptions of the CV application through perceived discrimination. Current findings indicate that structured forms were generally perceived as fairer than traditional CV applications. However, results did not demonstrate individual variations in fairness perceptions within the minority group, yet provide current literature with important theoretical implications.

### Theoretical Implications

First, in line with prior research (Heard et al., 2002; Odijk et al., 2024; Westwood et al., 2008), applicants perceived the structured form as fairer overall and as exhibiting higher face validity, predictive validity, and consistency than the CV application. The higher perceived face and predictive validity of the structured form may be attributed to its direct targeting of job-relevant characteristics, as opposed to CV applications that may include information that appears irrelevant, such as one's ethnicity. Furthermore, the higher perceived consistency in the administration of the structured form may have been noted due to its uniform questions, while CV applications allow for individual interpretation in content and design. However, applicants did not perceive differences in opportunity to perform between the application types. Although structured forms may allow elaboration on job-relevant abilities, applicants may feel

limited in the extent to which they can demonstrate skills and experiences beyond those addressed in the form. The CV application provides space for these experiences, potentially leading to the comparable fairness perceptions. Overall, these findings suggest that the structured form is not only objectively fairer, but it is also perceived as such by applicants in terms of overall fairness, face validity, predictive validity, and consistency, yet not regarding opportunity to perform.

Second, prior research indicates greater disparities in fairness perceptions between CVs and structured forms for minority applicants compared to majority applicants (Heard et al., 2002; Odijk et al., 2024). Interestingly, current exploratory analyses demonstrated no such differences between minority and majority applicants. This inconsistency may lie in the categorisation of minority and majority applicants. In the current study, western and non-western minorities were grouped together, whereas Odijk et al. (2024) distinguished between these groups. Differences between western and non-western applicants may be more pronounced due to potentially more noticeable distinctions in names or appearances on the CV application, compared to the differences between the Dutch majority ethnic group and non-Dutch minorities. However, the current categorisation indicated that minority applicants experienced higher identity centrality, negative public regard, and perceived discrimination than majority applicants. Thus, it appears that grouping minorities together may capture meaningful perceptive differences regarding these aspects.

Although no differences in fairness perceptions appeared between minority and majority groups, I expected variations within the minority group, based on ethnic identity. Minority applicants with high ethnic identity centrality or negative public regard were expected to evaluate the application process more critically and be more sensitive to information that confirms negative stereotypes, reflected in heightened awareness of procedural unfairness and group-based threats (Anseel, 2011; Johnson et al., 2006; Leach et al., 2008). However, current

results suggest that this may not necessarily lead to lower fairness perceptions as identity centrality and negative public regard did not relate to minorities' overall fairness perceptions, perceived predictive validity, perceived opportunity to perform, and consistency. In contrast, face validity of the CV application was positively related to identity centrality, implying that minority applicants with high identity centrality perceive the CV application as more fair in terms of face validity than applicants with low identity centrality. This finding should be interpreted with caution as face validity had a medium internal consistency. Overall, the results suggest that ethnic identity does not predict minority applicants' scepticism towards the fairness in CV applications. On the contrary, it may lead to higher face validity perceptions when ethnic identity is central to one's self-concept.

Several arguments can be made for the non-significant findings. In accordance with the conducted power analysis, the current sample size may have been too small to find individual differences within ethnic minority groups. Additionally, the current vacancy featured a traineeship position in retail management. Traineeships are typically targeted at young individuals in a specific field. As the present sample included participants of varying age groups and educational backgrounds, the job application may not have been equally relevant to each participant. This may have had a confounding effect on fairness perceptions, potentially resulting in non-significant findings.

Alternatively, theoretical explanations can be considered. For example, individuals do not always activate their most central identity (Morris, 2013). This may particularly hold true for minority applicants who are aware of their disadvantaged position. The awareness of their position may motivate them to engage in strategies intended to shape the impression that others (e.g., recruiters) have of them (Roberts, 2005). One strategy involves distancing oneself from one's social identity to increase personal distinctiveness (i.e., individuation). This may ensure minority applicants' positive self-image (Brewer et al., 1993; van Prooijen & van Knippenberg,

2000). Additionally, individuation may reduce minority applicants' tendency to make in- and outgroup comparisons with applicants from the majority group (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). By allowing applicants to separate themselves from the negative stereotypes they believe others hold of them, this process may override the impact of negative public regard on fairness perceptions (Ambady et al., 2003). Research by Mussweiler et al. (2000) supports the notion that emphasising distinct aspects of oneself can be a protective strategy against adverse social comparisons. Although they may recognise potential group-based procedural unfairness, the openly interpretable content and design of the CV enable applicants to highlight their personal identity and individual self-concept. This may enhance applicants' experienced uniqueness and positive professional self-image (Roberts, 2005), thereby reducing their experienced relative deprivation and its potential effects on fairness perceptions. Recent literature on personalised recruitment recognises that individuation resonates with applicants, suggesting that applicants are concerned with their individuality and personal treatment in the selection process (Huang et al., 2023; Pfiffelmann et al., 2023). Thus, balancing the individual and collective self-concepts may lead to a more nuanced perspective of fairness perceptions where minority applicants who are high and low in identity centrality or negative public regard may have comparable views.

Third, in line with Operario and Fiske (2001) and Weiner (1985), it was expected that perceived discrimination would mediate the expected relationship between minorities' ethnic identity and fairness perceptions of the CV application. Although direct effects between ethnic identity and fairness perceptions were not significant, the indirect effect was investigated to explore potential pathways and nuances between these concepts. Contrary to expectations, the current results show no mediation effect. One explanation could be that applicants who are low and high in centrality may have varying fairness perceptions that are influenced by perceived discrimination in different ways (Branscombe & Ellemers, 1998). For example, fairness

perceptions of applicants with low identity centrality may be affected through perceived discrimination and the belief that applicants should be considered on an individual level, not based on their ethnic group membership. On the other hand, fairness perceptions of applicants with high identity centrality may be affected through perceived discrimination and the belief that the applicant's ethnic group should not be considered inferior.

Surprisingly, additional analyses showed that majority, and not minority, applicants with high negative public regard perceived the CV application as less fair (overall and regarding opportunity to perform) than those with low negative public regard, when mediated by perceived discrimination. Although the effect was unexpected, the larger sample size of the majority applicants may have facilitated a significant indirect effect, whereas the smaller sample size of minority applicants may have withheld detection of significant results.

Alternatively, these findings may be attributed to minority and majority applicants' difference in perceived discrimination. Present additional analyses indicate that minority applicants experience more discrimination than majority applicants, thereby possibly viewing discrimination as a common and uncontrollable occurrence (Branscombe & Ellemers, 1998). This can lead to feelings of helplessness, which may cause minority applicants to refrain from attributing anticipated occurrences to prejudice, regardless of their experienced degree of negative public regard, in order to maintain a sense of control (Branscombe & Ellemers, 1998). Therefore, they may be less likely to have negative public regard influence their fairness perceptions through perceived discrimination. In contrast, majority applicants, who experience a lower baseline of discrimination, may still be affected by additional negative public regard. Considering that they are less accustomed to discrimination, majority applicants may use fairness attributions to justify anticipated personal criticisms that might otherwise harm their self-concept (Branscombe & Ellemers, 1998). For example, they could reason that they expect to be criticised due to discriminating stereotypes. Thus, fairness perceptions may not vary

through perceived discrimination with differences in identity centrality or negative public regard among minority applicants but may vary through perceived discrimination with differences in negative public regard among majority applicants.

**Practical Implications**

Building upon the theoretical insights, the current findings highlight several important implications for practice. Most importantly, organisations and practitioners should consider substituting CV applications with standardised alternatives, such as structured forms, that include identical questions for all applicants. Besides limiting recruiter bias and thereby ensuring more objective fairness of the selection procedure, standardisation also resonates with fairness perceptions of applicants themselves. Hence, structured forms limit the risk of adverse applicant reactions such as negative recommendation and litigation intentions towards organisations.

However, it should be considered that adopting standardised application forms may conflict with certain applicants' needs or preferences. Specifically, uniform questions may restrict applicants' ability to express their individuality, including their unique qualifications and experiences. In contrast, CVs allow for personalisation in content and design, thereby allowing for strategies that may promote applicants' expectation of individualised acknowledgement by the recruiter. A personalised approach to application procedures may reduce minority applicants' perceived barriers to hiring prospects and consequential adverse behavioural reactions. It should be noted however, that adding personal information does not necessarily decrease actual discrimination (Thijssen et al., 2021). Taken together, this implication illustrates a need for a balanced approach to recruitment practices that address subjective, as well as objective fairness concerns.

Lastly, the present study provides implications for both minority and majority applicants themselves. The finding that ethnic identity relates to majority applicants' fairness

perceptions, albeit indirectly, suggests that implicit characteristics related to one's self-concept may influence daily experiences, such as fairness perceptions in selection procedures. In a context marked by persistent discrimination, understanding how identity impacts fairness perceptions may improve applicants' personal expectation management. Specifically, it provides insight into possible discrepancies between applicants' experiences and actual fairness of selection procedures. A reflective attitude towards one's identity may encourage applicants to adopt a strategic role during application procedures, aligning expectations with organisational practices. Consequently, applicants may be better equipped to make informed application decisions, such as selecting positions in organisations that align with their fairness values.

**Strengths, Limitations and Future Research**

The current study contains several strengths. For instance, applicant perceptions were investigated with more nuance than prior research by distinguishing fairness in multiple dimensions. Similarly, ethnic identity was examined in terms of centrality and negative public regard, providing a more detailed understanding of the dynamics potentially underlying fairness perceptions. Lastly, the study included a diverse sample that represented various minority groups, ages, and educational backgrounds, which enhances the generalisability of the findings.

Despite these advantages, the current results should be interpreted in light of several limitations. First, the desired sample size for detecting a significant effect with sufficient power, particularly for mediation, was not attained. Therefore, more subtle effects or relationships may have gone undetected. Moreover, the current study did not differentiate among minority groups, possibly overlooking inter-group differences, such as western and non-western minority groups. Future research is encouraged to explore these distinctions to provide a more comprehensive understanding of potential variety among minority groups.

Second, an attention check was included in the survey to identify participants who were not paying attention. However, a relatively large number of participants failed to attend the attention check, indicating possible unclarity in its phrasing. Consequently, the difference in scores between those who passed and those who failed the attention check may not indicate whether participants devoted their full attention to the study. Rather, response variations may point to individual differences. Considering that participants who did not pay full attention to the survey may not have been recognisable, the results should be interpreted with caution and it is recommended that future studies ensure a clearly and accurately phrased attention check.

Third, the job vacancy may not have been targeted to all applicants to similar degrees given the varying age groups and educational backgrounds. This may have had a confounding effect on fairness perceptions, potentially resulting in non-significant results. Confirming this, age was significantly related to majority applicants' perceived predictive validity and opportunity to perform. Future research should adapt the vacancy to apply to all applicants appropriately. Alternatively, considering that outcomes of the current experimental study may differ in real-world job applications, future research could investigate fairness perceptions in actual selection procedures.

Following these limitations, future research is encouraged to explore application methods that can be personalised, while minimising group-based bias and perceived unfairness. The current study did not find evidence for the role of ethnic identity in explaining individual differences in fairness perceptions of minority applicants. Therefore, future research could investigate the boundary conditions under which ethnic identity affects these fairness perceptions and explore other variables that may result in individual differences within minority groups. As suggested, individuation may play a role in neutralising the effect of ethnic identity on fairness perceptions of the CV application. Additionally, there may be differences between ethnic identity exploring (i.e., acquiring knowledge about one's ethnicity), which may

increase unfairness perceptions, and belonging (i.e., well-defined and positive recognition of the significance of one's ethnicity in one's life), which may decrease unfairness perceptions (Gonzales-Backen et al., 2018).

**Concluding Remarks**

This study advanced research on fairness perceptions of job applications by examining the role of ethnic identity and perceived discrimination in structured and unstructured procedures. Findings indicate that applicants view structured forms as fairer than CV applications, suggesting that standardisation of application procedures may constitute a promising strategy for improving perceived fairness among applicants. However, the role of ethnic identity and perceived discrimination appears complex and may vary across contexts and individuals. Notably, for majority applicants, but not minority, negative public regard indirectly lowered fairness perceptions of the CV application through perceived discrimination. All things considered, this study is among the first to highlight the importance of within ethnic subgroup differences in applicant fairness perceptions by examining the role of ethnic identity and perceived discrimination. The results encourage future research to integrate both objective and subjective measures of fairness within organisational settings for a more comprehensive understanding of individual differences in applicant perceptions. Additionally, they underscore the need for organisations to be attentive to both perceived and actual fairness concerns in recruitment practices.

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**Appendix A**

**Demographic Comparison Ethnic Minority and Majority Participants**

**Table A**

*Demographic Characteristics of Minority and Majority Participants*

|  | Minority | | Majority | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | *n* | *%* | *n* | *%* |
| Sex |  |  |  |  |
| Female | 19 | 57.6 | 26 | 63.4 |
| Male | 14 | 42.4 | 15 | 36.6 |
| Age |  |  |  |  |
| 18 - 24 | 15 | 45.5 | 25 | 61.0 |
| 25 - 34 | 7 | 21.2 | 7 | 17.1 |
| 35 - 44 | 6 | 18.2 | 1 | 2.4 |
| 45 - 54 | 2 | 6.1 | 4 | 9.8 |
| 55 + | 3 | 9.1 | 4 | 9.7 |
| Education |  |  |  |  |
| Secondary education | 1 | 3.0 | 3 | 7.3 |
| Vocational education and training | 0 | 0.0 | 3 | 7.3 |
| Higher professional education | 9 | 27.3 | 10 | 24.4 |
| Higher research-oriented education | 23 | 69.7 | 25 | 61.0 |

*Note.* $N = 74$, *N* ethnic minority = 33, *N* ethnic majority = 41.

**Appendix B**

**Job Application Traineeship Retail Management Higher Education**

**Leading Retail Is Pioneering by Thinking, Daring, and Doing**

The Retail Management Traineeship is a three-year program, specifically designed for our future leaders. Your personal development is central to this program. Quality guidance, training, and challenging projects are the foundation for a promising career at our headquarters. During these three years you will gain operational, as well as professional knowledge and experience. In addition, you get the opportunity to work for various banners (e.g., Albert Heijn, Gall & Gall, Etos of Ahold Delhaize) in departments such as:

- Finance

- HR

- IT

- (Digital) Marketing/PR

- Supply Chain

- Sales

- Management/Business development

**What Will You be Doing as a Trainee?**

In your first position at the headquarters, you are immediately a part of the team and you receive much responsibility from day one. Simultaneously you follow personal development trainings and you receive intensive guidance of professionals. After your first year, you get to know the supermarket/ distribution centre, but above all, the development of your leadership qualities will be the main focus. Everything you learn during your training, you can directly apply in practice. In the third year you bring all your knowledge, ideas, and skills back to the headquarters. Together with the trainee coordinator you will find a new position to delve deeper in a department of your choice.

**Who Are You as Retail Management Trainee?**

You are (nearly) graduated in higher education and a starter in the job market. We believe in the value of diversity, so any educational background is welcome! Someone who meets our profile:

*You Are Analytically Strong*

As trainee you will think about opportunities and solutions for our company together with professionals. Regardless of which area you will specialize in, it is important that you are able to recognize the core issues and make connections between situations or information. Even under pressure you know to make the right decisions and are able to distinguish between main and side issues.

*You Are Customer-Oriented and Have Commercial Understanding*

As Retail employee, it is crucial to recognize the wishes and needs of customers and act accordingly. If required, you ask further questions to form a complete image of the customer's needs and provide them with tailored solutions. It is important that you consistently clarify and verify the customer's asks.

*Networking Comes Naturally to You*

Once you are in, it is vital that you can build a broad network. You develop and maintain relationships internally and externally so you can make use of these connections at the right times to achieve the organization's goals.

*You Can Effectively Influence Others*

It is important that you enjoy collaborating with others and naturally take the lead, which comes in handy when you become Assistant-Manager in your second year. Once you found a new position in your third year, you will work more independently than in the first year. You will lead a minimum of 150 to 250 employees and are co-responsible for millions in revenue. As part of the management team you ensure that everything runs optimally and you

know exactly how you get your colleagues on board with your plans and ideas.

**What Do We Offer?**

We offer you attractive employment conditions, such as a personal career coach, a personal training and development program, a fixed contract, and a good starter's salary that will quickly grow along with you.

**Appendix C**

**Structured Form Application**

To ensure that we can assess all candidates in equal manners regarding their suitability for the position, we ask you to answer several application questions. The structured application form is based on the profile that you could read in the Retail vacancy. Because all candidates answer the same questions, we get a clear overview of the extent to which you meet the job-requirements. Please answer the following questions in 200-300 words. You can draw on experiences related to (volunteer)work, study and/or other personal experiences, unless mentioned otherwise.

1. As trainee you will think about opportunities and solutions for our company together with professionals. It is important that you are able to recognize the core issues and make connections between situations or information. Therefore, we are curious to your ability to analyse problems: Which significant work- or study related problem have you faced in the past year? Name and describe one situation. Which steps did you take at the problem inventory? What was the cause of the problem, according to you?

2. As Retail employee, it is crucial to recognize the wishes and needs of customers and act accordingly: Which personal qualities are essential for effective interaction with customers? Name at least two. Additionally, please describe a situation in which you applied these qualities. When did/ didn't this work?

3. Once you are in, it is vital that you can build a broad network. You develop and maintain relationships internally and externally so you can make use of these connections at the right times to achieve the organization's goals: Which steps would you undertake, as a trainee, to build a broad network within the organisation? Please name at least two behavioural examples and explain why these would be effective.

4. Within this position you will often collaborate with others. As part of the management team you ensure that collaboration runs optimally and it is crucial that you know how to get your colleagues on board with your plans and ideas: *Imagine a meeting is scheduled for you and your colleagues to discuss potential improvements to your team's current workflow. Several team members, including yourself, have come up with good ideas and added them to the agenda. However, you are convinced that your idea will yield the best results and you want to persuade the group of this.* How would you prepare yourself for such a meeting? Consequently, how would you present yourself during the meeting? Please describe the steps you would take to ensure the meeting runs smoothly and how you would succeed in getting your colleagues on board with your plan.

5. What is your educational background? Have you completed your courses? If so, what was your average final grade? If not, when do you expect to finish?

**Appendix D**

**Scale-items of Fairness Perceptions, Ethnic Identity, and Perceived Discrimination**

**Overall Fairness Perception** (based on Wang et al., 2019):

1. Generally speaking, I feel this application type is fair.

2. The process of the application type is fair for all applicants.

3. The procedure of the application type is fair and reasonable.

**Perception of Predictive Validity** (based on Smither et al., 1993):

1. If one fails to pass the first selection, this clearly indicates one cannot handle the job.

2. I am confident the application type predicts how an applicant will perform on the job.

3. My performance on the application is a good indicator of my ability to do the job.

4. Applicants who perform well on this application type are more likely to perform well on the job than applicants who perform poorly.

**Face Validity** (based on Smither et al., 1993):

1. I did not understand what the application type had to do with the job (reverse coded).

2. I could not see any relation between the application type and the job requirements (reverse coded).

3. It would be clear to anyone that the application type is related to the job.

4. The content of the application type was clearly related to the job.

**Opportunity to perform** (based on Bauer et al., 2001):

1. I could really show my skills and capacities by means of this application type.

2. This application type allowed me to show my (job-)skills.

3. This application type allows applicants to show what they are truly capable of.

4. I was able to show what I am capable of by means of this application type.

**Consistency of administration** (based on Bauer et al., 2001):

1. This application type is executed in the same way for all applicants.

2. There are no differences in the way this application type is administered to different applicants.

3. HR-professionals do not distinguish how they treat applicants with this application type.

**Identity Centrality** (based on Leach et al., 2008)

1. I often think about the fact that I am a member of my ethnic-cultural group.

2. The fact that I am a member of my ethnic-cultural group is an important aspect of my identity.

3. Being a member of my ethnic-cultural group is an important aspect of how I see myself.

**Negative Public Regard** (based on Luhtanen and Crocker 1992)

1. Overall, my ethnic-cultural group is considered good by others (reverse coded).

2. Most people consider my ethnic-cultural group, on the average, to be more ineffective than other ethnic-cultural groups.

3. In general, others respect my ethnic-cultural group (reverse coded).

4. In general, others think that the ethnic-cultural group that I am a member of is unworthy.

**Perceived Discrimination** (based on Williams et al., 1997)

1. You are treated less politely than other people.

2. You are treated with less respect than other people.

3. You receive worse service than others in restaurants or shops.

4. People act as if they are better than you.

5. People act as if you are dishonest.

6. People act as if they are scared of you.

7. You get scolded or insulted.

8. You get threatened or harassed.

9. People act as if you are dumb.

# Appendix E

## Additional Independent Samples *T*-tests

**Table E**

*Independent Samples T-test Results of Dependent Variables by Majority and Minority Applicants*

| Dependent Variables | Majority | | Minority | | $t(72)$ | $p$ | Cohen's $d$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *M* | *SD* | *M* | *SD* | | | |
| Overall fairness CV | 2.92 | 0.95 | 3.28 | 0.93 | -1.65 | .103 | -.39 |
| Overall fairness SF | 3.43 | 0.97 | 3.35 | 1.06 | 0.33 | .744 | .08 |
| Face validity CV | 3.50 | 0.90 | 3.32 | 0.84 | 0.89 | .377 | .21 |
| Face validity SF | 3.97 | 0.66 | 3.77 | 0.75 | 1.21 | .232 | .28 |
| Consistency CV | 2.75 | 1.10 | 3.02 | 0.92 | -1.14 | .259 | -.27 |
| Consistency SF | 3.48 | 1.00 | 3.32 | 1.08 | 0.65 | .521 | .15 |
| Predictive validity CV | 2.32 | 0.86 | 2.51 | 0.77 | -0.96 | .340 | -.23 |
| Predictive validity SF | 2.63 | 0.82 | 2.67 | 0.80 | -0.20 | .839 | -.05 |
| Opportunity to perform CV | 2.61 | 0.93 | 2.91 | 0.93 | -1.38 | .173 | -.32 |
| Opportunity to perform SF | 2.85 | 0.91 | 2.99 | 0.94 | -0.67 | .503 | -.16 |
| Identity centrality | 2.71 | 1.38 | 4.05 | 1.56 | -3.92 | < .001* | -.92 |
| Negative public regard | 2.25 | 0.97 | 3.26 | 1.21 | -3.97 | < .001* | -.93 |
| Perceived discrimination | 1.49 | 0.42 | 1.89 | 0.75 | -2.73 | .009* | -.68 |

*Note.* $N = 41$ majority, $N = 33$ minority. CV = curriculum vitae, SF = structured form. *$p <$ .05.