

**ICS PhD Project 5:**

**Being the target of ethnic discrimination: A multi-actor study of discrimination attributions at the workplace (PhD project 1 in TARGETS)**

**Aim**

To understand: 1) on which basis an event or situation is perceived as discriminatory; 2) on which basis people are more likely to agree that an event or situation is discriminatory (consensus formation); 3) the contextual conditions under which consensus or disagreement around discrimination attributions emerge

**Theoretical background**

"*We regret to inform you that...*" is a message that many job seekers receive, especially those belonging to an ethnic minority group. While some of these rejections might be due to discrimination, hiring decisions are taken behind closed doors and on the basis of limited information. This ambiguity, together with the fact that discrimination often takes subtle forms (e.g. contact avoidance or nonverbal behaviour), leaves people uncertain as to whether discrimination has actually occurred (Barreto & Ellemers, 2015). Targets, perpetrators, bystanders and other organizational actors may vary in the extent to which they perceive the same behaviour or situation as discriminatory. Unfortunately, empirical studies have analysed their perceptions in isolation. Our key contribution is that we will compare the discrimination attributions made by different actors while they are exposed to the same, possibly discriminatory, situations. We will also focus on the institutional and organizational contexts within which these interactions take place.

**Research design**

We focus on discrimination attributions made within organizational settings. We will design factorial survey experiments and study how different actors (e.g. recruiters, job applicants, bystanders) react to hypothetical scenarios that could be perceived as discriminatory. We will conceptualize discrimination as multidimensional, and these dimensions (e.g. subtlety, perceived intentionality) will be randomly varied in the scenarios. This multi-actor design allows us to examine the conditions under which people are more likely to (dis-)agree that an event or situation is discriminatory. We will field the factorial survey experiments in four countries characterized by very different institutional contexts (e.g. Britain, Netherlands, Germany, Spain). The cross-national design allows us to test, for example, whether people living in countries with stronger anti-discrimination laws may be more aware of their legal rights and more readily and unanimously perceive discrimination in situations of ambiguity.

**Project**

This project is part of a larger ERC-funded project ('TARGETS') on ethnic discrimination in the labour market. Combining insights from sociology, social and organizational psychology, sociolegal and organizational studies, TARGETS approaches the study of ethnic discrimination from a multi-actor and dynamic perspective.

**Literature**

- Barreto, M., & Ellemers, N. (2015). Detecting and experiencing prejudice: New answers to old questions. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 52, 139-219.
- Jones, K. P., Arena, D. F., Nittrouer, C. L., Alonso, N. M., & Lindsey, A. P. (2017). Subtle discrimination in the workplace: A vicious cycle. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, 10(1), 51-76.

**Project initiators**

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**Location**

Utrecht University