

# Perceived group discrimination and psychological well-being in ethnic minority adolescents

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## Abstract

Few studies have examined the relation of perceived group discrimination and psychological well-being. Yet, there are theoretical reasons to expect such a relation, and members of ethnic minorities usually perceive higher levels of group discrimination than personal discrimination. In this research, we investigated the associations between perceived group discrimination and several indicators of psychological well-being among 354 Moroccan-Dutch adolescents controlling for perceived personal discrimination and testing the extent to which ethnic group identification moderated these associations. Our results showed that higher perceived group discrimination was associated with higher parent- and adolescent-reported internalizing (e.g., fear, worries) and externalizing problems (e.g., anger, aggression) but not with lower personal self-esteem. For personal self-esteem a negative association with perceived personal discrimination was found. Moreover, for adolescents with a strong ethnic group identification, there was no relationship between perceived group discrimination and parent- and adolescent-reported internalizing problems, while for those with a weak ethnic group identification, perceived group discrimination was associated with more parent- and adolescent-reported internalizing problems. Conversely, perceived group discrimination was unrelated to personal self-esteem among low identifiers, but positively related to it among high identifiers. Results indicate that minority group members can be negatively affected by discrimination, even if they do not experience it at first hand. Thus, future research on the psychological effects of discrimination should include group perceptions.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

There is ample evidence that people tend to perceive less discrimination directed against themselves than against their fellow group members, a phenomenon known as the Personal/Group-Discrimination Discrepancy (PGDD; Taylor, Wright, Moghaddam, & Lalonde, 1990; Taylor, Wright, & Porter, 1993; Verkuyten, 2002). Several explanations have been proposed and tested for the PGDD, and whereas cognitive mechanisms are important, there is also agreement that motivational factors play a role. More specifically, people are assumed to minimize their perceptions of personal discrimination, as those may be psychologically threatening, thwart their sense of belonging, and

put a strain on their social interactions (see for reviews, Bourguignon, Seron, Yzerbyt, & Herman, 2006; Kessler, Mummendy, & Leisse, 2000; Postmes, Branscombe, Spears, & Young, 1999). Given the notion that people tend to underestimate their perceptions of personal discrimination, it is quite remarkable that most studies on the psychological consequences of discrimination have predominantly relied on those personal perceptions (see Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009; Schmitt, Branscombe, Postmes, & Garcia, 2014).

To better understand what it means to be a member of a stigmatized group it is essential to go beyond people's personal experiences—which may be downplayed, underestimated, or even denied—and also

examine their perceptions of the way their fellow group members are treated. Moreover, as we will explain, the impact of perceived group discrimination may be either stronger or weaker than that of perceived personal discrimination, due to potential perceptions of group discrimination as particularly pervasive or to the likelihood of discarding self-blame especially when perceiving group discrimination. However, only a handful of studies have investigated the unique contribution of perceived group discrimination (in addition to personal discrimination) to the psychological well-being of minority group members (Armenta & Hunt, 2009; Bourguignon et al., 2006; Shorey, Cowan, & Sullivan, 2002; Verkuyten, 1998). Also, most of this research has focused on personal and collective self-esteem as a psychological outcome and neglected other aspects of well-being such as internalizing and externalizing problems. Moreover, various studies have shown that in-group identification can be an important moderator of people's reactions to personal discrimination (Greene, Way & Pahl, 2006; Hansen & Sassenberg, 2006; Romero & Roberts, 2003; Schaafsma, 2011; Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2003) but we know very little about the role of group identification in relation to their perceptions of group discrimination.

With the present research, we aimed to address these gaps in the literature. We worked with a sample of Moroccan-Dutch adolescents living in the Netherlands to examine how perceptions of group in addition to personal discrimination contribute to different aspects of psychological well-being (personal self-esteem, self- and parent-reported internalizing problems, and self- and parent-reported externalizing problems) and whether this depends on the degree of in-group identification. People of Moroccan descent are a typical minority group in Dutch society. They have a low socioeconomic status, and face relatively high levels of prejudice and discrimination (Andriessen, Nievers, & Dagevos, 2012; Gijbbers & Dagevos, 2010). Moreover, Moroccan-Dutch adolescents suffer from relatively high levels of externalizing problems, and an increasing number of them apply for youth assistance (Adriaanse, Veling, Doreleijers, & Van Domburgh, 2014; Vollebergh, 2002).

## 2 | THE UNIQUE NATURE OF PERCEIVED GROUP DISCRIMINATION

Many studies have been conducted on the psychological effects of perceived discrimination, and the vast majority of those studies have focused on people's perceptions of their individual experiences (see for reviews, Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009; Pachter & Garcia Coll, 2009; Paradies, 2006; Schmitt et al., 2014). Discrimination involves unequal treatment based on group characteristics that are often beyond the victim's control (e.g., ethnicity, disability, or gender). Experiencing it can be stressful because it indicates that one is negatively regarded and not accepted by others (Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002), that one is unfairly treated and the world is unjust (see Major, Kaiser, O'Brien & McCoy, 2007), and that one has limited control and mastery over one's life (Branscombe

& Ellemers, 1998). Accordingly, the meta-analyses by Pascoe and Smart Richman (2009) and Schmitt and colleagues (2014) showed modest but significant negative overall relationships between perceived personal discrimination and, respectively, mental health ( $r = -0.16$ ) and psychological well-being ( $r = -0.23$ ). However, such effects do not seem to be confined to discrimination at the personal level. Schmitt et al. (2014) also analyzed the considerably smaller number of studies examining the impact of perceived group discrimination, and they found an overall small but significant negative effect ( $r = -0.15$ ).

Few studies to date have examined the effects of personal and group discrimination simultaneously. However, there are strong theoretical reasons to expect that perceived group discrimination has unique effects on psychological well-being beyond those of perceived personal discrimination. A first reason is that discrimination appears to be especially harmful when it is seen as pervasive, because the awareness of widespread discrimination across time and context implies that one's life is or can be seriously hampered (see Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002). Thus, "the effects of making attributions to prejudice may be fundamentally different depending on whether the attribution is specific to a single instance of prejudice or whether it is reflective of a more general sense of stable and pervasive prejudice against one's group" (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999, p. 136). By definition, group discrimination implies much more pervasiveness than personal discrimination, as it is directed against many rather than one. Perceiving consistent and widespread prejudice against one's group can be highly disconcerting regardless of one's personal experiences with discrimination. Even if people experience little discrimination in their current personal lives, there is always the risk that their "luck" may change in the future. This is especially relevant for the group included in the present research: young people who have to find their place in society.

Another reason to examine the effects of perceived group discrimination in addition to those of perceived personal discrimination is that the former may have different implications for self-blame. In social psychology there has been an ongoing debate about the exact meanings of perceived discrimination, and according to the so-called discounting hypothesis (Crocker & Major, 1989) it can be self-protective to perceive discrimination in conditions where prejudice is very likely. The explanation is that perceptions of discrimination might function as external attributions for negative personal outcomes. This means that people can ascribe their lack of success to the prejudices of others rather than blaming it on their own personal shortcomings which would in turn protect their affect and self-esteem (e.g., Allport, 1954; Crocker & Major, 1989; Goffman, 1963; Major, Kaiser, & McCoy, 2003). There is empirical support for these assertions, but it has been also argued and shown that the attributions involved in perceived discrimination are still partly internal as they refer to an often important characteristic of the self, i.e., one's group membership (Major et al., 2003; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002). As a consequence, people who perceive personal discrimination might still wonder whether they are somehow personally responsible for their plight. However, we can expect that the attributional "advantage" of

perceiving group discrimination is larger and more straightforward. The perception that one's whole group is seen as a victim of discrimination dissipates the possibility of personal responsibility and therefore self-blame is rather unlikely (see Bourguignon et al., 2006).

Based on these two reasons, two seemingly contradictory expectations can be formulated for the unique effects of perceived group discrimination. On the one hand it can be argued that perceptions of group discrimination are relatively harmful because they indicate that the prejudice against one's group is extensive, widespread, and likely to continue. Yet, on the other hand, those perceptions may provide more opportunities for self-protection as people might feel good about themselves for managing their lives despite the widespread prejudice against their group. In the present study, we try to solve this paradox by looking at different aspects of psychological well-being.

### 3 | DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

Few studies have simultaneously examined the links between perceived group and personal discrimination and psychological well-being, and most of them have focused on personal self-esteem as an aspect of the latter. The results of those studies are somewhat mixed. For example, Verkuyten (1998) found that perceived group discrimination had an indirect negative effect on personal self-esteem via collective self-esteem in a sample of Turkish-Dutch minority adolescents. This indicates that adolescents who perceived more discrimination against their co-ethnics were less proud of their Turkish background (collective self-esteem), and as a result they were less positive about themselves (personal self-esteem). Yet, despite this negative pathway, the overall correlation between perceived group discrimination and personal self-esteem was not significant in that study (Verkuyten, 1998). Other research found that—unlike perceived personal discrimination—perceived group discrimination was unrelated to personal self-esteem (Shorey et al., 2002), or even had positive unique effects on it (Armenta & Hunt, 2009; Bourguignon et al., 2006). This clearly supports the notion that group discrimination may provide more opportunities for personal self-protection than personal discrimination. Thus, in the present study we tested the hypothesis that perceived group discrimination is positively related to personal self-esteem when taking perceived personal discrimination into account.

However, even if perceived group discrimination does not lead to self-blame it could still have negative effects on other aspects of psychological well-being. Major and colleagues (2003) examined the effects of attributions to prejudice on different kinds of emotions. Consistent with the discounting hypothesis, they found that women felt less depressed after an experience of personal rejection by a male confederate when they attributed this experience to the male's sexism. However, no such effects were found for anxious and hostile emotions (Crocker, Voelkl, Testa, & Major, 1991; McCoy & Major, 2003). Likewise, Thijs and Piscoi (2016) found evidence for protective effects of perceived discrimination on global self-esteem, but not on emotional problems such as worrying and sadness. Thus, even in the

absence of self-blame people may still feel apprehensive about experiences with discrimination, as well as angry about the injustice of the prejudice directed against them or their group (see also Hansen & Sassenberg, 2006; Major et al., 2007). And although the last type of reaction initially involves the perpetrators of discrimination, it might develop into attempts to assert the self, and more generalized patterns of externalizing behavior (see Smart Richman & Leary, 2009).

To thoroughly investigate the implications of perceived group discrimination for psychological well-being, we did not only examine the self-esteem of the Moroccan-Dutch youth, but also the levels of internalizing and externalizing problems they experienced. The broad-band distinction between internalizing and externalizing problems is frequently made in clinical and developmental psychology, and it captures the most important emotional and behavioral problems. Internalizing problems are predominantly harmful for the self and they include fear, worries, social withdrawal, overcontrol, and somatic complaints. By contrast, externalizing problems are predominantly disturbing to others and they involve anger, aggression, misconduct, and undercontrolled behaviors (Wenar & Kerig, 2000). Previous research among ethnic minority adolescents has clearly shown that perceived personal discrimination is positively related to both internalizing and externalizing problems (e.g., Brody et al., 2006; Nyborg & Curry, 2003; Santana, Almeida-Filho, Roberts, & Cooper, 2007) which supports the notion that it increases both fear and worries as well as hostile and angry reactions. Given its pervasive nature, we also expected that the adolescents' perceptions of group discrimination were associated with more internalizing and externalizing problems (see also Brittan et al., 2015; Schmitt et al., 2014). To conduct a strong test of this hypothesis, and to control for the impact of common method variance (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003), we used both self- and parent-reports of the adolescents' problems. Parents are generally perceived as the most reliable informants to gain insight into the psychological and behavioral problems of their offspring (e.g., Mash & Hunsley, 2005). Moreover, several studies have shown large discrepancies in information provided by adolescents versus their parents, and discrepancies have been found to be even more pronounced in ethnic minority populations (e.g., Roberts, Alegria, Roberts, & Chen, 2005; Van de Looij-Jansen, Jansen, De Wilde, Donker, & Verhulst, 2011). If similar results can be obtained with parent- and self-reports this adds to the robustness of our findings.

### 4 | ETHNIC GROUP IDENTIFICATION

How people respond to perceptions of discrimination directed at either themselves or their ethnic group likely depends on their in-group identification. A strong group identification involves feelings of pride and attachment to the group, and it signals perceived opportunities for social support from in-group members. Those elements may protect against the negative consequences of perceived discrimination, in particular the sense of being socially excluded and low personal self-esteem (Branscombe et al., 1999; Mossakowski, 2003). Put differently, people with a positive group identification

derive personal benefits from their group membership which can counteract the consequences of perceiving discrimination (a negative aspect of their group membership) and make it more bearable (Greene et al., 2006; Hansen & Sassenberg, 2006; Romero & Roberts, 2003; Schaafsma, 2011; Wong et al., 2003). The moderating role of ethnic group identification has been tested in several studies, but all studies focused on perceived personal and not so much on perceived group discrimination. The research conducted among adolescents has shown inconsistent results, with some studies finding evidence for buffering effects of ethnic identification and other studies finding no effects on well-being (Dulin-Keita, Hannon, Fernandez, & Cockerham, 2011; Seaton, Neblett, Upton, Hammond, & Sellers, 2011; Wong et al., 2003).

Based on the former, we expected that adolescents with a strong ethnic identification, and thus more confidence about their ethnic group membership, are more likely to benefit from the attributional "advantage" provided by perceived group discrimination resulting in relatively high personal self-esteem. We also expected that their high ethnic identification would protect them against the anticipated unfavorable effect of perceived group discrimination on their internalizing problems. However, we did not anticipate that ethnic group identification would buffer against the effect of perceived group discrimination on externalizing problems. The reason for this is that there might be two opposite effects that could cancel each other out. As mentioned, we anticipated that feeling positive and secure about one's ethnic group membership allows one to cope with the consequences of discrimination for the self (self-esteem and internalizing problems), and it could also reduce the need for acting out or reassert the self and thereby lead to less externalizing problems. But at the same time, a strong group identification might make individuals more focused on discrimination directed against their group (see Major & Sawyer, 2009) and therefore more likely to react with externalizing behaviors.

## 5 | OVERVIEW OF THE PRESENT STUDY

In this study, we investigated the unique associations between perceived group discrimination and different aspects of psychological well-being (personal self-esteem, internalizing and externalizing problems) when controlling for perceived personal discrimination in a sample Moroccan-Dutch adolescents. We tested the hypotheses that perceived group discrimination is related to more personal self-esteem, but also with more internalizing and externalizing problems. Next, we expected that ethnic group identification would strengthen the anticipated already positive association between perceived group discrimination and self-esteem, while it would weaken the positive association between perceived group discrimination and internalizing problems. For externalizing problems, no interaction between ethnic group identification and perceived group discrimination was expected.

Although the focus of this study was not on perceived personal discrimination, we anticipated it to be related to lower self-esteem

and more internalizing and externalizing problems, and we also tested whether ethnic group identification would diminish these anticipated relations. Finally, we explored the interaction between perceived group discrimination and perceived personal discrimination as we had no clear hypothesis for it. On the one hand, it could be argued that the attributional "advantage" of perceived group discrimination with respect to self-esteem is particularly strong for individuals who perceive a lot of personal discrimination: When one's fellow group members are seen as suffering from discrimination as well, one's personal experiences with discrimination are more likely to be perceived as a consequence of widespread prejudice against one's group rather than one's personal shortcomings (see Armenta & Hunt, 2009). Yet, the exact opposite could be anticipated as well: When individuals see high levels of discrimination directed at their fellow in-group members but not against themselves, they might conclude that they themselves are relatively well off. In fact, they might pride themselves on managing their lives despite the widespread prejudice against their group, which could even enhance their self-esteem ("I must be really nice if they are discriminated so often while I am not"; see Bourguignon et al., 2006).

## 6 | METHOD

### 6.1 | Participants

Initially, the group of participants consisted of 387 Moroccan immigrant adolescents ( $M_{age} = 14.28$ ,  $SD = 2.15$ ; 51.6% girls) and their parents ( $n = 376$ ). These data were part of a larger study on school-going immigrant youth, for which 1,127 children aged 4 through 18 with at least one parent born in Morocco were randomly selected from municipal registers of two large cities in the Netherlands (The Hague and Rotterdam). One of the parents of these children was requested to participate in the study and 73% of them consented to participation. From that original sample of parents, 415 parents were interviewed about their 11- to 18-year-old child, and they were asked permission to interview this child. Ten parents did not grant permission to interview their child, and 29 adolescents refused to participate themselves (response rate 91%,  $n = 376$ ). Furthermore, another 11 adolescents whose parents refused to participate themselves were interviewed, resulting in a total of 387 adolescent interviews. Only parent interviews for which an adolescent interview was available were used in the current study, which means that 376 parent interviews were included in the analyses for the current study.

Parents and adolescents were sent an introductory letter in Dutch and Arabic describing the aims of the study. About 1 to 2 weeks later, a trained Moroccan female interviewer visited the respondents' homes. In total, about 10 interviewers conducted all interviews which took about one hour. The interviewer asked one of the parents of the randomly selected adolescent to participate in the study. After the interview, parents were asked for permission to interview their child. If they consented, the adolescents were asked to participate. These interviews with the parents and adolescents preferably took place in a quiet space in the house in order to ensure privacy. In both parent and adolescent interviews, the interviewer read the questions aloud

and filled out the questionnaire on the family, peer and societal context and child emotional and behavioral problems. Written, active informed consent was obtained from both parent and adolescents. The research was reviewed and approved by the ethical committee of the University.

Thirty percent of the adolescents were born in Morocco, 69.5% in the Netherlands and 0.5% in another country. Eighty percent of the parent interviews were conducted with mothers, 17.9% with fathers and 1.9% with others (e.g., aunt, stepparent, adult brother, depending on with whom the child lived). In 95% of the families both parents were born in Morocco. Ninety percent of the participating parents were married. In 70% of the families, both parents were not educated at all or only completed elementary school.

We used the listwise deletion procedure to exclude cases with missing variables on the core variables.<sup>1</sup> The number of missing values ranged from 0.3% (self-reported internalizing and externalizing problems) to 3.6% (parent-reported internalizing and externalizing problems, mainly because parent data were unavailable for 11 of the adolescents). The final sample consisted of 354 participants ( $M_{age} = 14.28$ ,  $SD = 2.12$ ; 51.4% girls).

## 6.2 | Measures

### 6.2.1 | Perceived Personal and Ethnic Group Discrimination

To assess *personal* discrimination, we asked the adolescents whether they felt discriminated against in five situations: In the streets, at school, in shops, when going to a bar or discotheque, and by the police. Next, adolescents were asked whether they felt *Moroccans as a group* were discriminated in the same five situations (Stevens, Vollebergh, Pels & Crijnen, 2005). Answers ranged from never to always on a 4-point scale (0 = never, 1 = sometimes, 2 = often, 3 = always). Scale scores were calculated by summing the score of all items and subsequently dividing this score through five. Only for personal experiences of discrimination, adolescents were allowed to indicate that a particular item did not refer to them. Eighteen per cent of the adolescents indicated that the item “when going to a bar or discotheque” did not refer to him/her, and 11% provided this answer for the item “by the police.” For the other items (in the street, at school or in shops), this answer was only given in less than 1.5%. Since these adolescents did not perceive discrimination in this particular situation simply because the item was not applicable to them, these adolescents were given a value of 0 for the particular item. Cronbach’s alpha was 0.84 for perceived ethnic group discrimination and 0.77 for perceived personal discrimination.

### 6.2.2 | Ethnic Group Identification

We used the 6-item Psychological Acculturation Scale to measure the respondent’s sense of belonging to Moroccan people and culture (Stevens, Pels, Vollebergh & Crijnen, 2004; Tropp, Erkut, Coll, Alarcon

& Garcia, 1999). Adolescents were for instance asked whether they have a lot in common with Moroccan people, whether Moroccan people understand them, whether they feel proud to be a part of Moroccan culture, and whether they share most of their beliefs and values with Moroccan people (0 = highly disagree—4 = highly agree). Scale scores were calculated by summing the score of all items and subsequently dividing this score through six. Previous research has demonstrated strong psychometric properties for this instrument, as indicated by confirmatory factor analyses and (test-retest) reliability (Stevens et al., 2004). In the current study, Cronbach’s alpha was 0.80 for this scale.

### 6.2.3 | Personal Self-Esteem

The 5-item global self-worth subscale from the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (Renouf & Harter, 1990) was administered to tap adolescents’ overall perception of their worth as a person. Questions are written in a “structured alternative format” designed to reduce the tendency to give socially desirable responses. For instance: “Some teenagers really like the kind of person they are BUT Other teenagers often don’t like the kind of person they are.” The respondent was first asked to decide whether (s)he is more like the teenagers described in the first, or the second, part of the statement. After making this choice, the participant was then asked to check one of two boxes at the side of each statement, indicating whether that description is only “Sort of true for me” or “Really true for me.” Half of the items were worded to begin with the positive description and half began with the negative description of one’s worth. The items are scored on a 4-point scale (0–3), where higher scores indicated a higher sense of self-worth. Scale scores were calculated by summing the score of all items and subsequently dividing this score through 5. Cronbach’s alpha was 0.79 for this scale.

### 6.2.4 | Internalizing and Externalizing Problems

To obtain standardized self-reports of problem behaviors, the adolescents were asked to fill out the Youth Self-Report (YSR) (Achenbach, 1991), by rating the occurrence of problems in the preceding 6 months on a 3-point scale: 0 = not true, 1 = somewhat or sometimes true, and 2 = very true or often true. Internalizing was indicated by the sum of scores on items in the Withdrawn, Somatic Complaints, and Anxious/Depressed syndrome profiles (e.g., feeling lonely, having headaches, feeling worthless) and Externalizing by the sum of scores on the Delinquent and Aggressive Behavior syndromes (e.g., destroying stuff of others, getting into fights). Scale scores were calculated by summing the score of all items and subsequently dividing this score by 31 (internalizing problems) or 30 (externalizing problems). In this study, we used the Dutch translation of the YSR, since all adolescents were educated in Dutch. The adolescents’ parents (or caregivers, see above) completed the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL), which has the same format as the YSR and identical items. The CBCL was translated into Moroccan-Arabic. Independent back translations into Dutch were performed to check the accuracy of the translation.

<sup>1</sup>For two participants age scores were missing. We used EM to impute these missing values.

**TABLE 1** Intercorrelations, means, and standard-deviations of study variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	M	SD
1. Perceived group discrimination									0.97	0.66
2. Perceived personal discrimination	0.48**								0.28	0.40
3. Ethnic group identification	0.02	0.07							3.33	0.64
4. Self-esteem	-0.03	-0.11*	0.04						2.31	0.59
5. YSR internalising problems	0.15**	-0.03	-0.20**	-0.28**					0.28	0.22
6. YSR externalising problems	0.24**	0.13*	-0.04	-0.08	0.46**				0.26	0.19
7. CBCL internalising problems	0.07	-0.07	-0.16**	-0.21**	0.57**	0.24**			0.22	0.18
8. CBCL externalising problems	0.19**	0.12*	-0.06	-0.02	0.21**	0.57**	0.31**		0.20	0.19
9. Age	0.15**	0.13*	-0.00	0.04	-0.00	0.10	-0.01	0.08	14.28	2.12
10. Gender (1 = girl, 0 = boy)	-0.06	-0.28**	-0.15**	-0.04	0.20**	-0.14**	0.10	-0.14**	0.51	-

\* $p < 0.05$ . \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

Test-retest reliability and internal consistency were found to be acceptable to good for the Dutch translation of the original American version of the YSR (Verhulst, Van der Ende, & Koot, 1997). In this sample, Cronbach's alphas for the CBCL Internalizing and Externalizing scales were, respectively, 0.79 and 0.87, and for the YSR Internalizing and Externalizing scales they were, respectively, 0.85 and 0.83.

## 7 | RESULTS

### 7.1 | Preliminary Analyses

Table 1 shows the intercorrelations, means, and standard deviations for the study variables. There was a strong positive correlation between perceived group discrimination and perceived personal discrimination. Perceived group discrimination was positively related to self- and parent-reported externalizing problems and to adolescent-reported internalizing problems, while no association with personal self-esteem was found. Perceived personal discrimination was positively related to self- and parent-reported externalizing problems and negatively related to personal self-esteem. Ethnic group identification was unrelated to adolescents' discrimination perceptions but associated with lower levels of self- and parent-reported internalizing problems. Next, there were positive correlations between the measures for internalizing and externalizing problems. Finally, personal self-esteem was negatively related to self- and parent-reported internalizing problems, but unrelated to the externalizing problems of the adolescents.

Consistent with previous research, the mean score of perceived group discrimination was considerably higher than that of perceived personal discrimination ( $t(353) = 21.935$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Further analysis indicated a strong skewness (2.05,  $SE = 0.13$ ) and kurtosis (4.83,  $SE = 0.26$ ) for perceived personal discrimination, but not for perceived group discrimination (skewness and kurtosis of, respectively, 0.42, and  $-0.04$ ). Additionally, the self- and parent-reported problem scores were not normally distributed (skewness values from 0.99 to 1.57, and

kurtosis values from 0.72 to 3.57), and, therefore, we log transformed these variables before including them in our main analyses.

### 7.2 | Main Analyses

To test our hypotheses, we conducted two multivariate GLM analyses, in which self-esteem and the log-transformed measures of self- and parent-reported internalizing and externalizing problems were the dependent variables, and the adolescents' perceptions of personal and group discrimination as well as their ethnic group identification the independent variables. As age and gender were related to these variables (see Table 1), they were included as controls. For ease of interpretation all measures except gender were standardized (z-scores).

In the first analysis, we examined the main effects of the predictors, by simultaneously including age, gender, perceived group discrimination, perceived personal discrimination, and ethnic group identification as predictors. The multivariate associations (Pillai's) were significant for perceived group discrimination,  $F(5, 344) = 4.60$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ,  $\eta^2_{\text{partial}} = 0.063$ , and perceived personal discrimination,  $F(5, 344) = 2.51$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  $\eta^2_{\text{partial}} = 0.035$ , and marginally so for ethnic group identification,  $F(5, 344) = 2.11$ ,  $p = 0.06$ ,  $\eta^2_{\text{partial}} = 0.030$ . The univariate effects are shown in Table 2. Perceived group discrimination was unrelated to self-esteem, yet positively associated with more self- and parent-reported internalizing problems and more self- and parent-reported externalizing problems. For perceived personal discrimination, only one significant univariate association was found: Adolescents who reported higher levels of personal discrimination also reported lower self-esteem. Next to this, ethnic group identification was univariately related to less self-reported and parent-reported internalizing problems. Finally, there were no effects of age, but girls reported more internalizing problems than boys, and they scored lower on both measures of externalizing problems.

In the next analysis, we added the interactions of ethnic group identification with perceived personal and perceived group discrimination. For both interactions, the multivariate effect was significant,

**TABLE 2** GLM model coefficients for self-esteem, and self- and parent-reported internalizing and externalizing problems

	Self-esteem			YSR internalizing			CBCL internalizing			YSR externalizing			CBCL externalizing		
	B	$\eta^2_p$	R <sup>2</sup>	b	$\eta^2_p$	R <sup>2</sup>	b	$\eta^2_p$	R <sup>2</sup>	b	$\eta^2_p$	R <sup>2</sup>	b	$\eta^2_p$	R <sup>2</sup>
<b>Step 1</b>															
Age	0.54	0.003		-0.02	0.001		-0.01	0.000		0.06	0.004		0.05	0.003	
Gender <sup>a</sup>	-0.16	0.006		0.33**	0.026		0.12	0.003		-0.29**	0.020		-0.30**	0.022	
PGD <sup>b</sup>	0.03	0.001		0.21**	0.035		0.13*	0.013		0.25**	0.048		0.18**	0.025	
PPD <sup>c</sup>	-0.16*	0.018		-0.08	0.005		-0.11	0.008		-0.04	0.001		-0.01	0.000	
EGI <sup>d</sup>	0.04	0.001		-0.15**	0.024		-0.13*	0.018		-0.06	0.004		-0.08	0.006	
			0.009			0.080			0.029			0.070			0.063
<b>Step 2</b>															
EGI * PGD	0.15*	0.017		-0.25**	0.050		-0.19**	0.025		-0.10	0.008		-0.10	0.008	
EGI * PPD	-0.12	0.008		0.20**	0.023		0.14*	0.011		0.08	0.004		0.12	0.009	
			0.041			0.143			0.069			0.091			0.074

\* $p < 0.05$ . \*\* $p < 0.01$ . <sup>a</sup>boys = 0; girls = 1; <sup>b</sup>Perceived Group Discrimination; <sup>c</sup>Perceived Personal Discrimination; <sup>d</sup>Ethnic Group Identification.

respectively,  $F(5, 342) = 2.32, p < 0.05, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = 0.033$ , and  $F(5, 342) = 4.39, p < 0.05, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = 0.060$ . The univariate tests (see Table 2) showed a significant interaction effect on self-esteem for perceived group discrimination, and significant interaction effects on self-reported and parent-reported internalizing problems for both discrimination perceptions. However, the sign of these interactions differed for group and personal discrimination.

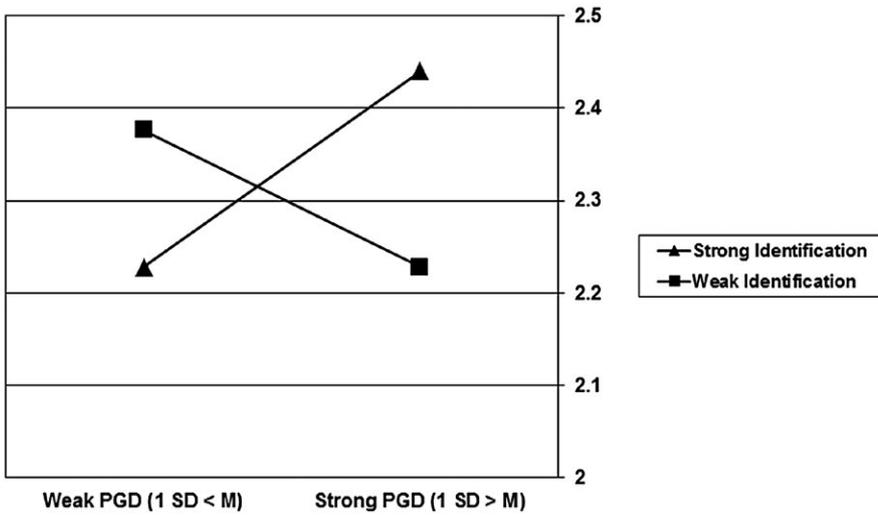
To examine the nature of these significant interactions, we used simple slope analyses. That is to say, we calculated the effects of the discrimination perceptions for adolescents with a weak versus a strong ethnic group identification (respectively, 1 SD below and 1 SD above the mean). Results showed that perceived group discrimination was unrelated to self-esteem when ethnic group identification was weak ( $b = -0.13, ns, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = 0.006$ ) but positively related to it when ethnic group identification was strong ( $b = 0.18, p < 0.05, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = 0.013$ ). Next, for strong identifiers, perceived group discrimination and perceived personal discrimination were unrelated to internalizing problems reported by the adolescents themselves (respectively,  $b = -0.04, ns, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = 0.001$ , and  $b = 0.11, ns, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = 0.005$ ) and their parents (respectively,  $b = -0.05, ns, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = 0.001$ , and  $b = 0.03, ns, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = 0.000$ ). However, for weak identifiers, perceived group discrimination was associated with more internalizing problems (respectively,  $b = 0.47, p < 0.01, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = 0.082$ , and  $b = 0.32, p < 0.01, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = 0.037$ ), whereas perceived personal discrimination was associated with less of these problems (respectively,  $b = -0.28, p < 0.01, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = 0.025$ , and  $b = -0.26, p < 0.05, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = 0.018$ ). The interaction results for perceived group discrimination were in line with our hypotheses and they are shown in Figures 1–3. For ease of interpretation, these figures show the results for the original (i.e., nontransformed and nonstandardized) variables.

For perceived personal discrimination the positive interactions were not expected. Therefore, and given the correlation between the two interaction terms ( $r = 0.39$ ) we reran the analyses with one interaction at a time. For perceived group discrimination, the interaction effects remained significant ( $p \leq 0.05$ ). However, once the interaction between perceived group discrimination and ethnic identification was removed from the model, the interaction effects for perceived personal discrimination were no longer significant ( $p > 0.19$ ), suggesting that they were not robust.

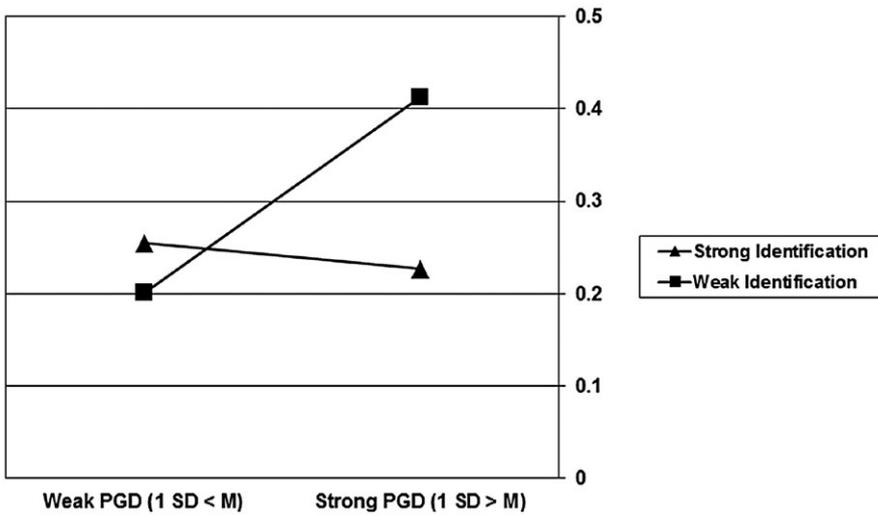
In the last step of our analyses, we explored whether the associations between perceived group discrimination and psychological well-being depended on the adolescents' perceptions of personal discrimination. Therefore, we added the interaction between perceived group and personal discrimination to the GLM model (directly after Step 2 in Table 2). The results showed that the multivariate effect of this interaction was not significant,  $F(5, 341) = 0.11, ns, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = 0.002$ , and the same held for the univariate tests ( $p > 0.56$ ). Thus, the effects of perceived group discrimination were independent of the degree of perceived personal discrimination.

### 7.3 | Discussion

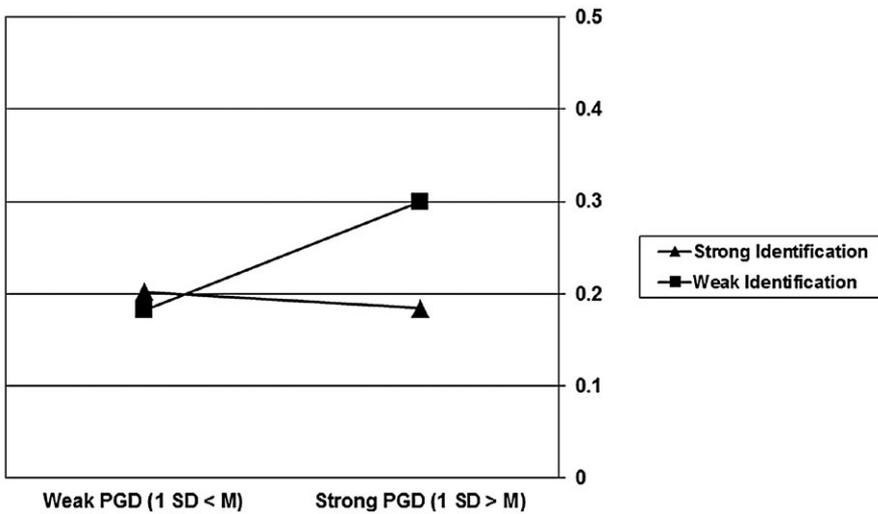
Many studies have focused on the psychological consequences of people's perceptions of personal discrimination in order to understand



**FIGURE 1** Relations between perceived group discrimination (PGD) and self-esteem for adolescents with a strong versus weak ethnic identification



**FIGURE 2** Relations between perceived group discrimination (PGD) and self-reported internalizing problems for adolescents with a strong versus weak ethnic identification



**FIGURE 3** Relations between perceived group discrimination (PGD) and parent-reported internalizing problems for adolescents with a strong versus weak ethnic identification

what it means to be a member of a stigmatized minority group. Yet, few studies have systematically examined the relations of perceived group discrimination and psychological outcomes while controlling for perceived personal discrimination (Armenta & Hunt, 2009; Bourguignon et al., 2006; Shorey et al., 2002; Verkuyten, 1998). Because members of ethnic minorities usually perceive higher levels of group than personal discrimination (Taylor et al., 1990; Taylor et al., 1993; Verkuyten, 2002), the present study investigated its unique contributions to the psychological well-being of Moroccan-Dutch adolescents. Whereas perceived personal discrimination was associated with lower self-esteem, perceived group discrimination was not. Moreover, among high-identifiers, perceived group discrimination was associated with higher personal self-esteem. These results are largely in line with former studies (Armenta & Hunt, 2009; Bourguignon et al., 2006; Shorey et al., 2002; Verkuyten, 1998), and suggest that the discounting hypothesis applies relatively well to perceptions of group discrimination. Self-blame may be less likely in the face of group versus personal discrimination as people cannot be personally held accountable for what happens to their group (see Bourguignon et al., 2006). Apparently, there is more attributional "advantage" in perceiving group discrimination when people are positive and confident about their ethnic group membership. It is important to note that there were no interactions between the adolescents' perceptions of personal and group discrimination in the prediction of self-esteem (as well as the other variables). Thus, we cannot conclude that perceiving discrimination against others from their group helped the adolescents to discount their own experiences with discrimination, or rather the opposite, to derive positive self-feelings from not being discriminated themselves.

Our results indicate that perceptions of group discrimination can have attributional advantage but they should not be considered harmless. As expected, these perceptions were uniquely related to more internalizing and externalizing problems, which fits with the notion that perceiving group discrimination is threatening and harmful because group discrimination is pervasive by definition (see Branscombe et al., 1999). The awareness that one's fellow group members are negatively treated based on their group memberships implies that prejudice is widespread and also that there is always the possibility of personal discrimination in the future. This can lead to self-focused internalizing problems such as worrying and anxiety, but also to indignation and anger directed against others who might be even unrelated to the experiences of discrimination. Specifically, "when expectations for success through conventional channels are low, individuals who believe that life is 'hopeless' may turn to more aggressive means of obtaining immediate rewards" (Guerra, Huesmann, Tolan, Van Acker, & Eron, 1995, p. 519). Importantly, these same relations were obtained when parents' reports of the adolescents' problems were relied on. This shows that our findings cannot be attributed to common method variance and attests to the robustness of our conclusions.

Fortunately, however, this research also suggests that the potentially detrimental effects of perceived group discrimination are not inevitable: As anticipated, there was an interaction with ethnic

identification, showing that perceived group discrimination was unrelated to both parent- and self-reported internalizing problems among high-identifiers. For those adolescents, the ethnic in-group was a source of belonging, connectedness, and pride, and this probably protected them from feeling sad and worrying about prejudice and group-based exclusion (see Branscombe et al., 1999; Schaafsma, 2011). Still, and as expected, ethnic identification did not moderate the association between perceived group discrimination and externalizing problems. Apparently, a strong group identification does not diminish feelings of anger and indignation about the injustice of discrimination or the need to act out (see Hansen & Sassenberg, 2006).

Notwithstanding the positive, bivariate correlations between perceived personal discrimination and externalizing problems, our study showed that perceived personal discrimination was not uniquely related to more internalizing and externalizing problems. These findings seem inconsistent with earlier studies among adolescents, but it is important to note that those studies did not include perceived group discrimination in their analyses (e.g., Brody et al., 2006; DuBois et al., 2002; Jasinskaja-Lahti & Liebkind, 2001; Liebkind & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2000; Wong et al., 2003). Moreover, ethnic identification did not mitigate the relationship between perceived personal discrimination and both parent- and adolescent-reported internalizing problems. In fact, we found that among adolescents who felt a weak connection to their ethnic group, higher perceived personal discrimination was associated with less parent- and adolescent-reported internalizing problems. We have no clear-cut explanation for this unanticipated finding but our additional analysis showed that it was not very robust. Possibly, the specific nature of the measure used to assess perceptions of personal discrimination may have accounted for the divergent findings. In our study, participants were asked to indicate whether they perceived discrimination in several important life contexts. In contrast, most former studies have used measures focusing on experiences with ethnic peer victimization (e.g., Brody et al., 2006; Jasinskaja-Lahti & Liebkind, 2001). Both types of measures capture somewhat different concepts. First, ethnic peer victimization is a limited aspect of discrimination, and former studies have suggested that personal discrimination by peers is possibly more detrimental to adolescent psychological adjustment than personal discrimination by adults (Greene et al., 2006). Second, our instrument used to assess personal discrimination may have tapped into a general sense of discrimination, whereas other instruments focused on concrete instances of it (e.g., being teased, called names and excluded). Perhaps it is especially these concrete personal experiences that are related to adolescent internalizing and externalizing problems. Finally, the term discrimination itself may have had rather strong connotations for our participants, and thus they may have been hesitant in labeling their personal experiences as discriminatory (see Barkan, 2017).

The results of this study can also be discussed in light of the rejection identification model which states that an important way to cope with prejudice is to make active attempts to maintain or increase one's ethnic identification or identification with the in-group. In turn, this increased identification is assumed to have a positive effect on well-being, which can counteract the direct negative effects of prejudice

(Branscombe et al., 1999). However, in our study, the perceptions of personal and group discrimination were unrelated to ethnic group identification, and ethnic group identification was only related to internalizing problems and not to self-esteem and externalizing problems. This suggests that the rejection identification model is not applicable here. Perhaps this has to do with the age range of our sample. Adolescence is a period in which individuals explore what their ethnic identity means to them (Phinney, 1993), and increased identification may not be an obvious or well-developed strategy to cope with discrimination. Also, ethnic identification may be less meaningful during this exploration phase than in later stages of ethnic identity formation (Phinney, 1993), and this might explain why ethnic group identification was only related to internalizing problems. Accordingly, although there is considerable evidence for the validity of the rejection identification model among adults (e.g., Branscombe et al., 1999; Cronin, Levin, Branscombe, van Laar, & Tropp, 2012; Garstka, Schmitt, Branscombe, & Hummert, 2004; Molero, Fuster, Jetten, & Moriano, 2011), research among younger people has yielded less consistent results. In their study, among ethnic minority adolescents, for example, Armenta and Hunt (2009) obtained support for the model with respect to perceived group but not personal discrimination. However, other studies among (pre)adolescents have shown no or negative associations between perceived personal or group discrimination and in-group identification (Romero & Roberts, 2003; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2006). However, our results do indicate the crucial importance of ethnic identification when it comes to the relationship between perceived group discrimination and adolescent well-being, as it may serve a buffering role. Thus, our study suggests that it may be important to expand the rejection identification model by including ethnic identification as a moderator in the relationship between perceived group discrimination and well-being.

To evaluate the present study, some (other) qualifications and limitations need to be considered. First, our conclusions are based on cross-sectional data. Thus, although our analyses and the interpretation of the direction of effects are consistent with our theoretically based expectations, we should acknowledge the possibility of reciprocal influences. It could be that the penchant for worrying that is typical for persons with internalizing problems increased the adolescents' vigilance for detecting experiences with group discrimination (see Phinney, Madden, & Santos, 1998). Likewise, as the tendency to attribute hostile intentions to others is a key element in the development and persistence of aggressive behaviors (Orbido de Castro, Veerman, Koops, Bosch & Monshouwer, 2002), adolescents with externalizing problems may be more prone to label particular social events as discriminatory. Still, it is important to note that the plausibility of reversed causal relations does not affect our conclusion about the unique psychological importance of perceived group discrimination. Even if adolescents' perceptions of group discrimination did (partly) originate from their internalizing or externalizing problems, it is remarkable that those problems were unrelated to their perceptions of personal discrimination. Second, our measure of ethnic identification consisted mainly of feelings of belonging and attachment toward the ethnic group, which could be perceived of as one aspect of ethnic identification, and measuring and analyzing

ethnic centrality (the cognitive importance of the ethnic group) or ethnic introjection (the extent to which one is personally affected by the adversity of one's group) might have produced different results (see Ashmore, Deaux & McLaughlin, 2004). Other studies have shown that it is especially those aspects of in-group identification make people more vulnerable to the negative effects of perceived discrimination (Fischer & Shaw, 1999; Greene et al., 2006; McCoy & Major, 2003). Future studies on perceived group discrimination should therefore include multiple dimensions of ethnic identity (see Brittan et al., 2015). Interestingly, collective self-esteem is considered to be one of those dimensions (Ashmore et al., 2004). We did not include it, as we focused on the belonging aspect of identification in the present study. Yet, it is important to study its moderating or mediating role (see Verkuyten, 1998) in research to come.

Earlier research has suggested that perception of group discrimination may not be (directly) problematic for the well-being of members of ethnic minority populations (Armenta & Hunt, 2009; Bourguignon et al., 2006; Shorey et al., 2002; Verkuyten, 1998). Our study nuances this picture by showing that perceived group discrimination was not related to lower self-esteem but still associated with both parent- and adolescent-reported internalizing and externalizing problems. These findings have implications for practical attempts to combat discrimination and its negative effects. Apparently, minority group members can be negatively affected by discrimination, even if they do not experience it at first hand. This implies that multicultural policies in specific organizations should do more than try to prevent and counter the local occurrence of prejudice and discrimination: They should also acknowledge and address individuals' concerns about what might happen to others of their group, and provide a climate that helps them to cope with these concerns. This is especially relevant for young people, and schools, for example, could help ethnic minority adolescents deal with perceived group discrimination by stimulating a positive ethnic identity. We hope that our study is an inspiration for such initiatives.

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