Rejection In The Job Selection Process: The Effects Of Information & Sensitivity

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REJECTION IN THE JOB SELECTION PROCESS: 
THE EFFECTS OF INFORMATION & SENSITIVITY 

by 

CLAYTON ALAN YONCE 
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ABSTRACT

Most people will experience rejection in the job selection process. Rejection from job opportunities is often issued via a letter from a hiring manager. These letters elicit reactions from applicants who may, in turn, have less favorable self perceptions and less favorable perceptions of the organization from which the applicant was rejected. Numerous research articles have been published that deal with delivering notification of selection and/or rejection to applicants in the job selection process. However, relatively few use a realistic laboratory design to obtain results. This study examined the effects of sensitivity and information in notifications of rejection when applicants are rejected in the job selection process. A more realistic laboratory design was used to increase the psychological fidelity of the job selection situation. One hundred forty undergraduate students participated in this study. Participants were told to imagine that they were graduate school applicants. Then, the participants completed a fake graduate school admissions test and received notification of rejection from a fake graduate school. Participants were assigned to conditions (letters varying in sensitivity and information type) randomly and the participants completed a post-notification of rejection survey that captured their self and organizational perceptions. Additionally, moderating variables were explored.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Rejecting job applicants is inevitable, as all applicants will not possess desired knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics. Research has focused on the effects of rejecting an applicant on organizational outcomes and has demonstrated that reactions are important to both the individual job applicant and the organization. (e.g., Bauer, Maertz, Dolen, & Campion, 1998; Brice & Waung, 1995; Truxillo, Bauer, Campion, & Paronto, 2002; Waung & Brice, 2000). The benefits to studying applicant reactions to rejection are twofold; applicant reactions can affect both the applicant and the organization (Ployhart, Ryan, & Bennett, 1999). As a result, organizations should be aware of methods that can serve to reduce the negative impact of rejecting applicants. This exploratory study seeks to examine hypotheses similar to those set forth by Ployhart et al. through a laboratory study and goes further by exploring possible moderator variables such as ethnic background, gender, and test performance.
CHAPTER 2: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Applicant Attributions & Self Perceptions

Depending on applicants’ performance in a selection procedure and their perceptions associated with a procedure, applicants may make causal attributions in regard to the outcome. Causal attributions refer to a relationship between the outcome (success or failure) of a person's participation in a task and the ascription of that outcome to either the person’s own abilities or to the outside environment (Weiner, 1972). Frieze and Weiner (1974) identified causal attributions as characteristically attributing success to oneself and attributing failure to external sources—an attribution now widely known as the self-serving bias. Larson (1977) went further when he presented evidence that the self-serving bias functions by internalizing success and externalizing failure when he found that “students assumed significantly more personal responsibility for success than for failure” (p.436).

Attribution theory can be used as a means to understand how applicants react to the job selection process (Knouse, 1989). For example, results of Chan et al. (1998) indicated that applicants who performed poorly were likely to experience the self-serving bias in that they perceived the test as irrelevant and unfair. This perception could aid the applicant in diffusing the responsibility for failure from the applicant to the organization, thereby attributing failure to external causes. Therefore, organizations may wish to provide applicants with a test perceived as fair.
Brockner et al. (2002) suggested that people are particularly interested in understanding rejection when the rejection was unexpected. Both an applicant’s credentials and past successes in selection procedures influence expectations of job attainment (Gilliland, 1993). From Campion and Lord (1982) we know that when an applicant who thought that he would be accepted is rejected, that applicant may lower goals and change strategies used to achieve those goals of acceptance in future selection processes. Campion and Lord also reported a link between number of failures and effort, as the severity of failures was related to increased effort and high consistencies of failures were related to the reduction of goals.

**Applicant Views of the Organization**

Factors in the control of the applicant such as performance (that may or may not be related to decisions made by the organization) could exert long lasting control over applicant reactions to selection procedures and future participation in such processes. It is assumed that applicants hope to succeed in the application/selection process, and therefore a favorable outcome would be one in which the applicant is accepted to a position that provided a match between job duties and the applicant’s knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics. People who are accepted tend to attribute selection to “internal, stable factors” and are often willing to recommend the organization to others (Ployhart & Ryan, 1997, p.330). Bauer, Maertz, Dolen, and Campion (1998) demonstrated that “outcome favorability was related to organizational attractiveness, intentions toward the organization, and general testing fairness” (p.900). Smither et al. (2000) found that applicant reactions to examinations were positively related to organizational attractiveness, justice perceptions, and willingness to recommend the
employer to others. This last relationship is a benefit to the organization because it may provide for a larger qualified applicant pool.

Rejection is often perceived internally as a negative consequence of participating in a selection procedure. Hallier and James (2000) found that failure was seen as a public loss of face by workers, indicating that rejection may be followed by a more salient social issue. Therefore, as Ployhart et al. (1999) recommended, organizations should attempt to elicit positive reactions from all applicants, even those who have been rejected through the selection process. One of the ways that organizations can achieve this is to use selection procedures that are highly job-related. Applicants who participate in selection procedures that contain questions that appear unfair, not job-related, and/or discriminatory, react less favorably toward the organization and have lowered job pursuit intentions with the organization (Saks, Leck, & Saunders, 1995). Thibodeaux and Kudisch (2003) found further support for the importance of positive applicant reactions to the selection procedure when they found that lower levels of perceived job relatedness of the selection procedure was significantly related to the perceived likelihood that a participant in the selection process would issue a complaint about the process.

Providing Equal Opportunities to Minorities

It may be important to elicit positive reactions from minorities because they tend to experience higher dropout rates in selection procedures (Schmit & Ryan, 1997) and generalized lower levels of opportunity (D’Amico & Maxwell, 1995). Not only does this impact minorities personally, but dropout rates may reduce the number of minorities available for hire in an organization’s applicant pool. Arvey, Gordon, Massengill, and Mussio (1975) studied applicant
withdrawal rates from selection procedures with varying time intervals between application closing date and the date of selection procedure administration. Their study found that the percentage of minority candidates who did not appear for the selection procedure was considerably higher than the percentage of majority candidates who did not appear when the time interval between closing date and selection procedure administration was long. Schmit and Ryan (1997) went further by investigating dropout rates among police department applicants in a multiple hurdle selection system—a system that often has a long time interval between closing date and selection procedure administration. Their study found that African-American candidates were more likely to withdraw from the selection procedure than Caucasian applicants.

Even when minority applicants remain in the applicant pool and are hired, differences between minorities and non-minorities still exist in the employment context. Brown and Ford (1977) found that blacks had lesser access to higher paying jobs when they graduated from historically black schools. This further emphasized a need to investigate differences between applicant evaluators. McConahay (1983) found that white evaluators who scored higher on a racial prejudice scale showed a preference for white applicants. Still today, minorities may often be at a disadvantage for job attainment, as D’Amico and Maxwell (1995) found a “pervasive” black disadvantage to job attainment and reported that unemployment rates of this minority group are five percent higher than that of whites. Although many organizations actively monitor hiring practices to ensure that there is no adverse impact on minorities, they may experience stereotypes that place them in positions subordinate to non-minorities (Stewart & Perlow, 2001). Not surprisingly, Stewart and Perlow (2001) found that people holding negative stereotypes about blacks and women were less likely to select them for higher level positions. Additionally,
gender stereotypes have been shown to contribute to sex differences in employment (Cejka & Eagly, 1999), which may hold back women from obtaining jobs that they want. Women are often stereotyped as less able to perform well in upper level management positions, and those who obtain jobs in these higher ranks often face disapproval, dislike, and derogation (Heilman, 2001). Furthermore, recent research has demonstrated that a glass ceiling for women has not disappeared (Baker, Wendt, & Slonaker, 2002).

Further evidence of increased hardship for minorities in employment is indicated by the findings of Elvira and Zatzick (2002) and Cavalcanti and Schleef (2001). Elvira and Zatzick found that whites and nonwhites with equal jobs and performance ratings had different probabilities of being layed-off; nonwhites had a significantly higher probability of job loss. Other studies have demonstrated more inequity, as in American locations where non-white Hispanics have been able to attain higher paying jobs than non-white Hispanics in other locations, their income still falls short of the rest of the location’s population (Cavalcanti & Schleef, 2001). These studies further emphasize the need for organizations to promote employment equity through fair processes.

**Fairness**

Procedural fairness is concerned with the process used to make a decision within the organization and the way the process determines outcomes for the individual (Cropanzo & Randall, 1993). In the contextual framework of employee selection, procedural fairness is an established positive perception that the selection procedure was fair by an individual applicant directly involved in the employment process. Fair outcomes are often perceived as “stable,
internal, and controllable” (Ployhart & Ryan, 1997, p.331). Applicant perceptions that the selection procedure is fair has the potential to affect an organization’s reputation and financial gain (Bauer, Maertz, Dolen, & Campion, 1998).

High procedural fairness is related to more support for the organization and the selection procedure, but such fairness may have negative effects on an employee (Brockner et al., 2002, p.67). For example, an employee who was rejected in an unfair procedure may believe that he/she was rejected because the process was poor, but an applicant who felt the process was fair has only his/her deficiencies in performance to blame for the failure. Contrary to these findings, Ployhart and Ryan (1997) found that fair procedures were associated with higher self efficacy than unfair procedures, even if an applicant was rejected. Furthermore, applicants who experienced unfair procedures, regardless of whether they were accepted or rejected, experienced lower self-efficacy.

**Job Relatedness**

Job-related selection procedures are methods by which an organization selects employees based upon performance in a test that the applicant views as related to performance on the job. Job-related selection procedures tend to be perceived as face-valid, but organizations may not always have the resources to use face-valid selection procedures. Written tests may be good predictors of employee performance on the job, but may be perceived as less valid or job-related to the applicant than other more costly selection methods such as high fidelity simulations, which may serve to provide a realistic simulation of on-the-job duties (Gatewood & Field, 2001).

Rejected applicants experience lower self-efficacy than those who are accepted when the selection procedure is highly job related (Gilliland, 1994). In fact, Gilliland (1993) called the job
relatedness of the selection tool the “greatest procedural influence on fairness perceptions” (p.703). Therefore, it is not surprising that Truxillo, Bauer, and Sanchez (2001) suggested that applicants should have an opportunity to demonstrate their skills through job-related selection procedures.

Real-world applications of job-related selection procedures have yielded convincing results. Chan, Schmitt, Jennings, Clause, and Delbridge (1998) found evidence that job-relatedness of a selection tool determine fairness perceptions in a real-world sample of State Police Troopers. Results from a real-world job applicant sample further stressed the importance of job relatedness of the selection procedure as they led Singer (1990) to believe that interviewers should focus upon job-related qualifications in their assessment of candidates.

Perceived validity, or face validity, may affect applicant perceptions of a selection procedure. Smither et al. (2001) proposed that selection procedures that are less face valid may be viewed as more unfair, and such perceptions of the process may result in negative consequences for an organization using the selection procedure. It appears that perceptions of the selection test itself are related to attitudes toward the process and the organization (Hoff Macan, Avedon, Paese, & Smith, 1994).

Providing Feedback to the Applicant

An organization has control over what procedure is used, how the procedure is administered, the content of the feedback, and the delivery of the feedback. Providing feedback to applicants is important to the selection process, as it can affect fairness perceptions and
applicant behavior (Gilliland, Groth, Baker IV, Dew, Polly, & Langdon, 2001). However, organizations may need to exert caution in the administration of feedback.

Ployhart et al. (1999) studied feedback by using a sample of undergraduate students who were asked to imagine that they had applied for a job. The participants were then told to imagine that they had either been selected or rejected and were asked to respond to surveys that captured their reactions to feedback letters that varied in sensitivity and information sharing. Ployhart et al. (1999) discovered that although providing rejected applicants with specific, personalized reasons for the rejection may enhance fairness perceptions, such an activity may result in lower self-perceptions. In other words, providing specific feedback may have direct consequences for the applicant.

Applicants may feel that the organization is obligated to behave in certain ways. For example, studies have warned that contact with applicants is important, and behavior that is considered discourteous or apathetic may negatively affect the organization (Brice & Waung, 1995). Waung and Brice (2000) found that participant perceptions upon failing to receive a rejection letter were characterized by a feeling that the organization failed to fulfill an obligation to be courteous. In an earlier study, Brice and Waung (1995) asserted that such silence could cause applicants to think that “the company is so poorly run that it cannot even respond to a simple employment inquiry” or that the organization thought “so poorly of the applicant’s qualifications that it did not bother to reply to the inquiry” (Brice & Waung, 1995).

The literature cites evidence that the notification process of applicants is important to applicant reactions. For example, Brice and Waung (1995) asserted that a response to an employment inquiry is important because a lack thereof could result in negative reactions to the
organization. Upon sending resumes to local businesses, Brice and Waung (1995) found that sixty-two percent of businesses failed to respond.

Feedback can be a useful tool in applicant rejection, especially when an organization is concerned with obtaining future qualified applicants and maintaining positive public perceptions. Truxillo et al. (2002) called feedback a “simple and relatively inexpensive approach to presenting information to applicants” (p.1029-1030). Such information sharing may influence the perceived fairness of the selection process both during testing and following acceptance or rejection (Truxillo et al., 2002). Bauer, Maertz, Dolen, and Campion (1998) found that negative effects of test taking were alleviated following the reception of feedback by participants.

Not only does the existence of feedback affect perceptions, but so does the content of the feedback. The content of the rejection itself has proven to be a predictor of applicant reactions to the organization and the selection procedure. Results of Shapiro, Buttner, and Barry (1994) indicated that the actual substance of an explanation for selection is important rather than how the explanation is given.

The literature contains a variety of suggestions for the issuing of rejection notifications to applicants. Factors such as time intervals, the presence of a contact person, tone, and content have all been investigated within this topic area. Overall, it may be most ethical to serve the applicant with a justification of the rejection, as Brice and Waung (1995) suggested that companies explicitly state a reason for the decision. Shapiro, Buttner, and Barry (1994) suggested a combination of sincerity and substance of explanations, as they proposed that specific, custom designed explanations for applicants will enhance perceptions of sincerity.
Although Shapiro, Buttner, and Barry (1994) found evidence that verbal explanations were superior to written explanations through their ability to enhance interpersonal relationship, organizations often use rejection letters as a means to reject applicants. Waung and Brice (2000) supported the idea that rejection substance may be more integral to positive applicant reactions to rejection than rejection style or form of delivery. The authors stressed the idea of psychological contracts within the selection process, meaning that applicants may believe that an inferred agreement for open information sharing about selection decisions exists between the applicant and organization.

Waung and Brice (2000) found evidence that the characteristics of a rejection letter could affect application reactions. Applicants reacted more positively when there was a lack of a contact person and a lack of explicit rejection. They hypothesized that rejected individuals may have responded more positively to this situation because they were unaware that they had been rejected (Waung & Brice, 2000). Interestingly, Waung and Brice found that long time intervals between participation in the selection process and notification of a decision were related to positive reactions if the rejection letter did not disclose a contact person. Additionally, Waung and Brice (2000) found results that indicated that positive reactions to rejection were experienced from letters that did not explicitly state rejection, lacked a contact person, and were sent following a long time interval. Further, the most negative reactions were experienced by letters that, like the most positive reactions, were sent after a long time interval and without an explicit rejection declaration, but unlike the most positive reactions, disclosed a contact person. Waung and Brice (2000) theorized that the presence of a contact person in a rejection letter may have inferred a sense of obligation of the organization. The authors hypothesize that negative reactions
for those participants who received vague rejection letters after long time intervals (that
disclosed a contact person) may have been a result of a violation of an implicit contract between
the contact person and the participant/applicant.
Ployhart, Ryan, and Bennett (1999) found that providing information about performance to applicants was positively related to perceptions of fairness. They argued that procedural information produced “a good balance between enhancing fairness and organizational perceptions” (p. 97) and helped minimize rejected applicants’ negative self perceptions. Still, Ployhart et al. cautioned dependency on information sharing to evoke fairness perceptions from applicants. They further asserted that the favorability of the outcome and other factors can contribute to applicant reactions.

The Ployhart et al. (1999) study can be improved upon. First, Ployhart et al. asked their participants to imagine situations and respond to surveys based upon those imagined situations. This research design may be problematic because asking participants to imagine situations provides little psychological realism. The current study seeks to use a more realistic laboratory setting to more accurately facilitate reactions from participants. Specifically, the current study administers an actual selection test, provides a $100.00 prize to serve as motivation for high performance on the selection test, and captures reactions to rejection based upon participant/applicant performance. Additionally, the current study seeks to address differences in reactions between minorities and non-minorities. This investigation may add to existing literature on barriers to employment for minorities and function as a starting place for further research in this area.

Hypotheses for the current study are as follows:
Hypothesis 1a: Consistent with the findings of Ployhart et al. (1999), applicants who are rejected through a sensitive letter will experience more positive self perceptions than those who did not receive a sensitive letter.

Hypothesis 1b: Consistent with the findings of Ployhart et al. (1999), applicants who are rejected through a sensitive letter will experience more positive organizational perceptions than those who did not receive a sensitive letter.

Hypothesis 2a: Consistent with the findings of Ployhart et al. (1999), applicants who are rejected with a letter that provides information will experience more positive self perceptions than those who received a rejection letter with no information about why the applicant was rejected.

Hypothesis 2b: Consistent with the findings of Ployhart et al. (1999), applicants who are rejected with a letter that provides information will experience more positive organizational perceptions than those who received a rejection letter with no information about why the applicant was rejected.

In addition, this study will take an exploratory look at ethnic background, gender, and test performance (test score) as it relates to rejection and the job selection process.
CHAPTER 4: METHOD

Design

The research design is a 4 (information: control, justification, procedural, or personal) X 2 (sensitivity: sensitive or control) between subjects design. The dependent measures include applicant self perceptions and applicant organizational perceptions.

Participants

Participants for this study were 140 undergraduate students recruited from psychology courses at a large, metropolitan, Southeastern university. Twenty-nine and one half percent of the participants identified as male. The mean age of all participants was 19.95 years (SD = 2.97 years). Approximately 57% of the sample identified as Caucasian/white, 22% as Hispanic/non-white, 11% as African American/black, and 7% as Asian/Pacific Islander.

Measures

Graduate School Admissions Test. A 30 item cognitive ability test was created using sample questions similar to those found on the Graduate Record Exam. Participants received one point for each correct item.

Manipulation Check. A manipulation check was used to assess whether or not the participant was aware of the rejection letter conditions of sensitivity and information sharing.

Demographics. Post-rejection survey questions included those that captured ethnic background, gender, age, and year in school.
Applicant Self Perceptions. Self perceptions were captured with a stem that asked “If I received this letter, my opinion of myself would be . . .” followed by four semantic differential items (i.e., bad-good, unfavorable-favorable, disapproving-approving, negative-positive), identical to those used by Ployhart et al. (1999). Participants responded to the items by choosing a number from 1 to 7 (i.e. 1 = bad, 7 = good, etc.) Previous application of this scale by Ployhart et al. (1999) demonstrated that the scale achieved an internal reliability of .97.

Applicant Organizational Perceptions. Organizational perceptions were measured in the same way, only a stem that reads “If I received this letter, my attitude toward the organization would be . . .” was used. “” followed by four semantic differential items (i.e., bad-good, unfavorable-favorable, disapproving-approving, negative-positive), identical to those used by Ployhart et al. (1999). Participants responded to the items by choosing a number from 1 to 7 (i.e. 1 = bad, 7 = good, etc.) Previous application of this scale by Ployhart et al. (1999) demonstrated that the scale achieved an internal reliability of .97.

Procedure

Participants signed-up to participate in the study and were awarded extra-credit points for participation. Next, participants arrived at the study location and received informed consent forms with information about the study which included the reasons for the study, contact names, and rights and responsibilities. Participants were told to imagine that they were taking a graduate school admissions test. They were then told that the participant who scores the highest on the admissions test would win a $100.00 prize. The, the participants took the selection test. The participants’ tests were scored, however all participants were “rejected.” Each participant then
received a letter that provided the notice of rejection following the completion of the test. The letter contained the study manipulations. Specifically, participants received a letter that provided one of four different types of information (control- no information, justification, procedural, or personal) and varied in sensitivity (sensitive or control- non-sensitive) (See APPENDIX E).

Following receipt of the rejection letter, the participants were administered a survey that captured their gender, ethnic background, age, and their self perceptions and organizational perceptions. Finally, participants were debriefed. Participants were told their actual scores on the test and the deception was revealed when the participants were told that all participants were rejected no matter their score. Debriefing also included explaining to the participants that based upon their actual score, the highest scorer would be selected to win the $100.00 prize.
CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

Manipulation Check

Two manipulation checks were conducted to determine whether or not participants were aware of their assigned condition (See APPENDIX D). The first manipulation check assessed whether or not the participant recognized the sensitivity of the letter he/she received. The second manipulation check assessed whether or not the participant recognized if the letter contained information about why he/she was rejected in the selection process. In the sensitivity manipulation check, 125 participants passed and 15 participants failed resulting in a pass rate of 89%. In the information manipulation check, 136 participants passed and 4 failed resulting in a pass rate of 97%. No participant failed both manipulation checks. Participants who failed either of the manipulation checks (a total of 19 participants) were removed from the data, resulting in a total of 121 participants for all further analyses.

Scale Reliabilities and Intercorrelations

Table 1 (See APPENDIX F) presents the means, standard deviations, internal consistency reliability estimates, and intercorrelations for all measures used in this study. The self perception scale achieved a coefficient alpha of .960 and the organizational perception scale achieved a coefficient alpha of .972. Based on a .7 threshold established by Cohen and Cohen (1983), reliability for each scale was considered “good.”
Statistical Analysis

After exploring the data, it was clear that one participant’s test score was an outlier. This participant scored approximately three standard deviations above the mean; therefore, this participant was removed from the analysis. With the outlier removed, males obtained a higher score on the selection test than females. Females obtained a mean score of 14.85 (SD = 3.02) and males obtained a mean score of 16.14 (SD = 3.73). Independent-samples t-tests revealed that there were significant differences in test scores between females and males $t(119) = 2.001, p = .048$. Independent-samples $t$-tests for organizational perceptions, $t(121) = -.796, p = .392$, self perceptions, $t(120) = 1.423, p = .157$, age $t(120) = 1.328, p = .187$, and graduate school intentions, $t(121) = -1.406, p = .162$, demonstrated that there were no significant differences between males and females on each measure.

To test hypotheses 1a and 2a, a 2 (sensitivity) x 4 (information) between subjects analysis of variance was conducted on the dependent variable, applicant self perceptions. Means and standard deviations for this analysis are found in Table 2 (See APPENDIX G). The results of this analysis indicated that there were no significant differences in self perceptions between participants who received sensitive letters and non-sensitive/control letters $F(1,111) = .096, p = .758$. There were no significant differences in self perceptions between participants who received letters containing letters with justice information, personal information, procedural information, and no information/control $F(3,111) = .237, p = .871$. Finally, there were no significant differences in self perceptions between participants who received sensitive and non-sensitive letters that contained different levels of information to include justice information,
personal information, procedural information and no information $F(3, 111) = .977, p = .406$, indicating that there was no interaction between sensitivity and information. Thus, hypotheses 1a and 2a were not supported.

Finally, hypotheses 1b and 2b were tested. A 2 (sensitivity) x 4 (information) between subjects analysis of variance was conducted on the dependent variable, applicant organizational perceptions. Means and standard deviations for this analysis are found in Table 2 (See APPENDIX G). The results indicated that there were no significant differences in organizational perceptions between participants who received sensitive letters and non-sensitive/control letters $F(1, 113) = .848, p = .349$. There were no significant differences in organizational perceptions between participants who received letters containing letters with justice information, personal information, procedural information, and no information/control $F(3, 113) = 1.392, p = .249$. Finally, there were no significant differences in organizational perceptions between participants who received sensitive and non-sensitive letters that contained different levels of information to include justice information, personal information, procedural information and no information $F(3, 113) = .890, p = .449$, indicating that there was no interaction between sensitivity and information. Thus, hypotheses 1b and 2b were not supported.

**Exploratory Analyses**

To explore the data further, additional analyses were conducted to find possible moderator variables. First, a regression analysis was conducted in which applicant organizational perceptions were regressed onto the sensitivity of the rejection letter (sensitive or not sensitive), the information type (information or no information) of the rejection letter, the participant test
score, and the interaction terms. The sensitivity and information variables were dummy coded and participant test scores were centered before conducting these analyses (Aiken & West, 1991). Results of this analysis are found in Table 3 (See APPENDIX H). The overall regression equation was not statistically significant \( F(7, 112)=1.626, p=.135, R^2=.092 \).

Next, a regression was conducted whereby applicant self perceptions were regressed onto the sensitivity of the rejection letter, the information type of the rejection letter, the participant test score, and their interaction terms. Again, the sensitivity and information variables were dummy coded and participant test scores were centered (Aiken & West, 1991). Results of this analysis are found in Table 4 (See APPENDIX I). The overall regression equation was not statistically significant \( F(7, 111)=1.189, p=.315, R^2=.070 \).

In an attempt to test whether or not gender moderated the effect of sensitivity and information on self perceptions, a 2 (sensitivity) x 2 (information) x 2 (gender) between subjects analysis of variance was conducted on the dependent variable, applicant self perceptions. Results indicated that each of the main effects for sensitivity, information, and gender were not significant \( F(119)=.052 – 1.698, \) n.s. The two way interaction effects for sensitivity x information, sensitivity x gender, and information x gender were also not significant \( F(119)=.002 - .244, \) n.s. Finally, the three way interaction effect for sensitivity x information x gender as not significant \( F(119)=.579, \) n.s.

Next, a between subjects analysis of variance was conducted in the same manner to determine whether or not gender moderated the effect of sensitivity and information on organizational perceptions. Results indicated that each of the main effects for sensitivity, information, and gender were not significant \( F(120)=.018 – 1.041, \) n.s. The two way interaction
effects for sensitivity x information, sensitivity x gender, and information x gender were also not significant F(120)=.128 - 1.071, n.s. Finally, the three way interaction effect for sensitivity x information x gender was not significant F(120)=.941, n.s.

Additionally, ethnicity (Caucasian/white versus non-white) was tested to see if it moderated the effect of sensitivity and information on self perceptions. A 2 (sensitivity) x 2 (information) x 2 (ethnicity) between subjects analysis of variance was conducted on the dependent variable, applicant self perceptions. Results indicated that each main effects for sensitivity, information, and ethnicity were not significant F(119)=.000-.171, n.s. The two way interaction effects for sensitivity x information, sensitivity x ethnicity, and information x ethnicity were also not significant F(119)=.007-1.580. Finally, the three way interaction effect for sensitivity x information x ethnicity was not significant F(119)=1.717, n.s.

Finally, ethnicity (Caucasian/white versus non-white) was tested to see if it moderated the effect of sensitivity and information on organizational perceptions. A 2 x 2 x 2 (ethnicity) between subjects analysis of variance was conducted on the dependent variable, applicant organizational perceptions. Results indicated that each main effects for sensitivity, information, and ethnicity were not significant F(120)=.097-1.315, n.s. The two way interaction effects for sensitivity x information, sensitivity x ethnicity, and information x ethnicity were also not significant F(120)=.014-1.157, n.s. Finally, the three way interaction effect for sensitivity x information x ethnicity was not significant F(120)=.680, n.s.
CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

Previous research has found that the sensitivity and information shared in a rejection letter can affect applicant reactions to the job selection process (Gilliland, 1994; Gilliland et al., 2001; Horvath et al., 2000; Ployhart et al., 1999; Truxillo et al., 2002). Organizations should be aware of methods that can serve to reduce the negative impact of rejecting applicants, as it is in the best interest of the organization to do so. The purpose of the current study was to improve upon the work done by Ployhart et al. (1999) by using a study design that provided participants with more realism. It was hoped that the design would more accurately elicit reactions from study participants. Additionally, this study searched for possible moderator variables such as ethnicity, gender, and test performance.

The present study hypothesized that applicants/participants who were rejected through a sensitive letter would experience more positive self perceptions and more positive organizational perceptions. In addition, it was hypothesized that applicants/participants who were rejected through a letter that provided information would experience more positive self perceptions and more positive organizational perceptions. Results suggest that participants’ self perceptions and/or organizational perceptions were not affected by the level of sensitivity or information type of the rejection letters, or the interaction of these two variables. In addition, there was no evidence that ethnicity, gender, or test performance moderated the relationship between sensitivity, information type, and perceptions of the self and the organization. Though Ployhart et
al. (1999) found evidence of a relationship between sensitivity, information, and self and organizational perceptions, this study failed to replicate such findings.

This study demonstrates a need for further research in the area of applicant reactions to rejection letters because the question remains: Were the differences between the results of the present study and that of Ployhart et al. (1999) due to research design or error? To answer this question, research should be conducted with the same materials used in this study, only the research design should not include the selection test. This would mimic the Ployhart et al. (1999) study to determine if the results of this study were spurious.

Limitations

The design of the present study may have provided a barrier to replicating the results achieved by Ployhart et al. (1999). It is possible that the manipulation was not salient to the participants; the participant’s may not have been able to put themselves in the mental position of an applicant. A part of the design of this study involved providing feedback that appeared realistic, although it is possible that the participants knew that the feedback was fake. This is because they received the feedback immediately following the completion of the selection test. In most real world situations, participants receive feedback weeks later. This aspect of the study design may have further hindered the participants’ ability to feel as though they were an actual applicant.

Not only did the participants need to put themselves in the mental position of a person applying for a job, but they also needed to be motivated to do well to ensure that the participant
would react to the notification of rejection. Though the design of this study included a one hundred dollar prize to the highest scorer on the selection test, this may not have provided motivation. Participants may have felt as though their chances of winning the prize were slim, so they expected rejection.

Another limitation to this study involved the difficulty of the selection test. The selection test used in this study may have been too difficult, as the mean score on the test was 15.23 points ($SD = 3.29$) out of a total 30 points possible. Participants may have been frustrated with or stressed by the process as a whole and such frustration may have resulted in overall feelings of dissatisfaction no matter how the participant scored. Furthermore, Ployhart and Ryan (1997) pointed out that fair outcomes are perceived as “stable, internal, and controllable.” Participants may have felt that they had no control over their performance due to difficulty with test items, resulting in lower perceptions of fairness that may have also affected self and organizational perceptions.

Future research should address the issue of creating more realism for participants. Additionally, reactions to test difficulty should be collected and controlled for when studying applicant reactions to notifications of rejection in the job selection process. With the ability to control for test difficulty, results may indicate that sensitivity and information in rejection letters do affect self and organizational perceptions. Additionally, future research is needed on moderating variables. A larger sample size with greater minority representation would aid researchers in exploring applicant reactions and ethnic background.

This study sought to determine whether or not rejection letters of varying sensitivity and information type affect applicant self and organizational perceptions, which continues to be of
interest to both practitioners and researchers. Notifications of rejection are a necessary part of the job selection process; research should continue to examine this area.
APPENDIX A: SELF PERCEPTIONS SCALE
Self Perceptions Scale (Ployhart et al., 1999)

Upon the receipt of this letter, my opinion of myself is:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bad</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfavorable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Favorable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disapproving</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Approving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Organizational Perceptions Scale (Ployhart et al., 1999)

Upon the receipt of this letter, my attitude toward the organization is:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bad</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfavorable</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disapproving</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Demographics Questionnaire

Please respond to the following items:

What is your age? __________

What is your gender?
   a. Female
   b. Male

What is your ethnic background?
   a. African American/Black
   b. Asian/Pacific Islander
   c. Caucasian/White
   d. Hispanic (non-white)
   e. Other

What is your year in school?
   a. Freshman – 0 to 30 Credit Hours Completed
   b. Sophomore- 31 to 60 Credit Hours Completed
   c. Junior- 60 to 90 Credit Hours Completed
   d. Senior- More than 90 Credit Hours Completed

How likely is it that you will attend graduate school?

Definitely Not 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Definitely
APPENDIX D: MANIPULATION CHECK ITEMS
Manipulation Check Items

Which best describes the letter you received?

a. I was rejected. The letter disclosed my score, told me that the test predicted success at the university, AND/OR informed me that my score was not high enough for admission.

b. I was rejected. The letter simply stated that I was rejected.

c. I was accepted. The letter provided information about why I was accepted

d. I was accepted. The letter provided no information about why I was accepted

If you were rejected, which best describes the letter you received?

a. The letter stated that the organization wished me the best in my graduate school career.

b. The letter did NOT wish me the best in my graduate school career.
APPENDIX E: REJECTION LETTERS
Dear Applicant,

Thank you for applying to the Graduate School at Westingham University. Our Graduate School uses tests to predict future success at our University. Unfortunately, your score was not high enough to merit an offer of admission. We thank you for your time, and wish you the best in your graduate school career.

Sincerely,

Dr. William A. Rockwell
Director of Graduate Admissions
Dear Applicant,

Thank you for applying to the Graduate School at Westingham University. You were not selected for admission to the program to which you applied. We thank you for your time, and wish you the best in your graduate school career.

Sincerely,

Dr. William B. Rockwell
Director of Graduate Studies
Condition: Procedural-Sensitive

Dear Applicant,

Thank you for applying to the Graduate School at Westingham University. Your participation involved taking two GRE-like selection tests. These tests provide us with information to predict your ability to succeed as a student at our university. Unfortunately, we are unable to offer you admission at this time. We thank you for your participation and wish you the best in your graduate school career.

Sincerely,

Dr. William C. Rockwell
Director of Graduate Admissions
Dear Applicant,

Thank you for applying to the Graduate School at Westingham University. Your performance on our admission selection tests highlighted both strengths and weaknesses in your abilities. You scored a ____ on the selection test. Unfortunately, our tests indicate that you are currently not the best candidate for admission to our graduate school. We thank you for your time, and wish you the best in your graduate school career.

Sincerely,

Dr. William D. Rockwell
Director of Graduate Admissions
Dear Applicant,

You applied to the Graduate School at Westingham University. Our university uses admission selection tests to predict future success. Unfortunately, your score was not high enough to merit an offer of admission.

Sincerely,

Dr. William E. Rockwell
Director of Graduate Admissions
Dear Applicant,

You applied to the Graduate School at Westingham University. Unfortunately, you were not selected for admission to a graduate school program.

Sincerely,

Dr. William F. Rockwell
Director of Graduate Admissions
Dear Applicant,

You applied to the Graduate School at Westingham University. Your participation involved taking two GRE-like selection tests. These tests provide us with information to predict your ability to succeed as a student at our university. Unfortunately, we are unable to offer you admission to a graduate school program.

Sincerely,

Dr. William G. Rockwell
Director of Graduate Admissions
Dear Applicant,

You applied to the Graduate School at Westingham University. Your performance on our admission selection tests highlighted both strengths and weaknesses in your abilities. You scored a ____ on the selection test. Our tests indicate that you are currently not the best candidate for admission to a graduate program at our university.

Sincerely,

Dr. William H. Rockwell
Director of Graduate Admissions
APPENDIX F: TABLE 1: MEANS, STANDARD DEVIATIONS, INTERNAL CONSISTENCY RELIABILITY ESTIMATES, AND INTERCORRELATIONS FOR STUDY VARIABLES AND MEASURES
Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, Internal Consistency Reliability Estimates, and Intercorrelations for Study Variables and Measures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable/Measure</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>α</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Age</td>
<td>19.95</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Test Score</td>
<td>15.23</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Graduate School Intentions</td>
<td>5.13</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>0.19*</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Overall Applicant Self Perceptions</td>
<td>16.41</td>
<td>5.35</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>-0.18*</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Overall Applicant Organizational Perceptions</td>
<td>17.03</td>
<td>5.27</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.16</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
<td>0.38**</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note.  * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
APPENDIX G: TABLE 2: MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS FOR EACH
DEPENDANT MEASURE IN EACH CONDITION
Table 2
Means and Standard Deviations for Each Dependant Measure in Each Condition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Measure</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Perceptions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control-Control</td>
<td>17.50</td>
<td>5.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control-Sensitive</td>
<td>16.00</td>
<td>6.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedural-Control</td>
<td>15.42</td>
<td>4.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedural-Sensitive</td>
<td>16.60</td>
<td>5.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justification-Control</td>
<td>15.64</td>
<td>5.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justification-Sensitive</td>
<td>17.55</td>
<td>4.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal-Control</td>
<td>18.80</td>
<td>5.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal-Sensitive</td>
<td>15.85</td>
<td>5.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Perceptions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control-Control</td>
<td>16.00</td>
<td>4.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control-Sensitive</td>
<td>17.27</td>
<td>5.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedural-Control</td>
<td>14.79</td>
<td>5.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedural-Sensitive</td>
<td>17.90</td>
<td>4.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justification-Control</td>
<td>16.33</td>
<td>6.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justification-Sensitive</td>
<td>19.27</td>
<td>3.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal-Control</td>
<td>19.20</td>
<td>5.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal-Sensitive</td>
<td>17.62</td>
<td>4.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX H: TABLE 3: RESULTS OF REGRESSION ANALYSIS FOR APPLICANT ORGANIZATIONAL PERCEPTIONS
Table 3

Results of Regression Analysis for Applicant Organizational Perceptions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$B$</th>
<th>$SE$ $B$</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall Model ($F(7,112)=1.626$, $p=.135$, $R^2=.092$)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitivity</td>
<td>-.057</td>
<td>1.953</td>
<td>-.005</td>
<td>-.029</td>
<td>.977</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>.819</td>
<td>1.673</td>
<td>.068</td>
<td>.490</td>
<td>.625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centered Test Score</td>
<td>-.197</td>
<td>.610</td>
<td>-.124</td>
<td>-.324</td>
<td>.747</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitivity by Information</td>
<td>1.402</td>
<td>2.238</td>
<td>.130</td>
<td>.626</td>
<td>.532</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitivity by Centered Test Score</td>
<td>-.178</td>
<td>.696</td>
<td>-.081</td>
<td>-.255</td>
<td>.799</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centered Test Score by Information</td>
<td>-.362</td>
<td>.650</td>
<td>-.196</td>
<td>-.557</td>
<td>.579</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitivity by Information by Centered Test Score</td>
<td>.917</td>
<td>.774</td>
<td>.330</td>
<td>1.185</td>
<td>.239</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX I: TABLE 4: RESULTS OF REGRESSION ANALYSIS FOR APPLICANT SELF PERCEPTIONS
Table 4

Results of Regression Analysis for Applicant Self Perceptions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall Model (F(7,111)=1.189, p=.315, R²=.070)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitivity</td>
<td>-.689</td>
<td>2.036</td>
<td>-.065</td>
<td>-.338</td>
<td>.736</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>-1.657</td>
<td>1.735</td>
<td>-.133</td>
<td>-.955</td>
<td>.342</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centered Test Score</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>.633</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>.100</td>
<td>.920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitivity by Information</td>
<td>1.471</td>
<td>2.330</td>
<td>.133</td>
<td>.631</td>
<td>.529</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitivity by Centered Test Score</td>
<td>.872</td>
<td>.729</td>
<td>.381</td>
<td>1.196</td>
<td>.234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centered Test Score by Information</td>
<td>.0002</td>
<td>.675</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitivity by Information by Centered Test Score</td>
<td>-.755</td>
<td>.809</td>
<td>-.266</td>
<td>-.933</td>
<td>.353</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
September 29, 2004

Clay Yonce  
University of Central Florida  
Department of Industrial/Organizational Psychology  
c/o Dr. Barbara Fritzschke, Room 311F  
Orlando, FL 32816-1390

Dear Mr. Yonce:

With reference to your protocol entitled, “Rejection in Job Selection Process: The Effects of Decision Explanations, Sex, and Ethnic Background” I am enclosing for your records the approved, expedited document of the UCFIRB Form you had submitted to our office.

Please be advised that this approval is given for one year. Should there be any addendums or administrative changes to the already approved protocol, they must also be submitted to the Board. Changes should not be initiated until written IRB approval is received. Adverse events should be reported to the IRB as they occur. Further, should there be a need to extend this protocol, a renewal form must be submitted for approval at least one month prior to the anniversary date of the most recent approval and is the responsibility of the investigator (UCF).

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call me at 407-823-2901.

Please accept our best wishes for the success of your endeavors.

Cordially,

Barbara Ward  
Barbara Ward, CIM  
IRB Coordinator

Copies: IRB File  
✓ Dr. Barbara Fritzschke, Department of Psychology, Room 311F, 32816-1390


the Workplace: Approaching Fairness in Human Resource Management (pp. 21-50).


