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Dealing with differences: the impact of perceived diversity outcomes on selection and assessment of minority candidates

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Although many strategies have been employed to specifically recruit and select minority employees, the selection rates for designated minority groups are often lower than those for the majority group. Minority candidates with high cultural maintenance (CM) are particularly vulnerable to cultural bias in selection procedures, a process which has proved difficult to change. This paper aims to examine whether these effects may be moderated by recruiters' *perceived diversity outcomes*; whether they view diversity as beneficial or threatening to the organization's performance. In an experimental study, participants belonging to a cultural majority group played the role of recruiters ($n = 99$). Their diversity perceptions were manipulated by asking them to think about, and discuss, either positive or negative outcomes of cultural diversity in the workplace. They were then asked to rate fictional profiles of minority candidates for a job opening. The results confirm that CM of minority candidates has a negative main effect on the ratings they receive in assessment procedures. However, as predicted, this effect is moderated by diversity perceptions. Recruiters who perceive individual differences in the workplace as positive and beneficial, give higher ratings to candidates who maintain their own culture. This provides a promising insight in possible ways to reduce cultural bias in selection procedures.

Keywords: cultural diversity; cultural maintenance; diversity outcomes; diversity perceptions; minority employees; selection and assessment

Introduction

Cultural diversity in the workplace has become an important issue in human resource management, and has steadily gained attention in both research and practice. Scholars have emphasized that hiring employees with different cultural backgrounds may be vital to an organization's competitiveness (e.g. Cox & Blake, 1991; Van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007), as the increase in unique skills, experiences and viewpoints may offer advantages for organizational innovation and flexibility (De Dreu & West, 2001; Van Knippenberg, De Dreu, & Homan, 2004).

As stated by Ng and Sears (2010), one of the central challenges that organizations face in improving workforce diversity is adverse impact in their selection practices. Although many strategies have been employed to specifically recruit and select minority employees, the selection rates for minority groups are often lower than those for the majority group. For example, studies in the Netherlands have shown that, despite strict anti-discrimination laws and government programs that promote diversity, members of cultural minorities (such as Surinamese, Moroccan and Turkish migrants and their offspring) are

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still underrepresented in the workplace, even when controlling for variables such as age and education level (Dagevos, 1998; De Vroome & Van Tubergen, 2010).

Prior research suggests that recruiters within organizations play an important role in the processes, which lead to workplace inequality. In selection and assessment procedures, the recruiter may display positive bias toward candidates who share the same worldview or background and may subconsciously reject individuals who in some way deviate from the norm (Brooks, Guidroz, & Chakrabarti, 2009; Goldberg, 2005; Ployhart & Holtz, 2008; Schneider, 1987). Members of cultural minority groups are particularly vulnerable to these biases, and become prone to lower assessment ratings by recruiters as well as peers within the organization (Sidanius & Pratto, 2001; Turban & Jones, 1988). Furthermore, studies have shown that this effect may be magnified when the minority members display a high degree of cultural maintenance (CM) in the workplace. Migrants who choose to maintain and express their unique cultural heritage are generally viewed by recruiters as having a lesser person–organization (P–O) fit, thus reducing their chances of being offered employment (Berry, 1997; De Vroome & Van Tubergen, 2010; Kaiser & Pratt-Hyatt, 2009). Conversely, migrants who emphasize their desire to associate with the majority culture in the host country are more likely to be hired (Horverak, Bye, Sandal, & Pallesen, 2013).

As summarized by Kalev, Dobbin, and Kelly (2006, p. 580), ‘we know a lot about the disease of workplace inequality, but not much about the cure’. The prevailing convention seems to be that adverse impact may be reduced by standardizing selection procedures and placing emphasis on job-relevant assessment criteria (see also Ployhart & Holtz, 2008). By devaluing the affective component of assessment, cultural bias may be circumvented. This argument is supported by the finding that selection rates of minority groups increase in a tight job market, where organizations experience difficulties in hiring qualified personnel (Fields, Goodman, & Blum, 2005), or in contexts where providing equal opportunity employment is seen as a social responsibility of the organization (Ely & Thomas, 2001; Reskin, McBrier, & Kmec, 1999). Kalev et al. (2006) argue that the best case for remedying adverse impact may therefore lie in increased (outside) incentives toward increasing workplace diversity, or in practices that provide structure and formalization in hiring guidelines (cf. McKay & Davis, 2008). They express skepticism toward interventions specifically aimed at reducing cultural bias among recruiters and management, based on the reported ineffectiveness of such programs.

However, in recent years, diversity scholars have uncovered evidence that cultural bias in the workplace may be inhibited by fostering positive beliefs and attitudes toward diversity outcomes (for a review, see Van Knippenberg, Van Ginkel, & Homan, 2013). For example, employees’ recognition of the ‘value-in-diversity’ has been associated with a more positive diversity climate, reduced diversity-related anxiety and a stronger overall desire for intercultural contact (Groggins & Ryan, 2013; Hofhuis, Van der Zee, & Otten, 2015; Shen, Chanda, D’Netto, & Monga, 2009; Tropp & Bianchi, 2006).

The aim of this paper is to apply these insights to the domain of selection and assessment. Specifically, it examines whether the negative influence of CM on assessment of minority candidates may be moderated by the recruiters’ *perceived diversity outcomes* (PDOs), i.e. whether they feel diversity will have positive or negative effects for their organization. As such, fostering positive diversity attitudes among recruiters may be effective in reducing cultural bias in selection procedures. This paper describes an experimental study, conducted in the context of the Dutch labor market, which tests this proposition. First a brief overview is given of the process through which recruiters come to their assessment of potential job candidates. This framework is then applied to the

selection and assessment of minority members, and the influence of CM in this regard. Finally, the moderating role of PDOs is discussed.

Social vs. task-performance assessment of job candidates

When assessing potential job candidates, recruiters are faced with the task of selecting the employee(s) whom they feel will bring the greatest benefit to the productivity of the organization. Existing literature shows that recruiters focus on two distinct types of anticipated performance. On the one hand, they assess the degree to which the candidate is expected to perform his/her assigned duties, and is able to directly contribute to an organization's productive output – the task-performance component of assessment. On the other hand, recruiters assess candidates' anticipated contribution to shaping the organizational, social and psychological context that serves as the catalyst for task activities and processes – the social component (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997; Motowidlo & Van Scotter, 1994). In practice, the ultimate decision whether or not to offer employment is usually based on a combination of these assessments (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997; Herriot, 1989).

In this paper, the social component of assessment, termed *social rating (SR)*, is defined as the degree to which recruiters feel the candidate would be pleasant to work with, and would fit well within the team. As the SR is based on an affective evaluation of the candidate, there is a broad range of variables that may influence recruiters' assessment on this domain, including job attitudes, helping behavior and perceived integrity of the candidate (for an overview, see Borman & Motowidlo, 1997). Based on research within the similarity-attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1997) and social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), one of the most robust predictors of SR is similarity between the recruiter and the candidate (Goldberg, 2005). Candidates who are perceived as similar are also ascribed a better P–O fit, which is seen by recruiters as a positive predictor of collaboration and organizational citizenship behavior (Herriot, 2002).

The task-performance component, termed *task-performance rating (TR)*, is defined as the degree to which recruiters feel a candidate is qualified for the job and possesses the ability to fulfill the required duties. The first and foremost criterion for assessing the task-related qualifications of potential employees is their *competence level (CL)*, the degree to which they possess the necessary education and experience to perform effectively in a specific function (Roe, 1989). Individuals with low scores on the required competences receive lower assessments and, as a result, have a lesser chance of being selected from a pool of applicants. In general, CL should have a direct positive impact on assessment ratings of candidates, particularly on the productive component. Furthermore, CL has also been linked to interpersonal attraction and trust between colleagues (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). Scholars have argued that recruitment and selection, regardless of the type of job environment, should be considered as the formation of a relationship between employee and organization (De Wolff & Van den Bosch, 1984; Herriot, 2002). As a result, in addition to receiving higher TRs, highly competent individuals may also receive higher SRs from recruiters.

Selection and assessment of minority candidates

As mentioned above, existing studies consistently report a relative disadvantage for cultural minority members in selection procedures, even when controlling for characteristics such as education level and work experience (Ployhart & Holtz, 2008).

In explaining these findings, scholars have pointed toward the effects of negative stereotypes (e.g. King, Mendoza, Madera, Hebl, & Knight, 2006). When selecting candidates for a job, resumes and assessment interviews may provide some indication of a person's competences, but can never provide the recruiter with enough information to predict future effectiveness with great precision. To supplement this information, recruiters may subconsciously fall back on their perception of the average member of the candidate's cultural group.

Research based on the stereotype content model (SCM) and the behaviors from intergroup affect and stereotypes (BIAS) map has shown that stereotype content can be described using the dimensions of 'warmth' and 'competence' (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2007; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002), which can be theoretically linked to the SR and TRs mentioned above. Stereotypes associated with immigrant groups are generally less favorable on one or both of these dimensions (Lee & Fiske, 2006), which may be responsible for lower ratings received by minority members.

As is the case in many Western European countries, the most stigmatized groups in the labor force of the Netherlands consist of first- and second-generation migrants from former colonies (such as Surinam and the Netherlands Antilles) as well as from predominantly Muslim countries (such as Turkey and Morocco). Unfortunately, research that examines stereotype content of specific minority groups in the Netherlands is scarce. There is some indication that the Muslim minorities, in particular, face negative associations with regard to both SCM dimensions (Velasco González, Verkuyten, Weesie, & Poppe, 2008). A recent study by Stupar, van de Vijver, Te Lindert, and Fontaine (2014) reports that Dutch majority members have similar affective evaluations of different minority groups, which suggests that the same may apply to non-Muslim minorities, but conclusive evidence has yet to be established.

However, even if stereotyping affects minority members' assessment ratings, other research suggest that it may not be the only explanation for adverse impact. For example, in a study comparing selection rates of the abovementioned minority groups in the Netherlands, the differences are relatively small, and even become negligible when compared to the assessment of majority members (Andriessen, Nievers, Dagevos, & Faulk, 2012). Similar results are reported in Canada (Oreopoulos, 2009) and Ireland (McGinnity & Lunn, 2011), where large differences are found between assessments of majority and minority members, but only very slight differences between different minority groups, even though the latter are associated with very different stereotype content. Based on these findings, it is logical to assume that stereotype content may not be the only mechanism behind adverse impact in selection and assessment. Instead, we propose that these effects may be explained further through the degree of perceived cultural similarity between recruiter and candidate.

Perceived similarity

Goldberg (2005) provides a comprehensive argumentation for the influence of perceived similarity as a predictor of assessment ratings. It is well established that similarity leads to more interpersonal attraction, as it reduces insecurity about one's personal beliefs, which in turn leads to more positive self-evaluation (Byrne, 1997; Duck & Barnes, 1992; Hogg, Coopershaw, & Holzworth, 1993). Job candidates seen as similar tend to be liked more, and evaluated more favorably by recruiters (Goldberg, 2005; Turban & Jones, 1988). This effect has been found for many individual characteristics, such as gender, cultural background, age and even language accents (Deprez-Sims & Morris, 2010; Dipboye & Colella, 2005;

Ployhart & Holtz, 2008). In the context of the job market in the Netherlands, perceived dissimilarity with cultural minority members is particularly prominent. Minority members often differ strongly from native Dutch employees on both surface level (skin color, language accents) as well as deep-level (cultural dimensions, religion) characteristics, which may, in turn, explain why they are overrepresented in unemployment statistics, and underrepresented in higher qualification and managerial careers (Ashikali & Groeneveld, 2015; CBS, 2014).

The most often used explanation for these processes is that the presence of interpersonal differences makes the social environment less secure, and induces a psychological sense of threat (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1990; Stephan & Stephan, 2000; Van der Zee & Van der Gang, 2007). Furthermore, dissimilarity has been shown to reduce workgroup effectiveness, mainly through psychological processes, such as categorization and intergroup anxiety, which have been well documented both in Dutch and international contexts (for an overview, see Fiske, 1998; Hofhuis, Van der Zee, & Otten, 2014; Van Knippenberg et al., 2004). A qualitative study conducted among Dutch managers confirmed that minority employees are often seen as a threat to the (social) status quo in the workplace (Hofhuis et al., 2015). The interviewees in this study state a fear of productivity loss: the possible language differences between cultural groups, as well as greater potential for anxiety and miscommunication in interpersonal contact makes teams more difficult to manage and reduces 'flow'. The time and effort needed to deal with these cultural differences may hinder the unit's operational effectiveness. Furthermore, managers may fear internal conflict as a result of having different cultural viewpoints represented in the team, which may also harm productivity in the long run (cf. Fiske, 1998). Finally, majority members may perceive minority groups as striving mainly for their own cultural group's interest, and may perceive them as a threat to the majority's norms and values (Shelton, Richeson, & Vorauer, 2006; Stephan & Stephan, 2000).

In sum, we argue that the cultural bias that minority candidates experience is not only based on their individual characteristics or the stereotypes associated with their cultural group, but instead may be a result of the recruiter's prediction that the candidate may harm workgroup effectiveness by increasing diversity. When hiring candidates who differ strongly from existing employees, recruiters may thus feel they are indirectly jeopardizing organizational productivity. As such, the degree of perceived similarity and P-O fit may be important levers that drive selection and assessment of these individuals. However, although these processes may lead minority members to be at a disadvantage in selection procedures, other researchers have found that this effect may be moderated by the minority candidates' degree of CM in the workplace.

Cultural maintenance

CM, as defined by Berry (1997), refers to the extent to which cultural (or ethnic) identity and characteristics are considered to be important to the individual, and to which their maintenance is strived for. In the workplace, the desire for CM can express itself in many forms. Oftentimes, minority members outwardly express their cultural heritage, for example through style of dress, language use or religious habits. However, CM can also express itself in more subtle forms, such as the individuals' desire for recognition of their own worldview or own norms and values regarding interpersonal interaction, hierarchy, etc. (Berry, 1997; Peterson et al., 1995). It must be noted that the construct of CM is strongly related to the degree of identification with the cultural group (cf. Barron, Hebl, & King, 2011; Schaafsma, 2011), but is defined in terms of the actual choice made by the

individual to openly display their cultural characteristics, over and above the psychological salience of the group identity.

The present research focuses on the reaction of recruiters, belonging to the cultural majority group, toward CM of minority candidates. Research shows that, in general, majority members prefer minority members to assimilate to the majority culture (Arends-Tóth & Van de Vijver, 2003; Van Oudenhoven, Prins, & Buunk, 1998), because higher perceived similarity may reduce the feelings of threat and anxiety mentioned above, as well as lower the risk of communication problems and interpersonal conflict (Fiske, 1998; Milliken & Martins, 1996).

Consistent with this body of literature, experimental studies focusing on selection and assessment unveiled negative effects of CM on minority members' assessment ratings (for a review, see Barron et al., 2011). In addition, field studies have shown that migrants are more likely to gain employment when they adapt to the majority culture than when they choose to maintain their cultural heritage (De Vroome & Van Tubergen, 2010; Derous, Nguyen, & Ryan, 2009; Kaiser & Pratt-Hyatt, 2009), as they are perceived as being more similar, and less threatening to the majority group within the organization (Major et al., 2002; Sellers & Shelton, 2003).

So far, the question remains how these perceptions among recruiters may be altered to circumvent these biases and encourage them to ignore the perceived risk (Kalev et al., 2006). This study aims to extend the literature by proposing that the negative relationship between CM and assessment rating of minority candidates may be moderated by *PDOs* of the recruiter.

Moderating role of perceived diversity outcomes

In recent decades, it has become apparent that cultural diversity in the workplace, in addition to the negative effects that are outlined above, may also provide positive outcomes for organizations. A review of the literature suggests that diversification may be beneficial for the organization in several different ways (Van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007). First, since most organizations' markets and stakeholders are inherently culturally diverse, having a diverse workforce is a valuable tool for gaining knowledge about, and access to, minority groups within society (Ely & Thomas, 2001). An example is a supermarket in a culturally diverse neighborhood, which matches the cultural backgrounds of its employees with those of its customers to provide the best customer service. The same principle can be applied to other types of organizations; a governmental organization must have a diverse workforce in order to understand and meet the needs of different groups within the society it serves; a health-care provider must be able to communicate effectively about health-related issues in terms that all groups in society are able to comprehend.

Moreover, diversity may also have benefits for team interactions. Studies show that diversity reduces groupthink and may lead to more effective decision-making (De Dreu & West, 2001; Nijstad & De Dreu, 2002). Ely and Thomas (2001) show that interaction between majority and minority members may increase the learning potential of teams. Nakui, Paulus, and Van der Zee (2011) provide evidence that cultural diversity may increase the effectiveness of idea generation in small groups. In sum, cultural diversity may lead to higher flexibility and creativity in workgroups, which in turn increases the competitiveness of the organization.

It has been established that majority members' appreciation of diversity has a positive effect on intercultural interaction. Individuals who value diversity, display more openness

toward cultural differences, a stronger desire for intercultural contact and a reduction in feelings of intercultural threat and anxiety (Hofhuis, Van der Zee, & Otten, 2012; Luijters, Van der Zee, & Otten, 2008; Tropp & Bianchi, 2006; van Knippenberg, Haslam, Platow, Van Knippenberg, & Haslam, 2007). Also, it has been suggested that a positive attitude toward diversity may enhance workgroups' ability to benefit from the presence of divergent viewpoints, thereby enhancing creativity and innovation (Homan et al., 2008; Nakui et al., 2011; Van Knippenberg et al., 2013).

The present study examines whether the way recruiters perceive these outcomes of diversity in the workplace may also have an impact on their assessment of minority employees. It has been shown that, in selection decisions, a positive attitude toward certain minority groups enhances recruiters' intention of hiring of members of these groups (Derous et al., 2009). Besides these group-specific effects on assessment, recruiters' global perception toward *diversity outcomes* may have a similar effect on their assessment decisions.

As explained above, having a *negative* perception of diversity outcomes may cause recruiters to perceive CM as a threat to the social environment within the organization. This perception may be caused by subconscious processes such as the similarity bias outlined earlier, but even when recruiters are consciously aware of their negative attitude toward minority candidates, they may feel justified to act upon these attitudes in the interest of organizational productivity. As a result, they may display a preference for minority members who choose not to express their cultural background, thus giving lower ratings to candidates with strong CM.

Conversely, having a *positive* perception of diversity outcomes, which is associated with an appreciation of individual differences, may cause recruiters to display a preference for minority candidates who actively express their cultural background. In this case, maintaining cultural background in the workplace is viewed as a way to increase the available pool of knowledge, experience and viewpoints within the organization, which may enhance innovation and flexibility. When recruiters recognize the added value of diversity, expressing a different cultural background may be viewed as beneficial for the organization, which could prompt them to ignore their cultural bias and stereotypes, and give higher assessment ratings to candidates with strong CM.

Research overview

In the present research, the abovementioned propositions were tested in an experimental study in which participants, playing the role of recruiters, were asked to assess profiles of candidates belonging to minority groups, for filling a fictional job opening. The minority candidates' profiles vary in the degree of CL and CM. In the experimental manipulation, recruiters were primed for either positive or negative PDOs, after which they were asked to assign a SR and TR to each minority candidate. Below, predictions are given of how PDOs may affect the SR and TR that candidates receive from the recruiters.

For *SR*, it is expected that recruiters will only appreciate CM of minority candidates when they have a positive perception of diversity in the workplace, as was outlined above. An interaction is expected between *PDOs* and *CM* on *SR*.

Hypothesis 1: PDOs moderate the negative relationship between CM and social rating, such that it will be weaker in the positive PDO condition than in the negative PDO condition.

For *TR*, an additional influence of CLs is predicted. The interaction between *PDOs* and *CM* on *TR* may differ depending on the degree to which the candidates are indeed

qualified for the job. Hence, recruiters who have a positive view of differences in the workplace may prefer to recruit candidates with high CM, as this characteristic is associated with ‘added value’ to the organization. This will only occur, however, when these candidates do indeed possess the necessary skills, i.e. when they have a high CL. It is expected that recruiters would not give a high TR to candidates with a low CL, regardless of their PDOs or degree of CM of the candidate. In sum, for *TR*, a three-way-interaction is predicted between *PDOs*, *CM* and *CL*, such that the two-way interaction between *PDOs* and *CM*, as stated in Hypothesis 1, only applies for candidates with a high *CL*.

Hypothesis 2: The moderating effect (as in Hypothesis 1) of *PDOs* on the relationship between *CM* and *TR* will only occur for candidates with a high *CL*.

Method

Design

The hypotheses that were outlined in the introduction were tested using a 2 x 2 x 2 factorial experimental design, in which participants played the role of recruiters, and assessed minority candidates for a fictional job opening. The within-subjects factors *CL* and *CM* of the minority candidates both consisted of two levels, high and low. The between-subjects factor *PDOs* was manipulated, randomly dividing participants in a positive or negative condition. Dependent variables included participants’ *TR* and *SR* of the minority candidates.

Participants

Participants were recruited through the informal networks (friends, family and other acquaintances) of the researchers. Particular care was taken to select and invite individuals who had had experience working in organizations. They were invited to participate in a study on cultural diversity, lasting approximately 1 hour, but were otherwise not told about the aims of the experiment. Those who participated were then asked to invite colleagues and members of their own informal network. In total, 102 individuals participated in this study. To avoid possible contamination due to cultural background, only majority members (in this case those of native Dutch cultural background) were included in the analyses, resulting in a total of 99 participants (61 women and 38 men). Mean age was 30.7 years ($SD = 12.3$), ranging from 19 to 56. A large majority of the participants ($n = 88$; 82.8%) had received higher education, defined as having a bachelor’s degree or above. When compared to the total Dutch workforce (49.4% female, mean age 41.4 years, 31.0% highly educated; CBS, 2014), our sample contains more women, is younger and more educated. However, the variance in these variables was high enough to include them in the analyses as covariates, to control for their influence on the hypothesized effects.

Procedure

The assignments and questionnaires used in this experiment were in Dutch, the primary working language of all participants. Formulations as described hereafter were translated by the authors.

Manipulation of perceived diversity outcomes

Upon arriving, participants were randomly divided into groups of three or four, and the groups were each led to a separate, enclosed room. The groups were randomly assigned to a *positive* or *negative* condition of *PDOs* ($n = 50$ and 49, respectively). *PDOs* were made

salient by asking participants to complete two assignments. In the positive condition, participants were asked to individually write down at least two '*potential positive outcomes of cultural diversity in the workplace, which organizations should aim for*'. In the negative condition, they were asked to write down at least two '*potential negative outcomes of cultural diversity in the workplace, which organizations should try to avoid*'. These formulations of 'aiming for vs. avoiding' are in line with existing theory on approach/avoidance in performance motivation, as proposed by Carver and Scheier (1990), and were intended to amplify the participants' salience of either positive or negative diversity outcomes.

Next, participants were asked to discuss the outcomes they had individually written down with the others in the group for a period of 10 minutes, and together decide on the three best examples. A research assistant was present during this manipulation, to ensure that every participant fully completed the assignment. After the experiment, the researchers checked the positive and negative outcomes that were written down. All individuals had formulated at least two diversity outcomes, and all had participated successfully in the group discussion.

Assessment task

Next, participants individually completed an assessment task. They were first presented a fictional job vacancy for a function within a team. It was stated that the team would be tasked with producing a complicated product in a short time. Emphasis was placed on the fact that the team members should be able to work well together, but would also have to solve complex problems in a creative manner. The necessary qualifications for the job were a bachelor's or master's degree, and a minimum of two years of relevant work experience.

Next, participants were given four fictional profile descriptions of potential candidates for this job. All fictional candidates were male, and belonged to one of the most prominent minority groups mentioned in the Netherlands: Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese, Antillean. Their non-native background could be distinguished from the name and birthplace of the candidates, which was given in the profile. It is important to note that including information such as date and place of birth in job applications is common practice in the Netherlands.

Furthermore, the profiles included general information on the candidates' education (obtained degrees) and work experience (number of years), but no further details were given. In this regard, it must be stated that most migrants from the mentioned minority groups have come to the Netherlands at an early age, and therefore speak the language fluently, as well as possessing Dutch college degrees. The choice was made not to include information on the country in which education was received, to reduce possible influence of participants' stereotypes about foreign credentials and/or language proficiency.

Finally, the profile included a short personal description of the candidates, which was presented as an excerpt from their motivation letter. Please note that in the Netherlands, it is customary for candidates to express their motivations for applying to a job, and provide an indication of how they expect to function in the advertised position, similar to cover letters used in most Western countries.

CL was varied in terms of education and work experience. Low-competence candidates were said to possess a bachelor's degree and two years of work experience, which was the minimum requirement for the job. High-competence candidates were said to possess a master's degree and four to five years of relevant work experience.

CM was varied using a specific section of the profile descriptions, which were presented as a citation from the candidates' motivation letter. Low CM candidates emphasized that they were willing to adapt to the team and stated their cultural background was not an issue (e.g. *'I find it useful to adapt to other people, and I believe my cultural background is not as important in my work'*). High CM candidates stated that they found their cultural background very important and wanted to use it to make a unique contribution to the team (e.g. *'I find it useful to be different than other people, I believe I can make use of my unique cultural background in my work'*).

Measures

Participants were asked to give each candidate a TR and SR, using Dutch-language scales constructed by the researchers. The items were first tested in a pilot study ($n = 16$) among students, which confirmed their internal consistency. TR was assessed using the items *'Do you think this candidate possesses the necessary skills and experience?'* and *'Do you think this candidate is qualified for the job?'* SR was assessed using the items *'Do you expect this candidate to fit well socially within the team?'* and *'Would you like to work together with this candidate?'* All items were rated on a scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 10 (very much). Confirmatory factor analysis showed that TR and SR load on separate factors, with eigenvalues of 2.06 and 1.07, respectively (78.4% of variance explained). A moderately strong correlation was found between the two scales ($r = .43$), which indicates the assessment components are related, but diverge enough to include them in the analyses as separate variables. The overall means, standard deviations and reliabilities of both scales are provided in Table 1.

After completing the assessment task, participants were asked to provide their age, gender, education level, country of birth and that of their parents, after which they were debriefed. Most participants completed the experiment in 40–45 minutes. None took longer than 1 hour.

Results

The hypotheses outlined in the introduction were tested using a full-factorial regression model including PDOs as a between-subjects factor, and CM and CL as within-subject factors. The means of SR and TR in each within-subjects condition, estimated using the procedure formulated by Judd, Kenny, and McClelland (2001), are provided in Table 2. Due to the differential predictions outlined in the hypotheses, the regression analyses were conducted separately for each dependent variable. The results of these analyses are provided

Table 1. Reliability and descriptive statistics of dependent and control variables ($n = 99$).

<i>Dependent Variables</i>	α	<i>M</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>Scale</i>
Social Rating (SR)	.84	7.20	.097	1–10
Task-performance Rating (TR)	.82	6.96	.098	1–10
<i>Control Variables</i>	<i>n (%)</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	<i>Range</i>
Age		30.7	12.3	19–56
Gender				
Male (1)	61 (62)			
Female (0)	38 (38)			
Education level				
Bachelor's degree or higher (1)	88 (83)			
Upto, but not including bachelor's (0)	11 (17)			

Table 2. Estimated marginal means and standard errors of Social Rating and Task-performance Rating in each experimental condition ($n = 99$; scale = 1–10).

	Social Rating (SR) <i>M (S.E.)</i>	Task-performance Rating (TR) <i>M (S.E.)</i>
<i>Positive Perceived Diversity Outcomes (PDO)</i>		
High Competence Level (CL)	7.61 (.10)	7.25 (.10)
High Cultural Maintenance (CM)	7.71 (.10)	7.39 (.10)
Low Cultural Maintenance (CM)	7.50 (.11)	7.10 (.11)
Low Competence Level (CL)	7.11 (.10)	6.74 (.10)
High Cultural Maintenance (CM)	7.19 (.10)	6.81 (.10)
Low Cultural Maintenance (CM)	7.00 (.09)	6.67 (.10)
Total	7.36 (.09)	7.00 (.10)
High Cultural Maintenance (CM)	7.45 (.09)	7.10 (.10)
Low Cultural Maintenance (CM)	7.26 (.09)	6.89 (.11)
<i>Negative Perceived Diversity Outcomes (PDO)</i>		
High Competence Level (CL)	7.27 (.11)	7.13 (.10)
High Cultural Maintenance (CM)	7.09 (.11)	6.99 (.11)
Low Cultural Maintenance (CM)	7.45 (.11)	7.25 (.09)
Low Competence Level (CL)	6.81 (.10)	6.71 (.10)
High Cultural Maintenance (CM)	6.63 (.11)	6.68 (.10)
Low Cultural Maintenance (CM)	6.99 (.10)	6.74 (.10)
Total	7.04 (.10)	6.92 (.10)
High Cultural Maintenance (CM)	6.81 (.10)	6.79 (.10)
Low Cultural Maintenance (CM)	7.27 (.10)	6.99 (.10)

in Table 3. Due to the nature of the sample, age, gender and education level of the participants were included in the analyses as covariates, but none showed significant effects.

Manipulation check

Before addressing the hypotheses, the direct effects of CL on SR and TR were examined, to check the effectiveness of the within-subjects manipulation. As expected, the main effects

Table 3. Repeated measures analysis of the effects of Perceived Diversity Outcomes, Competence Level and Cultural Maintenance on Social and Task performance rating of minority candidates ($n = 99$).

	Social Rating			Task-performance Rating		
	<i>b*</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b*</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>Main effects</i>						
Competence Level (CL)	.56	112.075	.001	.74	160.059	.001
Cultural Maintenance (CM)	–.17	4.524	.036	.01	.087	<i>n.s.</i>
Perceived Diversity Outcomes (PDO)	.13	1.164	<i>n.s.</i>	.09	1.106	<i>n.s.</i>
<i>Interactions</i>						
PDO * CL	.05	.977	<i>n.s.</i>	.14	1.474	<i>n.s.</i>
PDO * CM	.16	4.082	.046	.01	.082	<i>n.s.</i>
CL * CM	.00	.000	<i>n.s.</i>	.01	.074	<i>n.s.</i>
PDO * CL * CM	.02	.365	<i>n.s.</i>	.15	3.209	.076
<i>Control variables</i>						
Age	.06	1.003	<i>n.s.</i>	.02	.304	<i>n.s.</i>
Gender	.02	.433	<i>n.s.</i>	.01	.060	<i>n.s.</i>
Education level	.01	.102	<i>n.s.</i>	.02	.117	<i>n.s.</i>

of CL on both SR and TR were both highly significant ($p < .001$; see Table 3). As expected, those with high CL received much higher assessment ratings, thereby confirming the effectiveness of the manipulations in the fictional profiles of minority candidates.

Social rating

As shown in Table 3, aside from the positive main effect of CL, CM displays a negative main effect on SR ($b^* = -.17$; $p = .036$); candidates with high CM on average received significantly lower SR. PDOs did not display a main effect on SR.

In Hypothesis 1, an interaction between PDOs and CM on SR was predicted. Indeed, our results display a significant interaction effect on SR ($b^* = .16$; $p = .046$; see Figure 1). In the negative PDO condition, candidates with high CM received significantly lower ratings than those with low CM ($b = -.46$, $p = .028$). In the positive PDO condition, no significant effect was found ($b = .19$; *n.s.*). The difference between the regression coefficients is significant ($t(97) = 2.066$; $p = .042$). In other words, the negative impact of CM on SRs disappears when recruiters perceive positive outcomes of diversity, thereby confirming Hypothesis 1.

For SR, no significant interaction effects were found between CL and PDO, or between CL and CM. Furthermore, a three-way interaction effect between CL, CM and PDO was tested, which was not significant, showing that CL did not qualify the interaction between CM and PDO.

Task-performance rating

On TR, besides the strong positive main effect of CL, no main effects were found of CM and PDOs. Neither did the analysis reveal any significant two-way interactions between CM, CL and PDO.

In Hypothesis 2, a three-way interaction between PDOs, CL and CM was predicted on TR. As shown in Table 3, this interaction is significant at the $\alpha < .10$ level ($b^* = .15$; $p = .076$). Figures 2 and 3 show the interactions between PDO and CM on TR, for low and high CLs separately.

For the candidates with low CL (see Figure 2), TR is affected by CM, in neither the positive ($b = .15$; *n.s.*) nor negative ($b = -.06$; *n.s.*) PDO condition. Figure 3 shows the same analyses for candidates with high CL. Analyzing the ratings of these candidates only,

Figure 1. Interaction effect of Perceived Diversity Outcomes (PDO) and Cultural Maintenance on Social Rating of minority candidates ($n = 99$).

Figure 2. Interaction effect of Perceived Diversity Outcomes (PDO) and Cultural Maintenance on Task-Performance Rating of minority candidates with Low Competence Level ($n = 99$).

Figure 3. Interaction effect of Perceived Diversity Outcomes (PDO) and Cultural Maintenance on Task-Performance Rating of minority candidates with High Competence Level ($n = 99$).

a moderating effect is found of PDO on the relationship between CM and TR. In the negative PDO condition, high CM leads to a lower rating ($b = -.26$, $p = .043$). In the positive PDO condition, high CM results in a higher rating ($b = .29$, $p = .038$). The difference between these regression weights is significant ($t(97) = 4.108$; $p < .001$).

Although caution should be exercised in interpreting these effects, as the predicted three-way interaction was only marginally significant, these results do provide preliminary evidence for confirming Hypothesis 2. There appears to be a significant interaction between PDOs and CM on TR, but *only* in a separate analysis, which includes only candidates with high CL. When assessing these individuals, recruiters who view diversity as positive, tend to give higher ratings to candidates with strong CM. Recruiters who view diversity as negative, tend to give lower ratings to these candidates.

Conclusions and discussion

Summary of findings

In this paper, an experimental study was presented that shows that recruiters' PDOs may moderate the effects of CM on the assessment of minority candidates. The results confirm

that CM of minority candidates affects the SRs they receive in the assessment procedure. In line with existing studies on the impact of CM on selection and assessment (De Vroome & Van Tubergen, 2010; Deros et al., 2009), this study reveals that minority candidates receive lower assessment ratings when they display a higher degree of CM. These findings concur with prior research that has shown that perceived dissimilarity leads to less interpersonal attraction and induces a sense of threat among majority members (Byrne, 1997; Stephan & Stephan, 2000), which in turn reduces minority members' chances of being offered employment (Goldberg, 2005; Schneider, 1987; Turban & Jones, 1988). Conversely, minority employees who choose to adapt to existing norms and values of the organization, thus expressing low CM, appear to improve the degree of perceived similarity between themselves and the recruiter, ultimately increasing their chance of receiving a higher SR.

The most important conclusion of this study, however, is that this negative effect of CM on assessment ratings may be moderated by the recruiters' PDOs. It was argued that recruiters who perceive diversity to be the source of negative outcomes may view cultural differences as something to be avoided. As a result, they may assign higher assessment rating to minority candidates who choose to assimilate to the majority culture in organizations, and adapt their behavior and appearance to match existing norms and values. By applying recent insights regarding the effects of positive diversity attitudes to the domain of selection and assessment, it was shown that recruiters who perceive diversity to be beneficial for the productivity of an organization, may view individual differences as welcome and desirable. Consequently, they may give higher ratings to minority candidates who maintain their own culture and openly display and value their uniqueness.

Finally, the above mentioned influence of PDOs on assessment of candidates with a desire for CM does not only affect SR, but may also affect the degree to which recruiters assess whether the candidates will perform their work-related tasks. This study provides some indication that minority members with high CM may receive a high TR, but this appears to occur only when the recruiter perceives diversity outcomes as positive, and only when the candidate is sufficiently competent.

Suggestions for further research

The study presented in this paper provides evidence for the importance of PDOs on the assessment of minority candidates. However, these findings should be regarded with some caution. First, as Barron et al. (2011) state, the question whether or not assessment outcomes in experimental (laboratory) studies directly translate to real-life assessment procedures is still under debate. Before making a definite statement, these results should be replicated among actual recruiters in a more realistic work setting.

Second, the present sample consisted of a group of individuals who differed from the general workforce in terms of age, gender and education level. Although the results were controlled for these variables, and no effects were revealed, it would be desirable to replicate this study among a larger and more representative sample, as well as in different national contexts, before claiming generalizability of the findings.

One of the underlying assumptions of this study is that participants' positive vs. negative perception of diversity outcomes is directly linked to their attitude toward cultural differences on the *organizational level*: wanting to incorporate, respectively avoid, divergent behaviors and viewpoints in the workplace. Although the results suggest this may be the case, in future studies it would be valuable to include additional constructs

to specifically measure participants' *individual-level* attitudes toward cultural diversity. This would provide additional evidence for the assumption that the manipulation indeed changes participants' preference of how to 'deal with differences', which would be beneficial for further theorization in this research domain. To further assess the effects of individual-level diversity attitudes, future studies could include specific characteristics of the recruiters, such as intercultural competences (e.g. Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000), or their degree of openness to experience (e.g. Homan et al., 2008). To further examine the organizational-level effects of PDOs, researchers could assess their influence on organizational-level measures related to diversity, such as diversity climate or intercultural leadership characteristics (Hofhuis et al., 2012; McKay, Avery, & Morris, 2008; Somech, 2006).

A major limitation of this study is that it focuses on recruiters' assessment of minority candidates only. It would be valuable to extend the scope of this research to directly compare ratings given to minority candidates with those given to majority candidates in the same setting. Not only would this shed light on the relative degree of social and task-performance assessment of minority vs. majority members, it would also allow researchers to examine whether recruiters' PDOs would display the same influence on ratings of majority candidates who in some way diverge from the organizational norm.

Another limitation of this research is that it is based on a fictional scenario in which participants played the role of recruiters, assessing candidates for a fictional job opening. A deliberate choice was made to formulate a fairly general job vacancy and keep the profiles of the candidates relatively non-descript. This strategy allowed for greater control over the manipulations and reduced the risk of interference from confounding variables such as educational background or status differences between the fictional candidates. Future research could aim to replicate these results in a more realistic assessment task. It would be possible to use a more descriptive job vacancy and more elaborate descriptions of the potential candidates, such as their type of educational background (e.g. which subjects they majored in) or specific work experience.

In the present study, it was shown that recruiters' perceptions regarding diversity in the workplace may be influenced by a rather simple task, in this case a short individual assignment and a group discussion on the outcomes of diversity. A related question would be how long the effects of this manipulation could last. Based on the reported findings, it can be concluded that the effects of the group assignment last at least long enough to influence a selection task that is performed immediately after the manipulation. For application of this effect in practical situations, however, it would be beneficial to study whether the effects may also have a longer lasting effect, or how the manipulation could be adapted to accomplish this.

Finally, as mentioned above, this study focuses on the effects of a situational manipulation of PDOs. In practice, however, many recruiters in organizations have a priori perceptions of diversity outcomes, which may also strongly influence their assessment of minority candidates. Using a more detailed measure of recruiters' *actual* PDOs (cf. Hofhuis et al., 2015), paired with an assessment task similar to the one used in this study, would be a logical next step in this research line.

Conclusions and practical implications

The results of this study are a first indication that promoting positive perceptions of diversity outcomes may be an important new tool for reducing adverse impact in selection

procedures. Although earlier scholars have expressed pessimism about interventions that address cognitive bias in selection procedures (Kalev et al., 2006; Reskin et al., 1999), the findings presented in this paper suggest that the relationship between similarity and assessment ratings in this context may be circumvented by emphasizing the positive side of diversity regarding organizational productivity.

An important challenge for modern organizations is to design their recruitment process in such a way that new employees are selected on the basis of both their level of competence as well as the unique knowledge and experiences they may bring to the workplace. As suggested by Kalev et al. (2006), reducing adverse impact in selection could be accomplished by providing (outside) incentives, in terms of organizational performance or reputation, to increase workplace diversity. The present research confirms that recruiters' perception of the actual diversity outcomes in terms of team or organizational productivity may indeed be an effective way to frame such incentives. It appears that promoting positive diversity outcomes may specifically raise the evaluations of highly competent individuals who choose to maintain their cultural heritage. This is an important group, as it is these employees who fuel the possible benefits of cultural diversity for team productivity, through increasing flexibility and innovation in workgroups (De Dreu & West, 2001).

Bearing in mind the reported findings, it should be noted that recruiters are embedded within the larger context of the organization, and promoting positive diversity outcomes will likely not be effective unless the rest of the organization is also included in interventions. Consistently stating the belief in 'value-in-diversity', both in external (Avery & McKay, 2006) and internal (Shen et al., 2009) communication may be one way to accomplish this. Training programs could be aimed at defining the concrete advantages of diversity for innovation and competitiveness – effectively formulating the business case for diversity. Ely and Thomas (2001) provide a comprehensive rationale for the reasons why organizations may benefit from workforce diversity, for instance through better access to markets and customers, and by enhancing learning potential, flexibility and innovation. Through explicating, in training and management development practices, how the presence of cultural differences could increase performance, organizations may be able to turn around existing negative perceptions and promote a more positive view (Shen et al., 2009; Van Knippenberg et al., 2013).

Furthermore, organizational leadership plays an important role in this regard. Diversity practices are rarely effective when only implemented bottom-up: support within the higher ranks of the organization is needed. Including non-majority decision makers is a valid strategy for increasing awareness of diversity at different levels (Cook & Glass, 2014). Personnel officers as well as managers in different organizational layers who are aware of the productive advantages of diversity will in turn provide a boost to the success of diversity management in general (Harquail & Cox, 1993; McKay et al., 2007; Van Knippenberg et al., 2004).

The study presented in this paper shows that enhancing value-in-diversity-beliefs among recruiters may open doors for the recruitment and career development of minority employees who bring unique knowledge and experience to the workplace. This may reduce workplace inequality and ultimately make organizations more innovative and competitive.

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