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Managing diversity: How leaders' multiculturalism and colorblindness affect work group functioning

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Abstract

Workforces are becoming increasingly diverse and leaders face the challenge of managing their groups to minimize costs and maximize benefits of diversity. This paper investigates how leaders' multiculturalism and colorblindness affect cultural minority and majority members' experiences of connectedness (feeling accepted or distancing from group) and relationship conflict in their group. We collected data from 29 culturally diverse student work groups and their leaders. We used repeated measures (baseline and follow-up) of group functioning and independent measures of members' and leaders' diversity perspectives. Multilevel analyses revealed that leaders' diversity perspectives affect work group functioning, controlled for members' own perspectives: Leaders' multiculturalism predicted feeling accepted in the group for minority members. In contrast, leaders' colorblindness predicted distancing from the group and relationship conflict for minority members. There were no significant effects of leaders' diversity perspective on majority members and no reverse effects of prior group functioning on leaders' diversity perspectives.

Keywords

colorblindness, diversity, leadership, multiculturalism, work groups

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In today's increasingly diverse societies, many work groups consist of people from different cultural backgrounds. While cultural diversity has become an important issue for organizations, research relating cultural diversity to group performance has yielded mixed results (e.g., van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007), which may be due to contextual factors (Joshi & Roh, 2009), rater bias (van Dijk, van Engen, & van Knippenberg, 2012) or other moderators (e.g., Moreland, 2013). Research relating cultural diversity to group processes, however, consistently finds that diversity negatively affects

the social side of group functioning (Moreland, 2013; van Knippenberg & Haslam, 2003). Compared to members of nondiverse work groups, members of culturally diverse groups are

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less attached to their group (Tsui, Egan, & O'Reilly, 1992), less satisfied and less committed (Jehn, Northcraft, & Neale, 1999), less cooperative (Chatman & Flynn, 2001), and they experience less group cohesion (O'Reilly, Caldwell, & Barnett, 1989). Moreover, relationship conflict is more prevalent in culturally diverse groups (Jehn, Chadwick, & Thatcher, 1997; Pelled, Eisenhardt, & Xin, 1999). These negative effects of cultural diversity on group processes raise the question how to manage diverse work groups with a view to enhancing members' connectedness with their group and reducing potential conflict. Our research focuses on the role of work group leaders in the effective management of diverse groups.

Work Group Leaders as Diversity Managers

To date, research on leadership in culturally diverse work groups is still scarce (Chin, 2010). Yet, there is preliminary evidence of leaders' influence on group functioning in culturally diverse work contexts. Greer, Homan, De Hoogh, and Den Hartog (2012) show that culturally diverse work groups communicate and perform better when so-called visionary leaders are able to give a sense of meaning and purpose to their group and to avoid subgroup categorisation. Moreover, Kearney and Gebert (2009) find that culturally diverse work groups perform better under transformational leaders, who commit themselves to each group member and who try to enable members' full potential. Both studies indicate that general leadership styles affect the functioning of culturally diverse work groups. However, these studies did not investigate whether such leadership styles affect minority members (i.e., members with a cultural background different from the host culture) and majority members differently. Furthermore, general leadership styles do not specify how leaders manage diversity itself (e.g., to what extent cultural differences between group members are ignored or acknowledged, valued or seen as a difficulty). For example, a transformational leader can try to enable members' full potential with or

without taking into account members' cultural background. As we argue in what follows, such differences in leaders' approach to diversity will affect the social functioning of culturally diverse work groups.

Diversity Perspectives: Multiculturalism and Colorblindness

Work group leaders may adopt different perspectives on diversity, which will guide how they implement and manage diversity at work. In this paper, we focus on two perspectives on how to manage cultural diversity: multiculturalism and colorblindness (Plaut, Thomas, & Goren, 2009; Stevens, Plaut, & Sanchez-Burks, 2008). *Multiculturalism* explicitly recognizes cultural differences and considers them as a strength and an added value. In contrast, *colorblindness* foregrounds equality between all people by focusing on similarities and individual merit while ignoring cultural differences.

Multiculturalism recognizes and values differences between members from different cultural backgrounds. This diversity perspective is very similar to other concepts such as positive diversity beliefs (van Knippenberg & Haslam, 2003), diversity attitudes (e.g., Sawyerr, Strauss, & Yan, 2005; van Oudenhoven-van der Zee, Paulus, Vos, & Parthasarathy, 2009), or a group's diversity climate (Luijters, van der Zee, & Otten, 2008), which all refer to the belief that diversity is something valuable. From a social categorisation perspective on group processes (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wheterell, 1987), a multicultural ideology proposes a group identity which differentiates between distinct subgroups within a common superordinate identity (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Saguy, 2007). According to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), the social groups to which people belong make up their social identity, so that their self-esteem is contingent upon the value of their in-group. It follows that intergroup contexts where their in-group is devalued or disregarded pose a threat to their self-esteem as a devalued group member.

Reasoning from cultural groups as social identities, multiculturalism provides identity safety for minority members, to the extent that it values and protects their distinct cultural identities (Derks, van Laar, & Ellemers, 2007; Verkuyten, 2005). For majority members however, multiculturalism may pose a threat to their identity if the emphasis on cultural differences is seen to value cultural minorities at the expense of the value of their ingroup (Verkuyten, 2005).

Accordingly, cultural minority members were found to support multiculturalism more strongly than majority members (Markus, Steele, & Steele, 2000; Ryan, Hunt, Weible, Peterson, & Casas, 2007). Moreover, support for multiculturalism has been associated with more favourable attitudes and less bias against minorities as compared to colorblindness (Richeson & Nussbaum, 2004; Wolsko, Park, Judd, & Wittenbrink, 2000). Similarly, studies show that minority members feel more included and engage more with their work in organizations that support multiculturalism (Plaut et al., 2009; Vos, Jansen, Otten, Podsiadlowski, & van der Zee, 2014). Yet, majority members may feel more excluded in a multiculturalist environment (Plaut, Garnet, Buffardi, & Sanchez-Burks, 2011). Importantly, Stevens et al. (2008) propose that “all-inclusive” multiculturalism can include both minority and majority members. All-inclusive multiculturalism explicitly values not only minority group members, but also majority group members, as distinct parts of the diverse group.

Colorblindness emphasizes that all individuals are equal and that cultural differences are irrelevant. From a social categorization perspective (Turner et al., 1987), a colorblind ideology redefines the group boundaries between cultural minority and majority members by recategorising them as individual members of a common ingroup (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000; Gaertner, Dovidio, Anastasio, Bachman, & Rust, 1993). While the common ingroup formally constitutes all its members as equals, it will fail to actually include minority members when status inequalities between cultural minority and majority members persist (Dovidio et al., 2007; Plaut, 2002, 2010). In

unequal intergroup contexts, high-status group members will project their identity onto the superordinate level, thus appropriating the common ingroup identity and defining low-status groups as peripheral or deviant members (Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999). From a social identity approach (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), colorblindness will thus entail identity threat for cultural minority members when the common ingroup identity is seen to impose the norms and values of the cultural majority. Consequently, cultural minority members may resist a common ingroup identity which is seen to justify and perpetuate intergroup inequalities (Dovidio et al., 2007). Similarly, they may experience pressures to assimilate to the majority culture and to deny their distinct culture and identity in a colorblind environment (Derks et al., 2007; Markus et al., 2000). Conversely, the same colorblind environment connotes identity safety for majority members, as they will experience more ownership of a common ingroup identity which bolsters their cultural values.

In support of such different processes in minority and majority groups, majority members were found to support colorblindness more strongly than minority members (Markus et al., 2000; Ryan et al., 2007). Likewise, there is evidence that majority members feel more connected to an organization which supports colorblindness (Vos et al., 2014), whereas minority members tend to feel more excluded (Plaut et al., 2011).

Together, these findings underline that multiculturalist and colorblind climates set the stage for different group processes in diverse societies and organizations, which have different consequences for cultural minority and majority members. In this paper, we argue that group leaders’ diversity perspectives will play a crucial role in creating a multiculturalist or colorblind climate within a work group.

Leaders’ Multiculturalism and Colorblindness

Work group leaders’ task is to motivate group members to work towards collective goals and

to maintain group harmony. To this end, they influence members' task and social behaviours (Chemers, 2001; Yukl, 2010). From a social identity approach, work group leaders are central group members who not only represent group norms ("being one of us"), but who also play a key role in the construction of a group identity ("crafting a sense of us"): leaders craft a group's identity to ensure that their vision becomes prototypical for the group (Haslam, 2004; Haslam, Reicher, & Platow, 2011). Moreover, they can mobilise group members to act in accordance with this group identity (Reicher & Hopkins, 2003). In culturally diverse work contexts in particular, work group leaders are thus well placed to help create a common group identity which includes both cultural minority and majority members, and which enables cooperation and reduces conflict between group members (see also Homan & Jehn, 2010). As most work group leaders directly interact with group members and as group members typically perceive their leaders as representing their group identity, leaders will influence how members engage with cultural diversity in their group (van Knippenberg, van Ginkel, & Homan, 2013). Along those lines, intergroup contact research (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) has identified support from authorities as an important condition for positive contact between people from different cultural backgrounds, because authorities can create a norm of acceptance. Looking beyond explicit or injunctive norms, the hierarchical position of work group leaders also requires that they make decisions which directly affect group members (e.g., who is assigned to a task, who gets promoted). Leaders' decision making and other behaviours (implicitly) communicate their perspectives on diversity to group members. We expect that these perspectives have consequences for group processes in culturally diverse groups, because they will affect members' feelings of acceptance and inclusion in the group, and they are important to avoid conflict and enable cooperation on the group task.

Minority and Majority Members' Experiences of Connectedness and Conflict

As work group leaders communicate and implement different diversity perspectives, they seek to create inclusive work groups where minority and majority members feel committed to the group and where they help each other to achieve group goals (Dovidio et al., 2007). The present study examines how leaders' multiculturalism and colorblindness affect the functioning of cultural minority and majority members with a focus on their experiences of connectedness and conflict in the work group. Both connection and cooperation have been shown to be more difficult in diverse groups (Jehn et al., 1997; Pelled et al., 1999; Tsui et al., 1992). Members' *connectedness* refers to their group identification, as indicated by the positive experience of acceptance in the group (*feeling accepted*). Conversely, a lack of connectedness is assessed by the desire to disconnect or distance oneself from the group (*group distancing*).¹ In addition, our measure of *conflict* indicates the failure of cooperation between members of diverse work groups. We focus on *relationship conflict* (i.e., interpersonal tension or emotional discordance; Jehn, 1995), because diverse groups have been shown to experience enhanced relationship conflict in comparison to nondiverse groups (Jehn et al., 1997; Pelled et al., 1999).

To summarise, we investigate how leaders' multiculturalism and colorblindness affect members' experiences of connectedness and conflict in student work groups. Our study bridges research on leadership in diverse work groups with a separate stream of research on diversity perspectives. Since multiculturalism and colorblindness are known to affect cultural minority and majority members differently (see previous lines), we expect that leaders' adherence to these diversity perspectives will differentially affect minority and majority members of diverse work groups. Accordingly, we hypothesize that members' cultural background will moderate the associations of leaders' diversity perspectives with

members' experiences of connectedness and conflict in the group.

Hypothesis 1: Members' cultural background will moderate the influence of leaders' diversity perspectives on members' experiences of connectedness and conflict in the group.

A strength of our design is that we can test the effects of distinct diversity perspectives on minority and majority members separately. In line with previous research, we predict that leaders' multiculturalism will relate to more positive experiences for minority members (i.e., feeling more accepted), though it may entail more negative experiences for majority members (i.e., more group distancing and conflict). In contrast, we predict that leaders' colorblindness will relate to more negative experiences for minority members (i.e., more group distancing and conflict) but may be more positive for majority members (i.e., they may feel more accepted).

Overall, we expect the effects of leaders' diversity perspectives to be stronger for minority members. As potential targets of discrimination, minority members should be more concerned than majority members about diversity values or beliefs in their environment (Tropp & Bianchi, 2006). Along those lines, there is evidence that minorities are highly sensitive to (often implicit or subtle) diversity cues in their work environment, so that they will sooner disengage when the environment does not support their minority identity (Purdie-Vaughns, Steele, Davies, Dittmann, & Randall Crosby, 2008).

Hypothesis 2: The effects of leaders' diversity perspectives on members' experiences of connectedness and conflict in the group will be stronger for minority members than for majority members.

Another strength of the study is the independent measurement of leaders' diversity perspectives as reported by the leaders themselves, rather than members' perceptions of leaders'

perspectives. In this way, we avoid common method bias, which is a weakness in studies relating members' perception of leaders to their self-reported experiences in the group. As a most stringent test of work group leaders' unique influence, our analyses control for the degree to which individual members and their fellow group members endorse multiculturalism and colorblindness. Thus, we estimate the net effect of leaders' diversity perspectives over and above one's own and other members' perspectives within the work group. Finally, we also control for the proportion of minority members in the work group, leaders' and members' gender, and leaders' cultural background.

In addition, we exploit our baseline measures of group functioning preceding the main questionnaire to test for reverse causation. To consolidate our hypotheses, we draw on theoretical arguments from social categorisation and social identity theories and on cross-sectional evidence on the effects of multiculturalism and colorblindness. It could be argued, however, that the relation between diversity perspectives and group functioning works either both ways or the other way around, such that prior work group functioning determines leaders' perspectives on diversity over time. To put this argument to a test, we investigate whether leaders' diversity perspectives are influenced by our baseline measures of group functioning, as reported by group members as well as by group leaders themselves. Baseline measures of group functioning were collected 1 month before the main questionnaire was administered (i.e., 5 months into the group project).

Method

Procedure and Study Context

To test our hypotheses, we administered a questionnaire to 33 student work groups and their leaders at a francophone university in Brussels, Belgium at the end of their 6-month joint project (main questionnaire) and 1 month before (baseline measure). Every group consisted of a

group leader who was a first-year master engineering student and five to seven group members who were first-year bachelor engineering students. Students were assigned to the work groups by the coordinator of the course such that every member knew only one other member in the group. Group leaders were randomly assigned to work groups. They were enrolled in a university course on leadership and were encouraged to be themselves, rather than applying a specific leadership style. Similarly, there were no explicit instructions for leaders on how to deal with diversity issues.

During the group project, group members and their leaders were meeting at least once a week. The aim of the group project was to build a technical prototype that could heat water by means of physical activity, to write a joint paper about their project, and to present the project to an external jury of professors who evaluated their work. Group members were graded on the quality of their papers and presentations and on their collaboration as a group. They were graded by the jury, not by work group leaders. Leaders received grades for their management skills, such as discussing problems in the group, communication skills, and professional attitude. They were also graded by the jury, not by their group members. Participation in the study was voluntary, anonymous, and had no effect on course grades.

Participants

Because leaders' beliefs about cultural diversity are the focus of this study, we analysed only the groups whose leaders filled out the questionnaire and where one or more members had a minority cultural background. The remaining 29 groups consisted of five to seven students ($M = 6.17$, $SD = 0.71$) plus their leaders. Group leaders' ($n = 29$) mean age was 22.63 ($SD = 2.02$), and 71.4% were men. Group members' ($n = 173$) mean age was 18.83 ($SD = 1.11$), and 79.6% were men. Of all participants, 27 leaders and 148 group members rated the baseline measures of conflict and group connectedness.

Measures

Cultural background. In line with previous research (e.g., Podsiadlowski, Gröschke, Kogler, Springer, & van der Zee, 2012), we measured participants' cultural background by their country of origin, as well as the country of origin of both parents. The definition of cultural minorities by national origin or ancestry is common in European societies, where cultural differences are mainly perceived between a national (rather than racial or European) ingroup and nonnational outgroups (Duchesne & Frogner, 2008; Goldberg, 2006). Specifically, participants were categorized as cultural minority members if their own and one or both of their parents' country of origin was not Belgium. Based on this definition, 31% of the group leaders and 27.7% of the group members were cultural minority members. Within work groups, proportions of cultural minority members varied from 12.5% to 66.7% ($M = 27.1\%$, $SD = 15.68$). Cultural backgrounds were very diverse: the countries of origin included several (North) African (e.g., Cameroon, Congo, Morocco), Asian (e.g., China, Iran, Vietnam), European (e.g., France, Greece, Spain), and North American countries (Canada, USA). Given the small number of minority members with a European or North American background (34.5%), our data do not allow for analyses that distinguish effects of leaders' diversity perspective on Western versus non-Western minority members.

Diversity perspectives. All members and leaders scored four indicators that were adjusted from Ryan et al. (2007) and Plaut et al. (2009) to measure the perspectives specifically in a work group context. *Multiculturalism* was measured as a composite of two indicators: "The fact that members of my group came from different cultural backgrounds made for a valuable collaboration" and "Members with different cultural backgrounds had different ideas that complemented each other," $r = .45$, $p < .001$. *Colorblindness* was also composed of two indicators: "I thought it was better not to pay attention to cultural backgrounds

during this collaboration” and “In my view, all group members should behave in the way that is customary within our university,” $r = .16, p = .024$. Given this significant but low correlation, we repeated our analyses with each item separately. Because these analyses fully replicate our results with the composite scale, and in line with previous research (Plaut et al., 2009; Rosenthal & Levy, 2010), we report the analyses with the composite scale. We calculated levels of endorsement of multiculturalism and colorblindness for (a) *group leaders* as reported by leaders themselves, (b) *individual members*, and (c) *other group members* (i.e., mean endorsement levels of the other members of the same work group).

Feeling accepted in the group. To assess connectedness, two items measured to what extent group members felt accepted in their group: “I feel accepted in the group” and “I feel out of place in this group” (reversed), $r = .56, p < .001$; $r_{\text{baseline}} = .41, p < .001$.

Distancing from the group. To indicate the failure to connect, two items measured the extent to which group members distanced themselves from the group: “I dislike being a member of my group” and “I would rather belong to another group,” $r = .68, p < .001$; $r_{\text{baseline}} = .75, p < .001$ (Ellemers, Kortekaas, & Ouwerkerk, 1999).²

Perceiving relationship conflict in the group. To assess the failure to cooperate, we measured group members’ perceptions of relationship conflict in their work group using Jehn’s (1995) Intragroup Conflict Scale. Relationship conflict was measured by three items ($\alpha = .80$; $\alpha_{\text{baseline}} = .82$): “How much friction is there among members in your work group?,” “How much are personality conflicts evident in your work group?,” and “How much emotional conflict is there among members in your work group?”

All measures were scored on 5-point Likert scales, with 1 reflecting low scores of the construct and 5 reflecting high scores of the construct. Means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations for all variables can be found in Table 1.

Results

We analysed our data using two-level multilevel models (cf. Hox, 2002) in SPSS, given that our data consist of 173 members nested in 29 groups and predictors were specified both at the individual level (e.g., members’ own multiculturalism) and at the group level (e.g., leaders’ multiculturalism). Random slopes for leaders’ diversity perspectives were not significant. In multilevel models, maximum likelihood (ML) estimations are preferably used with 30 groups or more, while restricted maximum likelihood estimations (REML) already yield robust estimates with as little as six to 12 groups (Browne & Draper, 2000; Maas & Hox, 2004). We report models with REML estimations in this paper, because we analysed data from 29 groups. We also repeated the analyses with more commonly used ML estimation. As the results were the same, we do not report these analyses. The three models (i.e., one model for each outcome measure) tested whether leaders’ endorsement of multiculturalism and colorblindness significantly predicted members’ experiences of connectedness and conflict in their work group, controlled for members’ own endorsement and other members’ endorsement of multiculturalism and colorblindness. To test whether the effects of diversity perspectives differed between cultural minority and majority members, we added all interactions of members’ cultural background with leaders’, one’s own, and other members’ diversity perspectives. Moreover, we controlled for the proportion of minority members within the group, leaders’ cultural background and gender, and members’ gender in every model.³ The results of all multilevel models as well as the percentage of variance of each outcome variable at group and at individual level can be found in Table 2.

In line with our hypotheses, leaders’ diversity perspectives significantly predict members’ experiences of connectedness and conflict in their work group and the effects differ between minority and majority members. More specifically, our findings show that the degree to which leaders endorse multiculturalism is positively related to

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and correlations between all variables.

	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1. Leader's multiculturalism	3.28 (0.90)																
2. Leader's colorblindness	3.09 (0.97)	.39**															
3. Own multiculturalism	3.40 (0.80)	.32**	.16*														
4. Own colorblindness	3.39 (0.97)	.19**	.33**	.19**													
5. Other members' multiculturalism	3.42 (0.34)	.43**	.18* –	.21**	–.02												
6. Other members' colorblindness	3.50 (0.65)	.34**	.30**	.11	.35**	.17*											
7. Feeding accepted in group	3.74 (0.81)	.07	–.01	.25**	.09	–.09	.08										
8. Distancing from group	1.64 (0.93)	.01	.01	–.17*	–.02	.08	–.05	–.47**									
9. Relationship conflict	1.97 (0.83)	–.11	.04	–.24**	.01	–.10	.00	–.47**	.42**								
10. Cultural background member ^a		.01	–.02	.02	.18*	.03	.03	.23**	–.05	–.24**							
11. Cultural background leader ^a		.14	.11	.07	.16*	.11	.34**	.14	–.13	–.17*	.18*						
12. Gender member ^b		–.10	–.09	–.03	.01	–.15	–.13	–.05	.02	.20**	–.04	–.14					
13. Gender leader ^b		–.13	–.13	–.07	–.23**	–.08	–.34**	–.07	.07	.10	–.15*	–.22**	.15*				
14. % minority members in group	27.10 (15.68)	.00	.09	–.04	–.10	–.09	–.12	–.10	.21**	.15*	–.38**	–.32*	.05	.46**			
15. Baseline feeling accepted in group	3.72 (0.76)	.01	–.07	.09	.05	.06	.04	.54**	–.36**	–.32**	.14	.14	–.06	–.09	–.07		
16. Baseline distancing from group	1.65 (0.91)	–.04	–.12	–.10	–.05	–.11	–.11	–.36**	.52**	.34**	–.05	–.23**	.10	.07	.17*	–.33**	
17. Baseline relationship conflict	1.96 (0.83)	–.20*	–.03	–.24**	.02	–.23**	–.12	–.28**	.25**	.64**	–.17*	–.18*	.15	.11	.10	–.26**	.47**

^a0 = minority, 1 = majority; ^b0 = male, 1 = female.
p* < .05; *p* < .01.

Table 2. Effects of leaders' diversity perspectives on all outcomes (multilevel analyses).

	γ (SE)		
	Feeling accepted	Group distancing	Relationship conflict
Intercept	2.70 (1.51)	0.38 (1.84)	2.30 (1.81)
Cultural background ^a	0.47 (1.85)	0.79 (2.27)	-0.26 (1.89)
Leader's multiculturalism (MC)	0.40 (0.19)*	0.04 (0.23)	-0.09 (0.21)
Leader's colorblindness (CB)	-0.13 (0.13)	0.34 (0.16)*	0.37 (0.15)*
Leader's MC x Cultural background	-0.44 (0.22)*	0.11 (0.26)	0.09 (0.22)
Leader's CB x Cultural background	0.02 (0.16)	-0.54 (0.19)**	-0.34 (0.16)*
<i>Control variables:</i>			
Own multiculturalism	0.12 (0.16)	-0.30 (0.20)	-0.10 (0.17)
Own colorblindness	-0.01 (0.16)	0.01 (0.20)	0.12 (0.17)
Own MC x Cultural background	0.16 (0.19)	0.12 (0.24)	-0.15 (0.19)
Own CB x Cultural background	0.07 (0.18)	-0.01 (0.23)	-0.10 (0.19)
Other members' multiculturalism	-0.17 (0.40)	0.10 (0.49)	-0.43 (0.46)
Other members' colorblindness	-0.10 (0.24)	0.08 (0.30)	0.12 (0.26)
Other members' MC x Cultural background	0.13 (0.50)	0.11 (0.61)	0.42 (0.51)
Other members' CB x Cultural background	0.01 (0.27)	-0.02 (0.33)	0.03 (0.27)
Proportion of minority members in group	-0.01 (0.01)	0.02 (0.01)**	0.01 (0.01)
Leaders' cultural background ^a	0.35 (0.16)*	-0.17 (0.20)	-0.15 (0.22)
Leaders' gender ^b	0.15 (0.17)	0.04 (0.21)	-0.11 (0.25)
Own gender ^b	-0.11 (0.16)	0.33 (0.20)	0.38 (0.17)*
Variance at individual level	96.0%	90.6%	71.7%
Variance at group level	4.0%	9.4%	28.3%*

^a0 = minority, 1 = majority; ^b0 = male, 1 = female.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

members' *feeling accepted in the group*, $t(103.65) = 2.08$, $p = .040$. This effect is qualified by a significant interaction with members' cultural background, $t(121.96) = -2.05$, $p = .043$. Analyses with minority and majority members separately show that this interaction effect is driven by minority members: Minority members feel more accepted in the group when their leader supports multiculturalism more strongly, $t(41) = 2.24$, $p = .031$. In contrast, leaders' support for multiculturalism is not related to majority members' feeling accepted, $t(100) = -0.46$, $p = .649$.

In addition, the degree to which leaders endorse colorblindness predicts *distancing from the group*, $t(123) = 2.16$, $p = .032$. This effect is again qualified by members' cultural background, $t(123) = -2.78$, $p = .006$. To further examine this interaction, we analyzed cultural minority and majority members separately. We found that minority members distance themselves significantly more from the group when their leaders are more colorblind, $t(30) = 2.35$, $p = .026$; majority members show a near-significant trend in the opposite direction, suggesting rather less distancing from

Table 3. Baseline measures of group functioning as predictors of leaders' diversity perspectives.

Predictors one month earlier:	Leader's multiculturalism		Leader's colorblindness	
	β	p	β	p
Feeling accepted in group				
Reported by leader	0.05	.866	-0.07	.779
Reported by members (group average)	-0.02	.957	-0.32	.253
Group distancing				
Reported by leader	-0.18	.496	-0.04	.876
Reported by members (group average)	0.07	.847	-0.18	.565
Relationship conflict				
Reported by leader	-0.06	.891	-0.44	.239
Reported by members (group average)	-0.30	.509	0.54	.192

the group when leaders are more colorblind, $t(21.55) = -1.82, p = .084$.

Similarly, the degree to which leaders endorse colorblindness predicts perceptions of *relationship conflict* in the group, $t(58.56) = 2.50, p = .015$. Again, this main effect is qualified by members' cultural background, $t(117.33) = -2.15, p = .033$. Cultural minority members experience more relationship conflict when their group leader endorses colorblindness more strongly, $t(11.09) = 2.37, p = .037$, while leaders' colorblindness is unrelated to perceived conflict by majority members, $t(20.11) = 0.12, p = .910$. There are no main effects of members' cultural background.

Of all *control variables*, only three are significant predictors: Group members feel more accepted in the group when their group leader has a majority cultural background, $t(24.60) = 2.16, p = .040$; they distance themselves more from their group when there is a higher proportion of minority members in the group, $t(123) = 3.25, p = .001$; and female group members report more relationship conflict than male members, $t(120.27) = 2.27, p = .025$.

Finally, we tested the reverse causation by regressing leaders' multiculturalism and colorblindness on their own assessment or members' assessment of group functioning 1 month prior to the main questionnaire. As shown in Table 3, neither leaders' multiculturalism, nor their colorblindness was influenced by prior group functioning: there were no significant effects of

feelings of acceptance in the group, group distancing, or relationship conflict as reported by group leaders or by group members 1 month earlier.

Discussion

As workforces are becoming increasingly diverse, leaders face the challenge of managing diversity in their teams in order to overcome difficulties and to exploit the benefits of cultural diversity in the workplace. In the present research, we investigated how leaders' support for multiculturalism and colorblindness affect group functioning in culturally diverse work groups.

First, we found that group leaders' multiculturalism uniquely predicts minorities' feelings of acceptance in the group. This finding is consistent with a social identity approach which relates multiculturalism to identity safety and increased engagement for minority members (Plaut et al., 2009; Verkuyten, 2005). Going against a related argument that majority members might feel threatened or excluded when their organization supports multiculturalism (Plaut et al., 2011), we found little evidence of a downside of leaders' multiculturalism for majority members. Rather, our findings resonate with a notion of *all-inclusive multiculturalism*: when multiculturalism emphasizes not only the value of minority groups but also the value of the majority group, majority members may feel included rather than threatened and

hence, negative effects for majority members are not inevitable (Stevens et al., 2008).

Second, we also found that minority members experience more distance from the group and more relationship conflict when group leaders support colorblindness more strongly. This finding supports a well-documented argument that cultural minorities will experience colorblindness as exclusionary and threatening to their distinct identity (Dovidio et al., 2007; Markus et al., 2000). While Vos et al. (2014) found that majority members feel more included in a colorblind organization, our study provides little evidence for a possible majority advantage of colorblindness, except for a near-significant trend towards less group distancing.

Overall, leaders' multiculturalism and colorblindness especially affect cultural minority members as possible targets of discriminatory treatment. This finding of minority-majority asymmetry supports the argument that minority members' functioning is more contingent on whether their work environment values diversity than that of the majority whose identity is more secure (Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008; Tropp & Bianchi, 2006). While more research into minority and majority understandings of cultural diversity is needed, our finding that majority members need not suffer from leaders' multiculturalism qualifies accounts of multiculturalism as alienating majority employees from culturally diverse organisations.

A distinctive strength of the present study is its multilevel design, which relates members' group functioning at the individual level to leaders' self-endorsed (rather than their perceived) diversity perspectives as external predictors at the group level. In this way, our results cannot be attributed to common method bias or evaluative bias in members' experiences of the group and their evaluations of diversity or leadership. An additional strength of the study design is its longitudinal dimension, which allows us to test for possible lagged effects of prior work group functioning on the endorsement of different diversity perspectives by work group leaders. In the absence of significant reverse effects, it

seems unlikely that leaders' multiculturalism or colorblindness is reactive in response to (less) successful group formation. Instead, we conclude that group leaders can play a proactive role as diversity managers who create identity safety for all group members, and for minority members in particular.

Our research adds to the literature in at least three ways. First, the different implications of leaders' diversity perspectives for cultural minority and majority members corroborate a social identity approach of multiculturalism (Verkuyten, 2005), and provide further support for its ecological validity in interactive groups of students. In line with different expectations of identity threat versus safety for minority and majority subgroups within diverse work groups, we find that multiculturalism enables, and colorblindness hampers, the functioning of minority, but not majority, group members. Second, our study bridges separate research literatures on diversity ideologies and on leadership in organisations. Our findings show that group leaders who value cultural diversity can create inclusive work group identities which enable both cultural minority and majority members to connect to the group and to cooperate towards common goals. Importantly, leaders' views on diversity make a difference over and above the individual and collective diversity beliefs of group members themselves; and their unique impact holds regardless of leaders' own cultural background. Taken together, these findings contribute to existing research on cultural diversity by foregrounding the key role of leaders as central group members who represent the common work group identity and who can communicate a positive diversity norm to group members (Haslam et al., 2011). Third and finally, the findings also add to existing research on leadership by empirically establishing leaders' diversity perspectives as a relevant dimension of leadership in culturally diverse work environments.

Limitations and Future Directions

The previous conclusions should be interpreted with due caution in light of several limitations of

our data. First, the correlation between our two indicators of colorblindness was significant but low. As both items differ in their emphasis on “assimilation” or “ignoring cultural difference,” their low correlation may suggest that, in a European context, assimilation represents a separate perspective (Verkuyten, 2005) rather than an integral part of colorblindness (Plaut et al., 2009; Rosenthal & Levy, 2010). On the other hand, additional analyses showed that both indicators of colorblindness are functionally equivalent: they are similarly related to members’ experiences of connectedness and conflict in their work group. Future research could further differentiate between assimilation and colorblindness and replicate our findings with more extensive and more reliable measures of diversity perspectives. On a related note, future research could also look into possible valence differences between measures of multiculturalism and colorblindness. While they are taken from existing scales (Plaut et al., 2009; Ryan et al., 2007), our multiculturalism items may have a more positive evaluative connotation than the colorblindness items. As we predict members’ experiences in their group from leaders’ self-rated diversity perspectives, however, possible valence effects cannot account for our substantive findings.

Another possible limitation is the fact that our baseline measures were administered when groups had already been working together for 5 months. In future research, an earlier baseline measure would be preferable. It seems unlikely, however, that initial group functioning could have a lasting effect on leaders’ diversity perspectives that would not be mediated by our more proximal baseline measures of group functioning.

In addition, more research in different intergroup settings would be needed to find out which contextual factors in our research setting may moderate the impact of leaders’ diversity perspectives on minority and majority members. While we investigated work groups that had been interacting on a meaningful and demanding task over a longer period of time (6 months), our study was situated in an academic context and our group leaders were master’s students. Most likely,

leaders’ diversity perspectives will matter even more in other organizational contexts, where leaders typically have more power over members’ outcomes (e.g., over pay, promotion, and job assignments) than the group leaders in our study, whose groups were externally evaluated and graded. In addition, we need to acknowledge that our setting provided several conditions that might have facilitated diverse work group functioning. First, students represent a highly educated and generally less prejudiced segment of the majority population; hence, majority participants in other organisational settings might be more prone to feel threatened by multiculturalism (Wagner & Zick, 1995). Second, our work groups had to cooperate on a creative task. Such a task structure is more suited to bring out the added value of diversity as compared to more competitive or less creative work contexts (e.g., assembly line workers). Third, the minority students in our sample came from many different backgrounds. In intergroup contexts where the cultural minority is more homogenous, the majority–minority divide may be more salient and majority members might sooner feel threatened or excluded by multiculturalism. Altogether, we cannot be sure whether the conclusion from our findings that all-inclusive multiculturalism can be a viable model of diversity management in a European context may be restricted to settings with these specific conditions. Therefore, future research should further investigate the role of leaders’ diversity perspectives in other, less optimal, intergroup contexts.

Several issues remain to be investigated in this field. For example, it would be interesting to study whether leaders’ diversity perspectives have differential effects on different groups of minority members. We would expect that leaders’ approach to diversity affects non-Western minorities in particular, as they are generally more devalued by majority members (Billiet & Swyngedouw, 2009) and hence may be more vulnerable to identity threat. It would also be interesting to investigate further *how* work group leaders’ diversity perspectives affect members’ experiences in the work group. As argued from previous research (e.g., Dovidio et al., 2007;

Verkuyten, 2005), experiences of identity safety and identity threat mechanisms may be important mediators. Moreover, it seems worthwhile to examine how group leaders communicate their diversity perspective in implicit and explicit behaviours (e.g., taking cultural background into account in selection or promotion procedures, stressing the added value of differences between group members in successfully reaching group goals) and to what extent group members have an accurate perception of their leaders' perspective.

To summarize, our findings suggest that diverse work groups and especially their minority members will benefit from a leader who recognizes cultural differences amongst the work group members and emphasizes them as a strength, rather than ignoring differences or stressing assimilation. It is especially encouraging that in our study, these benefits for minorities were not at the disadvantage of majority group members. These findings have important applied implications for current controversies over cultural diversity and diversity management at the workplace and in society at large. Organizations may want to empower leaders to promote an inclusive multiculturalist climate within their work group. To this end, organizations could include multiculturalism as a company value, train group leaders in the endorsement of diversity perspectives that emphasize the possible benefits of cultural diversity at work and in parallel, raise awareness of the costs of denying cultural diversity when leaders adopt a colorblind approach.

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Notes

1. Additionally, we measured task conflict and whether group members took pride in their group. As our analyses revealed no effects for these variables, we do not further discuss them in the scope of this manuscript.
2. The group distancing items are part of a group identification scale with two positive and two

negative items. In the paper, we only use the negative items because these formed a reliable scale ($\alpha_{\text{negative items}} = .83$), while the four items together ($\alpha_{\text{complete scale}} = .58$) and the positive items separately ($\alpha_{\text{positive items}} = .49$) showed low reliability. Since we used the negatively phrased items and reliability analyses suggested they did not measure the exact same construct as the positive items, we labelled them scale "group distancing." However, analyses with the full group identification scale support the robustness of our findings.

3. Models with only the effects of interest yield the same results as models that include the control variables, with one exception: the interaction effect between leaders' colorblindness and members' cultural background on members' feeling accepted is near significant, $t(132.87) = 1.82, p = .072$, instead of significant.

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