What drives ethnic discrimination in recruitment? Examining individual and contextual factors using a sample of German recruiters

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Executive summary:

Recruiters' responsibility is to hire the best fitting candidates for a particular job. On the one hand, this ensures a fair and just procedure for job applicants and on the other hand, provides the recruiting organisation with quality personnel. However, research experiments point to the fact that superficial characteristics that are entirely unrelated to the objective fit of an applicant (e.g., ethnicity, age, gender, etc.) influence the evaluations of recruiters. The present research focused on ethnicity by investigating how ethnic discrimination in recruitment can be explained. The participants that took part in this research were real-world recruiters with German nationality. They were instructed to evaluate applicant resumes for two kinds of jobs, a job low in prestige (cashier) and a job high in prestige (store manager). The recruiters rated four resumes for each of the two jobs. On each resume the ethnicity of the applicant was randomly assigned to be either German or Turkish. Preference for German over Turkish applicants in the evaluations of recruiters was interpreted as discrimination. Next to that, the recruiters were asked to fill in questionnaires. These questionnaires measured to what extent the recruiters perceive Turks as a threat (perceived ethnic threat) and how frequently the recruiters are in contact with Turks (intergroup contact).

Perceived ethnic threat: Ethnic threat distinguishes between realistic threat which concerns tangible values (e.g., neighbourhood safety or job chances on the labour market) and symbolic threat which concerns intangible values (e.g., religion or religious customs). An increase in perceived ethnic threat was associated with more ethnic discrimination between German and Turkish applicants.

Intergroup contact: Intergroup contact describes face-to-face interactions recruiters had with people of Turkish origin. It was expected that increased intergroup contact would be associated with less ethnic discrimination. The data showed that this was not the case, as intergroup contact turned out to be unrelated to ethnic discrimination.

Job function: As indicated above, there were two jobs for which the recruiters rated resumes. Namely, the position of a cashier and a store manager. The results showed that ethnic discrimination differed across the two jobs. Whereas there was hardly any discrimination for the store manager job, clear discrimination was observed for the cashier job. Interestingly, the exact opposite was expected. Multiple interpretations are discussed in the paper.

Overall, no statistically significant preference for German applicants over Turkish applicants was observed. This is a positive finding, as it implies that Turkish applicants have a fair chance for employment. Still, it was found that recruiters who perceive Turks as an ethnic threat were more likely to discriminate. The results suggest that the threat perceptions of those recruiters might be attenuated with intergroup contact. Prior research has shown that imagining intergroup contact is already enough to encourage open-mindedness.

Abstract: Previous field experiments revealed considerable magnitudes of ethnic discrimination in recruitment which poses a problem for organisations and individual applicants. The present study addressed the question to what extent ethnic discrimination in recruitment can be explained by perceived ethnic threat, intergroup contact, and the level of skill required by the job. The study sampled 54 German recruiters whose task was to evaluate resumes (n = 432) for a low skill job (cashier) and a high skill job (store manager). On each resume the ethnicity of the applicant was manipulated to be either German or Turkish. Evaluation differences between German and Turkish applicants were interpreted as ethnic discrimination. Additionally, perceived ethnic threat and intergroup contact were measured with questionnaires. The results showed no statistical preference for German applicants over Turkish applicants. Also, the results have shown that recruiters' perceived ethnic threat and the job function moderated the relationship between applicant ethnicity and recruiter evaluations, whereas intergroup contact did not. Follow-up analyses suggested that religion might play a crucial role. The results are then discussed in light of the theoretical framework and practical implications are offered.
KEY WORDS: ethnic discrimination, recruitment, resumes, contact hypothesis, group threat theory, job characteristics

Due to the course of globalisation and migration flows, ethnic diversity of the European workforce population continues to grow (Marois, Bélanger, & Lutz, 2020). Contemporary research has pointed out several benefits of ethnic diversity in teamwork. In a Dutch field experiment, for instance, Hoogendoorn and van Praag (2012) assigned business students who were taking part in an entrepreneurial program into random teams and found that the share of ethnic minorities in a team positively affected the financial performance of the team. Complementary data from questionnaires suggested that this is because the relevant knowledge is more diverse in heterogeneous teams which has a positive influence on mutual learning. Other studies have suggested that ethnic diverse teams are more innovative (Brixy, Brunow, & D'Ambrosio, 2020; Nathan 2014) and perform better on tasks that require creativity (McLeod, Lobel, & Cox, 1996), compared to homogeneous teams. Yet, a large body of experimental research clearly demonstrates that ethnic minorities have to face considerable extents of ethnic discrimination in recruitment processes (Blommaert, Coenders, & van Tubergen, 2014; Kaas & Manger; 2012; Quillian, Pager, Hexe, & Midtbøen, 2017; Weichselbaumer, 2019). Altogether, these studies suggest that ethnic minority applicants are significantly less likely to receive a positive response from recruiters than applicants from the

ethnic majority group, merely due to their ethnic background (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004). This finding has been repeated with a comprehensive variety of ethnicity comparisons (Quillian et al., 2017). For example, in Germany, Turkish applicants are about 14% less likely to get invited to a job interview than German applicants (Kaas & Manger, 2012; Thijssen, Lancee, Veit, & Yemane, 2019).

Ethnic discrimination is associated with negative consequences for the individual who experiences discrimination. Previous research has linked ethnic discrimination with depression (Torres & Vallejo, 2015), anxiety (Cano et al., 2016) and psychotic symptoms (Bardol et al., 2020). Besides that, ethnic discrimination in recruitment implies disadvantages for organisations. That is because the strength of an organisation is to a large extent dependent on the quality of personnel. Thus, a business loss is implied, if recruiters neglect valuable candidates, due to biased evaluations. Hence, recruiters should be encouraged to disregard the ethnicities of applicants as much as possible, to ensure a fair and purposive recruitment procedure.

To this date, the existence of ethnic discrimination in recruitment has been frequently documented in scientific literature, but the phenomenon is yet to be grasped from a psychological point of view (Adamovic, 2020). That is because research thus far has put only little focus on examining factors that explain why ethnic minority applicants are more likely to be rejected than applicants from the majority ethnic group. Given the harmful effects of ethnic discrimination on individual applicants and the hiring organisation, a deeper understanding of ethnic discrimination in recruitment would be meaningful. The scope of the present study thereby focuses on the comparison between German natives and the ethnic minority of Turks[1] who are the largest minority group in Germany (Statista, 2020). Subsequently, concepts are discussed that are potentially connected to the topic of ethnic discrimination in recruitment.

Perceived ethnic threat

The group threat theory (Blalock, 1967) proposes that ethnic groups are in competition over tangible resources (e.g., economic power, job opportunities) and intangible resources (e.g., religion, cultural customs). Groups that are controlling those resources are sensitive to groups that threaten their dominance. The concept of *perceived ethnic threat* (PET) thereby defines

[1] Throughout this paper the term *Turks* may include all residents located in Germany with Turkish roots. The nationality does not necessarily need to be Turkish.

the degree to which a particular ethnic minority is seen as an endangerment to the status quo. Based on that, the theory predicts that when a particular ethnic minority group becomes more influential, the majority group will act more hostile towards that minority group, because of PET. Studies from the US support the theory by showing that the severity of court decisions against ethnic minorities is positively related to the local size of the ethnic minority population (Carmichael, 2005; Ulmer & Johnson, 2004). Moreover, a field experiment by Gaddis and Ghoshal (2015) showed that housing discrimination against American Arabs was higher in cities with larger concentrations of mosques. Applying these findings to recruitment discrimination, Thijssen (2021) found that ethnic discrimination in recruitment is more likely in regions with a higher concentration of ethnic minorities.

Because the theoretical framework of PET has its origins in sociology, previous studies have mostly measured the concept on a strata level rather than an individual level. Hence, it is not entirely clear so far whether ethnic discrimination can be explained with individual differences of ethnic threat perceptions. Nonetheless, since Turks are arguably the most influential ethnic minority group in Germany (largest ethnic minority; Statista, 2020), recruiters' levels of PET towards Turks could play a role in biased recruitment evaluations.

Intergroup contact

The contact hypothesis of Allport (1954) states that contact between (ethnic) groups reduces negative intergroup attitudes. So-called *intergroup contact* (IC) is defined as "face-to-face interaction between members of clearly defined groups" (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006, p. 754). The contact hypothesis is well-known in the field of intergroup psychology, as it has been tested with a variety of groups in many contexts. A meta-analysis by Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) investigated over 500 studies and confirmed the central idea that IC is negatively related to prejudice in general and prejudice about ethnicities specifically (Wagner, Van Dick, Pettigrew, & Christ, 2003). Related to the topic of the present study, Fasbender and Wang (2017) found that having cross-group friendships predicted the willingness of recruiters to hire outgroup applicants. Still, there have been a rather few studies linking IC to behaviour (i.e., discrimination). Wagner, Christ and Pettigrew (2008) found an association between IC and xenophobic behavioural intentions (e.g., intention to buy a car from a foreigner). Another study that measured behaviour more directly found a positive relationship between IC with homosexual men and voting behaviour that supports the rights of homosexuals (Zingora & Graf, 2019). Accordingly, it could be that German recruiters with more IC with Turks are more supportive of the employment of Turkish applicants, rather than

recruiters with less IC with Turks. However, it needs to be remarked that research into the relationship between IC and behaviour is far less conclusive than with attitudes (MacInnis & Hodson, 2018). Hence, more research into the relationship between IC and behaviour would be desirable.

Job function

Economic studies often refer to statistical discrimination when explaining ethnic discrimination in recruitment. Statistical discrimination means that recruiters infer applicant characteristics from attributes that are statistically more common among the relevant ethnic group (Fang, Hanming, & Moro, 2011). That is because resumes do not provide recruiters with enough information about a particular applicant, to make precise assessments about relevant criteria (Andriessen, Nievers, Dagevos, & Faulk, 2012). Consequently, applicants are judged on characteristics that are attached to the (ethnic) group that they are perceived to belong to, even though those characteristics may not apply to them. Turks in Germany commonly have a lower socioeconomic status and are statistically more likely to engage in violent or criminal behaviour, when compared to native Germans (Bundeskriminalamt, 2021). Additionally, many Germans have the impression that Turks are unpunctual (Kahraman & Knoblich, 2000). Recruiters may draw upon those kinds of information when estimating personal dispositions of Turkish applicants. Therefore, it may be the case that Turkish applicants are discriminated against more when the job involves a higher degree of responsibility. That is because false selections are more costly for responsible jobs and the statistical information that recruiters may consider is likely to be a substantial barrier when it comes to entrusting Turkish applicants with responsible jobs.

Research question

The present study addresses the following research question: To what extent can perceived ethnic threat, intergroup contact and the job function explain ethnic discrimination in recruitment processes? To answer this research question, the present study will apply the methodology of resume studies in a laboratory setting. The typical procedure of resume studies is that researchers send manipulated resumes in response to real-world job openings. The resumes match each other entirely, except for one feature. This one feature determines the focus characteristic on which discrimination is tested on. For example, like in the original resume study by Bertrand and Mullainathan (2004), applicants either had a White-sounding

name or a Black-sounding name. Variation in recruiter responses that is caused by the differing feature (e.g., applicant ethnicity) is then interpreted as discrimination.

Resume studies are commonly set up as field experiments. That is because no trade-offs must be made between internal and external validity, as they are both likely to be high. However, the ethical justification of this methodology is ambiguous (Hangarten, Kopp, & Siegenthaler, 2021), as the data is obtained without consent. Furthermore, deception is applied by making recruiters believe that a fake applicant is real which requires recruiters to do redundant work and might influence the recruitment process (Rich, 2014). Thus, real applicants may get rejected because they are seen as inferior to an applicant that was created by researchers. Hence, a further goal of the present study aims to lay out a new methodological path for resume studies by inviting recruiters to participate. This ensures that the data collection becomes more ethical for applicants and recruiters. Recruitment is done in form of a vignette that seizes the idea of resume studies by letting participants rate matched resumes where only the ethnicity of the applicant differs. Furthermore, the experiment can be combined with the use of questionnaires which can aid to test explanatory attempts of ethnic discrimination in recruitment. Explanations that are approved by empirical evidence may then serve as a basis for future interventions.

In this study the feature that varied between resumes was ethnicity. More concretely, German and Turkish ethnicities were compared, manipulated by the name of the applicant. Whether the ethnicity of an applicant was German or Turkish was decided based on chance. Participants were recruiters whose task was to evaluate four applicants for two jobs respectively. The two jobs were cashier and store manager which were thought to differ on the required skill level, with store manager as high-skilled job and cashier as low-skilled job. After the evaluation of applicants, recruiters were asked to fill in questionnaires about PET and IC.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis #1: Turkish applicants will be evaluated worse than German applicants indicating the occurrence of discrimination.

Hypothesis #2: More PET towards Turks is associated with more discrimination against Turkish applicants.

Hypothesis #3: More IC with Turks is associated with less discrimination against Turkish applicants.

Hypothesis #4: More discrimination occurs for the store manager job, compared to the cashier job, due to the differences in skill that the jobs require.

Methods

Participants

To be eligible to participate in this research, German citizenship was required, as well as experience in professional recruitment. That means that participants could either be common HR employees in a company, employees of recruitment agencies, or chief executives of smaller companies that have no HR department. To ensure compliance with these requirements, the research sample was acquired with purposive sampling. The researcher actively approached recruiters who meet the participation criteria.

In total, 59 recruiters agreed to participate of which five recruiters did not finish the questionnaires. Those five recruiters were excluded from further analyses. Hence, the final sample consisted of 54 participants. Among the participants were 36 females and 18 were males. The age of the recruiters ranged from 24 to 65 years (M = 38,296; SD = 10,524). The predominant Bundesländer in which the participants spent the most time of their lives were Nordrhein-Westfalen (n = 24) and Bavaria (n = 18). Approximately half of the participants were church members (44.4%).

Since every recruiter rated eight resumes, a total of 432 resumes got rated. This constituted the total sample size of this study (n = 432) yielding sufficient statistical power at the recommended level of .80 (Cohen, 1988), even for moderately small effect sizes (f^2 > .15).

Procedure

The methodological goal was to implement a study that accounts for the ethical limitations of regular resume studies. In the present research, recruiters were actively invited to participate online. That way ethical issues are compensated for because participation is consensual and the study does not interfere with real-world recruitment processes. Furthermore, this study method allowed to combine the core task of resume studies (evaluating manipulated resumes) with the administration of questionnaires.

The study consisted of two parts. In the first part of this research participants were instructed to imagine working as a recruiter for a supermarket. It was their task, to rate applicants on their employability for two different job positions. One job position was a cashier and the other job position was a store manager. Participants rated four resumes for

each of the two job positions, so eight resumes in total. All participants saw the same eight resumes. However, on each resume the ethnicity of the applicant was either German or Turkish, based on chance. To put it differently, for each of the eight resumes there was a version with a German applicant name and a version with a Turkish applicant name and the version that was displayed was decided randomly for each of the eight resumes. The order of the resumes was randomized, as well as the order of the two job positions for which the participants were instructed to recruit. It was intended to manipulate the applicant ethnicity through the applicant's name which is an empirically justified practice (Butler & Homola, 2017). In the second part of this research the participants were asked to fill in questionnaires about PET, IC, and additional information (see section below).

The study was set up with *Qualtrics*, an online software for survey constructions. The completion of the entire study took approximately 15 minutes. Participants took part in this research online.

Materials

Resumes

The resumes were based on real applications, drawn from internal databases which responded to either a cashier position or a store manager position. For each of the two jobs, four resumes have been selected that the researcher assessed as relatively homogeneous, with regards to their persuasive power. Due to reasons of privacy, minor modifications needed to be made. Anonymous generics were used for the applicant e-mail, phone numbers and locations. The locations of previous workstations or educational institutes were removed. Company names were reduced to the work sector (e.g., *Volkswagen* into *automobile manufacturer*) and names of educational institutes were reduced to the educational level (e.g., *high school*). Volunteer work and socio-political engagements have been removed, as well. Moreover, all resumes were put in the same visual layout to foster comparability between the applicants. An exemplary resume can be viewed in Appendix A.

All Turkish names that were used were suggested to be common among Turks living in Germany by onomatological literature (Rodríguez, 2010). At the same time, names of well-known public figures (e.g., *Erdoğan*) have been avoided, as this may influence assessments. The German names were built with the help of *fantasynamegenerators.com* and were assessed by the researcher for their representativeness. All names that were assigned to the resumes were male.

Recruiter evaluation

The dependent variable in this study was the evaluation that recruiters gave for each resume. This evaluation was centred around the question how employable the recruiters rated the applicants. This was indicated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from *does not fit at all* to *fits perfectly*.

Perceived ethnic threat

PET was measured with five items that were adopted from the measurement of Kanas, Scheepers and Sterkens (2015). Three of these items measured realistic threat (e.g., safety climate, job chances) and the other two measured symbolic threat (e.g., religion, culture). All items were presented in the form of statements that participants rated on their applicability on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from *not at all applicable* to *very applicable*. For example, one statement measuring realistic threat states "with an increasing presence of citizens of Turkish origin, I am concerned about an increase in violence.". An exemplary statement measuring symbolic threat states "with an increasing presence of citizens of Turkish origin, I am concerned about the preservation of German customs."

The questionnaire was translated into German using the back-translation method by research confederates. The full questionnaire is displayed in Appendix B.

Intergroup contact

The questionnaire that was used to measure IC was the General Intergroup Contact Quantity and Contact Quality questionnaire (CQCQ; Islam & Hewstone, 1993). Corresponding to the ordinary use of the scale, the word *outgroup* was replaced with *Turks* for each item. The concrete specifications of what the term Turks includes were given to the participants (see footnote pp. 5). The questionnaire itself consists of two scales: contact quantity and contact quality. Contact quantity refers to the frequency of face-to-face interactions with outgroup members. All five items ask about the frequency of contact with Turks in different social environments (e.g., at work, in the neighbourhood or at home). The answer categories were presented on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from *no contact at all* to *permanent contact*. Contact quality refers to the degree to which these interactions were experienced positively or negatively. The five items on this scale are adjectives that are rated for their accuracy in describing previous contacts with Turks. The adjectives are *equal*, *voluntary*, *intimate*, *pleasant*, and *cooperative*. Again, the answer categories were presented on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from *not at all applicable* to *very applicable*. The internal consistency is

reported to be high for both scales (α = .90 and α = .82, respectively; Islam & Hewstone, 1993). The questionnaire was translated into German using the back-translation method by research confederates. The full questionnaire can be viewed in Appendix C.

Additional information

Participants were asked to indicate their age and gender, as well as their (pre-academic) scholarly degree. Moreover, participants were asked in which *Bundesland* [2] they have spent the most time of their lives. This measurement approaches IC in a more objective sense, since the proportion of Turks varies between the Bundesländer. The rationale for this measurement was that a higher proportion of Turks in the Bundesland would be related to more exposure and hence, more IC. However, many neighbourhoods are segregated by ethnicity. Therefore, the construct validity of Bundesland as an indicator of IC might be rather low. Besides that, participants were asked whether they are church members or not. The objective was to investigate whether church members perceive Turks more as an ethnic threat and discriminate more against them, due to their divergent views on religion. That is because most Turks consider themselves as Muslims.

Data analysis

Each evaluated resume (employability rating) counted as one case, instead of every recruiter representing one case. For the applicant name a dummy code was created (1 = German; 2 = Turkish). Response options of all items from the questionnaires of PET and IC were presented on a seven-point Likert scale. For both concepts the mean was computed, as well as the mean for each of their subscales. To answer the main research question, a one-way ANCOVA has been performed on the employability rating with the ethnicity of the applicant as independent variable. Furthermore, the job function (categorical, cashier vs. store manager), PET, and IC (both continuous) were added to the model as moderators. Besides, exploratory analyses were planned to assess the role the Bundesland, church membership and age.

Results

Preliminary analyses

Reliability analysis

[2] Bundesland = Federal state of Germany (e.g. Bavaria, Hesse, North Rhine-Westphalia, etc.)

The reliability was analysed for the subscales of PET and IC. The reliability scores of realistic threat and symbolic threat were acceptable (α = .76 and α = .80, respectively), given the small number of items on the subscales (Pallant, 2010). With regards to IC, the observed alpha coefficients for contact quantity and contact quality (α = .90 and α = .91, respectively) were similar to the ones that are reported by Islam and Hewstone (1993).

Processing of scores

For each participant the mean scores were computed for the scales of PET, IC, and each of their subscales. The data had to be restructured in such a way that each rated resume represented one case, instead of each participant representing one case. Thus, each case indicated which ethnicity the applicant on the resume had, to which job this resume applied to, and how the resume was rated by the recruiter.

Test of assumptions

Histograms and Q-Q plots showed that the scores were approximately normally distributed for both ethnicities. Also, the data held no outliers, assessed with a boxplot. Running Levene's Test demonstrated the homogeneity of variances (F (3, 428) = 0.777; p = .507). Furthermore, a grouped scatter plot of the covariates showed that PET and IC were linearly related to the employability rating for both types of ethnicities.

Main analysis

A one-way ANCOVA was conducted that tested the main effect of ethnicity (German vs. Turkish) on the employability rating and its interaction with PET, IC, and the job function (cashier and store manager). The descriptives and correlations for all variables are summarised in Table 1. For a summary of the ANCOVA results, see Table 2.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics and correlations.

Variable (response options)	Mean	SD	N	1	2	2a	2b	3	3a	3b
1 - Employability rating (1-5)	2.930	1.113	432	/						
German ethnicity	3.15	0.990	213							
Turkish ethnicity	2.71	1.183	219							
Cashier job	2.95	1.168	216							
Store manager job	2.91	1.057	216							
2 - Intergroup contact (1-7)	4.256	1.206	54	.139**	/					
2a- Contact quantity (1-7)	3.367	1.359	54	.090	.910**	/				
2b- Contact quality (1-7)	5.144	1.302	54	.164**	.902**	.642**	/			
3 - Perceived ethnic threat (1-7)	2.852	1.262	54	-.149**	-.623**	-.601**	-.526**	/		
3a- Realistic threat (1-7)	2.808	1.293	54	-.133**	-.569**	-.602**	-.425**	.893**	/	
3b- Symbolic threat (1-7)	2.917	1.671	54	-.127**	-.517**	-.437**	-.501**	.852**	.525**	/

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

Table 2

Fixed effects ANCOVA results with employability rating as dependent variable.

Predictor	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	partial η^2
(Intercept)	67.842	1	67.842	65.583	.000	.134
Ethnicity (main effect)	2.167	1	2.167	2.095	.149	.005
Ethnicity* Intergroup contact	3.099	2	1.549	1.498	.225	.007
Ethnicity* Perceived ethnic threat	29.520	2	14.760	14.268	.000	.063
Ethnicity* Job position	13.088	2	6.544	6.326	.002	.029
Error	438.603	424	1.034			

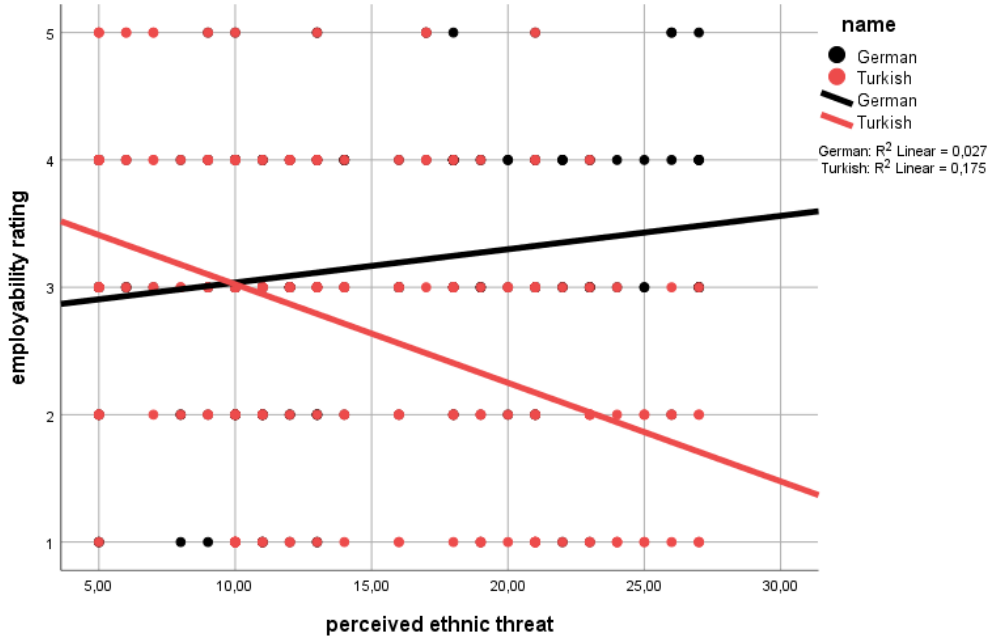
Notes. * = interaction

The one-way ANCOVA showed no statistically significant main effect of the ethnicity of the applicant (F (1, 431) = 2.095, $p > .050$). Thus, the mean employability rating for resumes with a German name (M = 3.15; SD = 0.990) and resumes with a Turkish name (M = 2.71; SD = 1.183) were statistically not different from each other.

Also, the difference on employability rating between German and Turkish applicants did not change significantly based on a function of IC (F (2, 431) = 1.498, $p > .050$). That means that the data showed no indication for interaction between the ethnicity and IC, with respect to the employability rating.

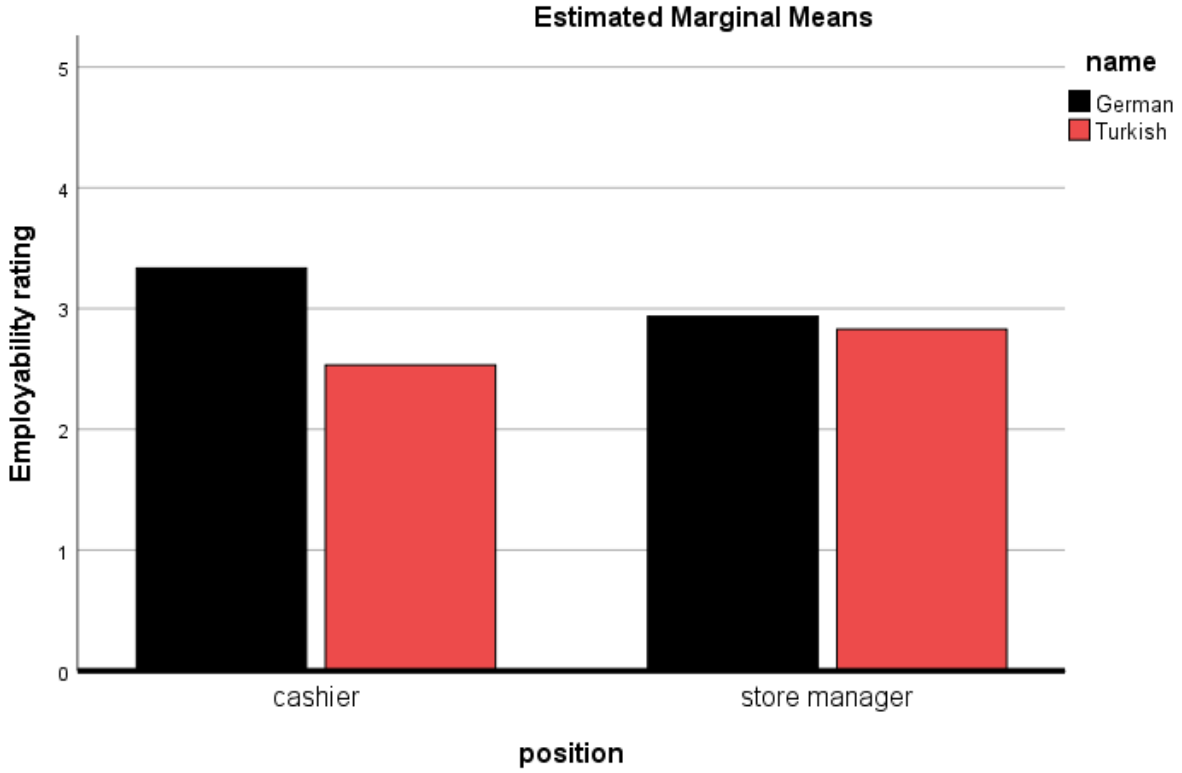
The interaction between applicant ethnicity and PET was statistically significant (F (2, 431) = 14.268, $p < .000$). Namely, increased PET towards Turks was associated with increased favouritism of applicants with German names over Turkish names (Figure 1). The effect size was large, assessed by the partial eta squared (*partial* η^2 = .063).

Figure 1. *Interaction plot between applicant ethnicity and perceived ethnic threat.*



Furthermore, the analysis showed that the interaction between applicant ethnicity and job function was statistically significant (F (2, 431) = 6.326, $p < .005$). This highlights that discrimination changed significantly dependent on the required level of job skill. Interestingly though, not in the expected direction. In contrast to what was hypothesised, discrimination against Turkish applicants was more prominent for the cashier job than the store manager job (see Figure 2). The effect size was large, assessed by the partial eta squared (*partial* η^2 = .029).

Figure 2. *Distribution of mean employability ratings of German and Turkish applicants over the jobs cashier and store manager.*



Follow-ups and explorative analyses

Predicting ethnic threat from intergroup contact

A linear regression analysis was used to test whether more IC with Turks can reduce PET. The results showed that IC negatively predicts PET (*ß* = -.623, $p < .000$) accounting for 38.8% of the variance (F (1, 430) = 273.071, $p < .000$).

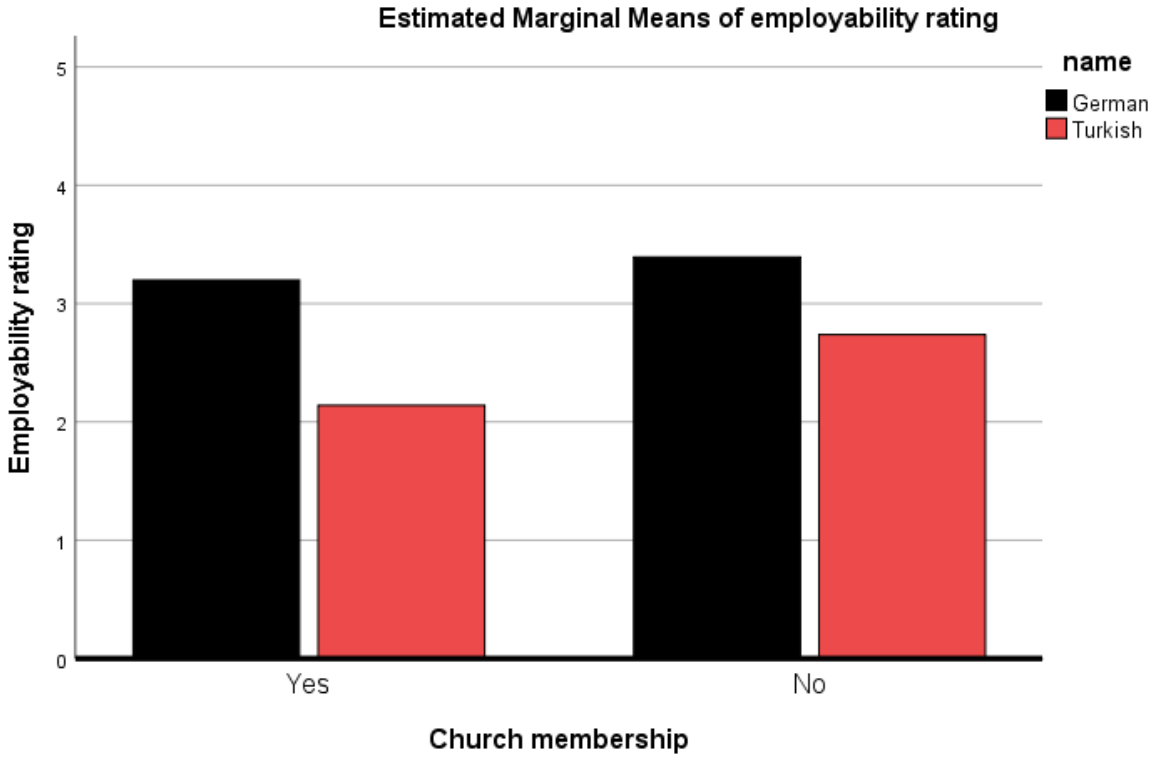
Subscales of perceived ethnic threat and intergroup contact

The main analysis was repeated using the sub-components of the scales for PET and IC. These were realistic threat and symbolic threat for PET and contact quantity and contact quality for IC. Out of those four sub-scales only symbolic threat reached statistical significance (F (2, 431) = 9.081; $p < .000$). The size of the effect was large, assessed by the partial eta squared (*partial* η^2 = .041).

Explorative variables

Additionally, the one-way ANCOVA from the main analysis was repeated replacing the moderators by gender, church membership and Bundesland as categorical variables and age as a continuous variable. Like the main ANCOVA, the model tested the main effect of the applicant ethnicity and its interaction with the other variables. The results showed that church members were more likely to rate German applicants over Turkish applicants (F (4, 431) = 5.170; p < .000; Figure 3). The effect size was large (*partial* η^2 = .049). The other interactions were statistically not significant.

Figure 3. *Distribution of mean employability ratings between German and Turkish applicants over church members and non-church members.*



Discussion

The research question was to what extent ethnic discrimination in recruitment can be explained by PET, IC, and job function. Subsequently, the results of this study are discussed with respect to each hypothesis.

Hypothesis #1: "Turkish applicants will be evaluated worse than German applicants indicating the occurrence of discrimination."

The observed preference for German applicants over Turkish applicants, with regards to their employability ratings, was statistically non-significant. Therefore, the present study overall did not observe ethnic discrimination implying that the first hypothesis is rejected. This contradicts the results of numerous experiments that present evidence for the existence of ethnic discrimination in recruitment, Kaas and Manger (2012) particularly, since they have observed striking differences between the assessments of German and Turkish applicants. The reason why the present study did not observe an effect of ethnicity, may be ascribed to social desirability. This is further addressed in the limitations.

Hypothesis #2: "More PET towards Turks is associated with more discrimination against Turkish applicants."

The data showed that increased PET was associated with significantly more discrimination against Turkish applicants. This finding supports the group threat theory of Blalock (1967) which assumes that threat perceptions towards outgroup members results in discriminatory behaviour. Therefore, the third hypothesis is retained. The follow-up analysis that investigated which type of ethnic threat was predictive of ethnic discrimination showed that only symbolic threat (concerning religion and culture) was statistically significant. Additionally, the exploratory analysis revealed that church members discriminated more between ethnicities than non-church members. Together, these results suggest that religion may be a profound underlying factor of ethnic discrimination. Namely, that recruiters who have aversive feelings towards Islam are more likely to discriminate against Turks. The group threat theory would argue that frequented approval of Islam poses a threat to native Germans, as it challenges the religious dominance of Christianity. The theory would conclude that Germans with a need to protect the status quo develop aversive feelings towards Islam which manifest in discriminatory behaviour towards Muslims. A meta-analysis by Bartkoski, Lynch, Witt, & Rudolph (2018) reports that recruitment discrimination against Muslims is present across many European countries. Experiments that controlled for ethnicity found that women wearing the headscarf receive fewer callbacks and fewer encouragements to complete their application in relation to those who do not wear the headscarf (Ghumman & Ryan, 2013; Weichselbaumer, 2019).

Hypothesis #3: "More IC with Turks is associated with less discrimination against Turkish applicants."

Ethnic discrimination did not change as a function of IC which means that the second hypothesis is rejected. Although the direction of the data indicated that recruiters with more IC with Turks discriminated less between the two ethnicities, statistical significance was not reached. Therefore, the results of this research present evidence that IC is not related to discriminatory behaviour.

Still, the follow-up regression analysis showed that more IC with Turks was negatively related to PET. This is in line with the research of Frølund Thomsen (2012) who found that the relationship between IC and ethnic tolerance is mediated by PET. Given the moderation effect of PET that this study found, IC could contribute to a decrease of ethnic discrimination by reducing ethnic threat perceptions.

Hypothesis #4: "More discrimination occurs for the store manager job, compared to the cashier job, due to the differences in skill that the jobs require."

The data of this study suggests that discrimination is more apparent in low-skilled jobs which contrasts with the initial hypothesis. Initially, it was expected that recruiters would discriminate more between German and Turkish applicants when the job requires more responsibility. It was argued that recruiters would apply statistical information about Turks onto Turkish applicants which lets them appear unsuitable for high-skilled jobs. Given the opposing results, it could be that negative statistical associations were broken, once a Turkish applicant applied for a high-skilled job. Namely, that recruiters would think that a Turkish applicant is deviant from the general Turkish population because the applicant strives for a prestigious job. Therefore, the recruiters might conclude that statistical characteristics are not applicable to this candidate. Another explanation could be based on the dual system theory by Kahneman (2011) which distinguishes between two systems of decision making. While jobs with low-skilled jobs might tempt recruiters to process applicants more with the fast and bias-prone system 1, difficult jobs demand more elaborate system 2 processing of recruiters. Hence, ethnic discrimination may result from a lack of cognitive processing.

In accordance with the results of the present study, an Indian study found discrimination for low-skilled jobs but not for high-skilled jobs (Banerjee, Bertrand, Datta, & Mullainathan, 2009). They reasoned that difficult skills are more verifiable in applications which can prevent statistical discrimination. However, since no references were attached to the resumes, this explanation seems rather unlikely for the present study.

Limitations

Since participation in this research was consensual, recruiters were aware that their responses were being monitored. This is a striking difference in comparison to regular resume studies which are conducted as field experiments. This has two important implications. First, detriments on external validity must be acknowledged. That is because the recruiters knew that the recruitment was fictional and that they would not have to deal with the consequences of their evaluations. Thus, it might be possible that Turkish applicants were rated more favourably in this study than they are rated in real-world recruitment. Second, even though the participants were informed that their responses remain anonymous, the measurements might have been susceptible to social desirability. Recently, the topic of discrimination received global attention, due to the saliency of the BLM movement which might have influenced recruiters to inhibit discriminatory impulses. This idea is supported by Sawyer and Gampa (2018) who found that explicit attitudes of White Americans became more egalitarian over the course of BLM, even when holding racist implicit attitudes. Social desirability in this study concerns particularly the measurements of PET and the employability rating. The fact that part of the research sample has been acquired through personal contacts of the researcher might have reinforced the effect of social desirability, because participants wanted to avoid being seen as racist by the researcher.

A shortcoming of this study was that the ethnicity of the recruiters was not measured. Even though all recruiters had a German nationality, some recruiters might have been bicultural. Thereby, it could be that some recruiters even identified themselves as Turkish, despite their German nationality. The social identity theory which assumes in-group favouritism (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) would argue that those recruiters would be more likely to favour Turkish applicants over German applicants. Hence, to discriminate the other way around. The present study did not take this into account.

A further limitation is that there is a considerable structural difference between the job of cashier and the job of a store manager beyond the attached skill and responsibility. That is that cashiers typically have more contact with customers than store managers. Therefore, it could be that recruiters had doubts that the Turkish applicants would possess the necessary language skills (even though the resumes affirmed that).

Recommendations for future research

Future research that uses consensual sampling techniques could incorporate implicit measures in their design, as they are less affected by social desirability (Steffens, 2004). Also, the

perception of recruiters about statistical prevalent characteristics of Turks could be measured directly (e.g., with an open-ended question).

Besides that, the aspect of religion should be investigated further. For example, to clear up whether discrimination and symbolic threat are generalisable to all foreign religion or whether this has to do with the Muslim religion in particular. This could be studied with a multi-group experiment comparing multiple religions.

Discrimination varied, based on the job. However, it is still ambiguous whether this was caused by the required level of skill or other job characteristics. Future research could substantiate this finding by minimising structural differences between the jobs. For example, comparing two jobs that have the same function, whereas one job has a leadership element that the other job has not. This would enable more precise interpretations.

Finally, future research may test the applicability of dual processing theories in recruitment. For example, whether applications for more complex jobs lead to more system 2 engagement, whereas applications for easier jobs are processed with system 1. This could be investigated with the addition of time measurements. A shorter evaluation time can be interpreted as system 1 processing and longer evaluation time as system 2 processing.

Practical suggestions

The topic of discrimination in recruitment is important for organisations because organisations suffer, if applicants with good objective fit are neglected, based on criteria that are irrelevant to the job. Furthermore, research has shown tremendous upsides of diverse teams in terms of teamwork, problem solving and financial performance (Brixy et. al, 2020; Hoogendoorn & van Praag, 2012). Because the results suggest that the level of PET of recruiters determines the extent to which recruiters discriminate between ethnicities, organisations should try to minimise the influence of PET. This research suggests that IC could be a counteracting mechanism. In their review on how IC can be promoted, Paolini, Harwood, Hewstone and Neumann (2018) report numerous studies showing that mentally visualising positive contact with outgroups can improve the readiness for IC (Crisp, Stathi, Turner, & Husnu, 2008; Turner, Crisp, & Lambert, 2007). This offers a very inexpensive opportunity for organisations to promote IC. For example, a team meeting could be held where recruiters imagine collaborating with minority members. In addition, recruiters could be provided with information on how ethnic diversity can improve the organisation. This would open up recruiters for intergroup contacts, would reduce the perceptions of ethnic threat and ultimately reduce the tendency to discriminate ethnic minorities.

Conclusions

Overall, there was no preference for German applicants over Turkish applicants which indicates that recruiters can make unbiased applicant evaluations. However, social desirability needs to be taken into account. The results have also shown that the more recruiters perceive Turks as an ethnic threat, the more likely discrimination against Turkish applicants becomes. Religion seems to be particularly involved in this, as higher discrimination rates were observed for recruiters who were church members and recruiters who view Turks as a symbolic threat. IC did not moderate ethnic discrimination but was found to reduce the levels of PET and might thereby offer opportunities to tackle ethnic discrimination in recruitment.

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Appendices

Appendix A – German applicant

Exemplary cashier resume: German applicant.

LEBENSLAUF

Philipp Schmied

Persönliche Daten

Name	Philipp Schmied
Anschrift	Musterstraße 1 12345 Musterstadt
Tel.	0123 / 456 789
E-Mail	email@domain.de
geb.	03.12.1996

Ausbildung

09/2012 - 07/2015
Berufsausbildung Verkäufer
Ökonomie & Recht

2002 – 2011
Hauptschulabschluss

Kenntnisse & Fähigkeiten

Sprachen
Deutsch: Muttersprache
Spanisch: Grundkenntnisse

Führerschein
Klasse B

Berufliche Laufbahn

03/2020 – heute
Tankstelle
Kassierer

03/2019 - 03/2020
Schuhgeschäft
Verkäufer

07/2016 - 02/2019
Supermarkt
Kassierer

01/2015 – 06/2018
Tankstelle
Kassierer

07/2014 - 02/2015
Baumarkt
Filialmitarbeiter

Appendix A – Turkish applicant

Exemplary cashier resume: Turkish applicant.

LEBENSLAUF

Abdul Güler

Persönliche Daten

Name	Abdul Güler
Anschrift	Musterstraße 1 12345 Musterstadt
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Ausbildung

09/2012 - 07/2015
Berufsausbildung Verkäufer
Ökonomie & Recht

2002 – 2011
Hauptschulabschluss

Kenntnisse & Fähigkeiten

Sprachen
Deutsch: Muttersprache
Türkisch: Muttersprache
Spanisch: Grundkenntnisse

Führerschein
Klasse B

Berufliche Laufbahn

03/2020 – heute
Tankstelle
Kassierer

03/2019 - 03/2020
Schuhgeschäft
Verkäufer

07/2016 - 02/2019
Supermarkt
Kassierer

01/2015 – 06/2018
Tankstelle
Kassierer

07/2014 - 02/2015
Baumarkt
Filialmitarbeiter

Appendix B

Measurement: Perceived ethnic threat.

Please indicate to what extent the respective statements apply to you.

With an increasing presence of citizens of Turkish origin, I am concerned about...

	not applicable at all	not applicable	rather not applicable	neutral	rather applicable	applicable	very applicable
...my chances on the labour market.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
...the safety in my neighbourhood.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
...an increase in violence.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
...the respect for my religious values.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
...the preservation of traditional German customs.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

Appendix C

Measurement: Intergroup contact (Contact Quantity and Contact Quality Questionnaire; Islam & Hewstone, 1993).

How much contact do you have with citizens of Turkish origin? Please indicate below.

	no contact at all	hardly any contact	little contact	occasional contact	frequent contact	a lot of contact	permanent contact
...my chances on the labour market.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
...the safety in my neighbourhood.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
...an increase in violence.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

How often did you...

	never	very rarely	rarely	sporadically	sometimes	often	very often
...hold informal conversations with citizens of Turkish origin?	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
...visit a citizen of Turkish origin at home?	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

How would you describe your previous contacts with citizens of Turkish origin overall?

	not applicable at all	not applicable	rather not applicable	neutral / don’t know	rather applicable	applicable	very applicable
Equal	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Voluntary	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Intimate	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Pleasant	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Cooperative	O	O	O	O	O	O	O