Article

Being different at work: How gender dissimilarity relates to social inclusion and absenteeism

Wiebren S. Jansen,[1,3] Sabine Otten,[1] and Karen I. van der Zee[2]

Abstract
We investigated how and when gender dissimilarity relates to two highly important individual work outcomes: social inclusion and absenteeism. We collected survey data among 397 employees from a university of applied sciences and combined these with data from the organization's personnel administration. Our results indicate that dissimilarity was negatively related to perceived work group inclusion. In addition, this negative effect was stronger when the group was perceived to have a negative diversity climate. Finally, there was a conditional indirect effect of gender dissimilarity on absenteeism through inclusion. That is, being different from other group members in terms of gender was associated with higher absenteeism through lower levels of perceived inclusion, but only when the group was perceived to have a negative diversity climate. Together, the present research demonstrates that sometimes being different is associated with more absences and underlines the importance of establishing a positive climate for gender diversity.

Having a gender diverse workforce is important to organizations in many respects. Gender diversity can improve internal work processes, may enlarge the organization's external network, and can enhance the moral image of the organization (Jackson & Joshi, 2011; Phillips, Kim-Jun, & Shim, 2011). Yet, while gender diversity may offer organizations a competitive advantage, research suggests that individual employees sometimes struggle with being different from their colleagues in terms of gender (i.e., being gender dissimilar). For example, gender dissimilarity has been found

to be negatively related to the extent to which employees identify with their coworkers, resulting in reduced work performance (Guillaume,

[1]University of Groningen, the Netherlands
[2]VU University, the Netherlands
[3]Utrecht University, the Netherlands

Corresponding author:
Wiebren S. Jansen, Department of Social and Organizational Psychology, Utrecht University, Heidelberglaan 1, 3584 CS Utrecht, the Netherlands.
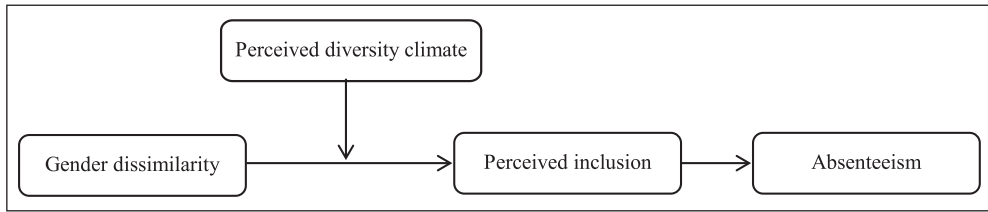Email: w.s.jansen@uu.nl

Figure 1. Conceptual model.

Brodbeck, & Riketta, 2012; Tsui, Egan, & O'Reilly, 1992). Accordingly, there is a strong need to develop an understanding of how the problems associated with gender differences can be avoided. This will be the focus of the present study.

The question how gender dissimilarity affects employees has received growing attention from scholars, which can be explained by the increasing number of women in the labor market (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012; Chattopadhyay, George, & Ng, 2015). Yet, although currently a popular topic of study, there are at least three important ways in which gender dissimilarity research can and needs to be extended. First, previous work has mostly focused on how dissimilarity affects the extent to which *individuals* psychologically connect to their work group, which is usually captured in measures of group identification and commitment (e.g., Chattopadhyay, George, & Lawrence, 2004; Guillaume et al., 2012; Tsui et al., 1992). Although this is an important perspective, it overlooks the active role that *other group members* may play in shaping the work experience of those who are different. As such, it neglects an important mechanism through which dissimilarity may unfold its effects. Second, so far we do not have a complete picture of the boundary conditions of the effects of gender dissimilarity. This is not only unfortunate for practitioners, who wish to create harmonious and effective work environments, but also for scientists, who seek to better understand under which circumstances dissimilarity is most consequential. Third, and finally, most existing studies have investigated how gender dissimilarity relates to self-reported outcome measures (Guillaume et al., 2012). As a result, to date, little is known about how gender dissimilarity translates into objectively assessed work outcomes.

In the present research we aim to address these issues. We will argue that gender dissimilarity, under specific conditions, will be negatively related to the extent to which an employee perceives to be socially included by his or her work group (cf. Jansen, Otten, van der Zee, & Jans, 2014). In particular, we posit that when a work group is perceived not to be open towards and appreciative of gender differences (i.e., to have a negative diversity climate; Harquail & Cox, 1993), gender dissimilarity is negatively associated with social inclusion perceptions. In addition, we posit that perceived inclusion, in turn, is negatively related to the number of days that people are absent from work. Our conceptual model is depicted in Figure 1.

Gender Dissimilarity and Inclusion: The Moderating Role of Diversity Climate

Gender dissimilarity in work groups has been defined as the difference between a focal group member and his or her peers with respect to gender (Guillaume et al., 2012). Accordingly, gender dissimilarity reflects how prototypical a group member is within a group in terms of his or her gender (Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1998). This relative position is deemed to have important consequences for the individual, with the few existing studies focusing on how being dissimilar affects the extent to which an individual psychologically connects to the group (Guillaume et al., 2012).

Based on the social identity approach, which encompasses self-categorization theory (SCT; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) and social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner,

1986), researchers have hypothesized that dissimilarity is negatively related to individuals' attachment to the group. According to SCT, people use observable similarities and differences (such as gender) to categorize themselves and others into in-groups and out-groups. SCT further suggests that people who are dissimilar are more prone to become aware of their demographic group membership (i.e., their gender). As a result, they are more likely to define themselves in terms of their demographic group membership, rather than in terms of their work group membership. SIT extends this reasoning by positing that in order to enhance and maintain a positive social identity, people like and trust in-group members more than out-group members.

Complementing these arguments, researchers have contended that dissimilarity induces uncertainty about how to behave to meet team expectations and performance (Chattopadhyay, George, & Ng, 2011; Goldberg, Riordan, & Schaffer, 2010). To reduce this uncertainty, dissimilar individuals are thought to be more likely to identify with their demographic subgroup and display in-group favoritism. That is, dissimilarity may cause people to turn inward and seek confirmation from their in-group (Hogg & Terry, 2000). Together, this implies that dissimilar individuals may feel less attached to other group members. This prediction has found empirical support in a number of studies (e.g., Chattopadhyay et al., 2004; Guillaume et al., 2012; Tsui et al., 1992).

Importantly, while we concur with the previous reasoning, we hold that these arguments do not only imply that dissimilar individuals may refrain from attaching themselves to the group, but also that the group may be perceived as less willing to include the individual. In this regard, inclusion refers to the extent to which an individual perceives to be an accepted group member that is allowed to be him- or herself within the group (Jansen et al., 2014).

Because being dissimilar (i.e., being in the minority) increases one's visibility within the group, group members belonging to the demographic majority may see and treat dissimilar individuals as peripheral group members (Mullen, Chapman, & Peaugh, 1989). Also, similar to minorities, majority group members are motivated to maintain and enhance a positive social identity. As a result, they may develop a relatively less positive stance towards minority members.

Likewise, we believe that the uncertainty reduction argument also implies that being dissimilar may cause people to feel less included. Consistent with recent work on dissimilarity (Guillaume, van Knippenberg, & Brodbeck, 2014), we propose that dissimilar individuals not only attempt to reduce their uncertainty by identifying with members of their demographic subgroup, but also try to effectively cope with that uncertainty by closely monitoring their social environment for cues that indicate whether they fit in. We posit that, due to their increased sensitivity to social cues, dissimilar individuals are more likely to be affected by the in-group favoritism displayed by majority members and consequently feel less included.

Together, the arguments we have put forward suggest that being dissimilar in terms of gender is associated with lower levels of perceived inclusion. However, there is reason to believe that this relationship may be contingent on contextual factors. For example, previous research suggests that the extent to which work group members depend on each other to perform their tasks plays an important role (Guillaume et al., 2012). Specifically, Guillaume and colleagues found that the negative effects of gender dissimilarity on social integration and individual performance were more pronounced in groups characterized by low interdependence than in groups with high interdependence. The rationale behind this is that team interdependence fosters personalized interactions among group members. That is, when people are dependent on each other, they come to see one another as individuals rather than as representatives of demographic categories, rendering more harmonious subgroup relations (Brewer & Miller, 1984; Brickson, 2000).

Yet, another viewpoint is that subgroup salience does not necessarily undermine positive relationships among group members. That is, as long as subgroup differences are seen as positive, perceiving one another as group representatives is not harmful for subgroup relations (Hewstone

& Brown, 1986). Following this perspective, in the present research, we focus on the group's climate for gender diversity as a potential contingency factor of the dissimilarity–outcomes relationship (cf. Chattopadhyay et al., 2015; Gonzalez & Denisi, 2009). We define diversity climate as the degree to which individuals perceive the group to be open towards and appreciative of differences between men and women (Harquail & Cox, 1993).

We posit that the negative association between gender dissimilarity and perceived inclusion is especially pronounced if the group is perceived not to be open towards and appreciative of gender differences (i.e., to have a negative diversity climate). In these groups, dissimilarity is seen as a liability, leading majority members to be particularly inclined to display in-group favoritism. Also, experiencing a negative diversity climate may increase the uncertainty that comes with being dissimilar. That is, perceiving that differences between men and women are not considered to be valuable makes it harder for dissimilar individuals to reliably assess whether they fit in. Accordingly, in these contexts, dissimilarity may result in lower levels of perceived inclusion.

In contrast, the negative effect of being dissimilar may be weaker or even disappear if the group is perceived to have a positive diversity climate. In these groups, being dissimilar is not considered to be a hindrance, but is seen as valuable. Accordingly, majority members may be less inclined to have a relative preference for interacting with in-group members. In addition, perceiving a positive climate for gender diversity may reduce the uncertainty induced by dissimilarity. That is, experiencing that gender differences are appreciated may offer dissimilar individuals confidence their behavior meets team expectations and performance. Thus, we expect the negative relationship between gender dissimilarity and perceived inclusion to be weaker if the group is perceived to have a positive diversity climate.

These predictions have indirectly already received some empirical support. For example, it was found that diversity climate perceptions attenuate the positive effect of gender dissimilarity on turnover intentions (Gonzalez & Denisi, 2009). Yet, most evidence for the moderating effect of perceived diversity climate comes from research conducted in the domain of racial and cultural diversity. Specifically, diversity climate perceptions have been found to moderate the effect of cultural/racial dissimilarity on organizational commitment and identification (Hofhuis, van der Zee, & Otten, 2012; McKay et al., 2007; Wolfson, Kraiger, & Finkelstein, 2011) and perceived job recognition (Hofhuis et al., 2012). Together, this leads us to our first hypothesis:

> Hypothesis 1: The negative relationship between gender dissimilarity and perceived inclusion is moderated by perceived diversity climate, such that it will be stronger for employees who perceive their work group to have a negative diversity climate than for employees who perceive their work group to have a positive diversity climate.

Inclusion and Absenteeism

An important follow-up question is why inclusion in the workplace matters. The significance of social inclusion for both individual employees and their immediate work environment has been well documented in previous research. In particular, perceptions of inclusion have been found to be positively associated with a range of individual (e.g., mood, work satisfaction, and creativity), interpersonal (e.g., trust), and group-level outcomes (conflict, performance, and team learning behavior; Jansen et al., 2014). Also, experimental studies have shown that inclusion (compared with exclusion) improved self-regulation (Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, & Twenge, 2005), resulted in lower levels of distress (Williams & Nida, 2011), and increased prosocial behavior (Twenge, Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, & Bartels, 2007).

These findings suggest that inclusion may also be related to another highly relevant work-related outcome, which is the focus of the present research: absenteeism. Absenteeism, defined as the number of days that people are absent from work for any reason other than an approved

vacation (e.g., sickness and carer's leave), has important consequences for both individual employees and organizations. For individuals, absenteeism may have short-term effects such as reduced performance, stress, and an increased workload when returning to work. In the long run, absenteeism may reduce individuals' chances for promotion and can even be a precursor for turnover. For organizations, absenteeism usually causes capacity problems and reduces group performance (Harrison & Martocchio, 1998). But above all, employee absences are very costly. In fact, estimates of the average cost per employee per missed day vary from US $200.00 to US $700.00 (Anderson, 2005; Armes, 2005).

Although researchers have not specifically focused on inclusion as a predictor of absenteeism, there is some indirect evidence for such a link. First, as already mentioned, inclusion has been found to be positively associated with psychological well-being (e.g., Baumeister et al., 2005; Williams & Nida, 2011). We predict that such an improved mental state may cause employees to be sick less often and thereby reduce their absences from work. Second, scholars have argued that people who feel more included in their group are also more motivated to contribute to their group (e.g., Ellemers & Jetten, 2013). We may expect that, because of this increased motivation, employees who strongly feel included are more likely to show up for work. In line with these predictions, there is evidence that factors similar to perceived inclusion, such as the perceived affective tone and support of the group, result in fewer employee absences (George, 1990; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Together, this leads us to our second hypothesis:

> Hypothesis 2: The extent to which employees perceive to be included in their group is negatively related to the number of days they are absent.

Capturing our full research model (see Figure 1), the final relationship we focus on is that between gender dissimilarity and absenteeism. Following from our first three hypotheses, and building on research that considers inclusion to be a process

variable that links organizational features to work-related outcomes (Jansen, Vos, Otten, Podsiadlowski, & van der Zee, 2015), we hypothesize a conditional indirect effect of gender dissimilarity on absenteeism. That is, we predict that the indirect relationship between gender dissimilarity and absenteeism through perceived inclusion will depend on how positive employees perceive their work group's diversity climate to be. More precisely, we expect that when a work group is perceived to have a negative diversity climate, gender dissimilarity will be negatively related to social inclusion perceptions, which in turn, predict higher levels of absenteeism. This reasoning is captured in the following hypothesis:

> Hypothesis 3: The indirect effect of gender dissimilarity on absenteeism through perceived inclusion is stronger for people who perceive their work group to have a negative diversity climate than for employees who perceive their work group to have a positive diversity climate.

Gender Differences

The last question we address is whether our hypothesized relationships are different for men and women. Previous research on this matter appears to be quite inconsistent (Chattopadhyay et al., 2015). Some research showed that dissimilarity effects may be stronger for women than for men (e.g., Gonzalez & Denisi, 2009), but there is also evidence that being dissimilar is more consequential for men than women (e.g., Tsui et al., 1992). Thus, instead of formulating an explicit hypothesis about the moderating effect of gender, in the present research we will explore whether our hypothesized relationships differ between men and women.

Method

Participants

We invited 1,321 employees from a university of applied sciences located in the Netherlands to

participate in a study about organizational diversity. Out of the 715 people who responded to our call, we excluded those who had a leadership role ($N = 154$) or were not part of a larger work group ($N = 164$). This resulted in a final sample size of 397 (30% response rate). The response rate per work group was not related to the extent of gender diversity. The mean age of the remaining participants was 45.05 years ($SD = 10.77$) years and 61% of them were female. Participants were either part of the supporting staff ($N = 225$) or educational staff (i.e., lecturers; $N = 172$). All respondents completed an online questionnaire in which we asked them both personal questions and questions about their group of direct colleagues. In the remainder, we refer to this group as "work group." We identified 132 work groups. Using data from the personnel administration, we found that the average size of these work groups was about 10 people and ranged from three to 20 people. Respondents indicated to have been part of their work group for 5.61 years on average ($SD = 5.48$ years).

Measures

Gender dissimilarity. As recommended by Harrison and Klein (2007), we operationalized gender dissimilarity by calculating the Euclidean distance between each respondent and his or her other group members. Specifically, for each individual group member the Euclidean distance was calculated by dividing the number of other group members with a different gender by group size and then taking the square root of this fraction (Tsui et al., 1992). To illustrate, consider a work group of three male and two female members. For the men in this group, the Euclidean distance equals $\sqrt{(2/5)} = .63$. For the women, the Euclidean distance equals $\sqrt{(3/5)} = .77$. We obtained the necessary information about group size and the gender of all group members from the personnel administration.

Perceived inclusion. The extent to which employees perceived to be included within their work group was measured with eight items from the original

16-item Perceived Group Inclusion Scale (Jansen et al., 2014). This scale distinguishes between two components: belonging and authenticity. While the subscale for belonging measures the extent to which employees feel they are accepted by their work group (e.g., "My work group gives me the feeling that I belong"), the authenticity subscale assesses the degree to which individuals perceive they are allowed and encouraged to be themselves within the work group (e.g., "My work group allows me to be who I am"). We decided not to use the complete original scale for two reasons. First, the items of the original scale are to a high degree, homogenously formulated. In our view, this justifies the use of an abbreviated version of the scale. Second, due to practical restrictions (i.e., we were forced by the organization to keep the average completion time of the questionnaire below the 10-minute mark), we were limited in the number of items that we could present to the respondents. Provided that, in the validation article of the original scale (Jansen et al., 2014), all items were shown to highly load on their intended factors (all factor loadings exceeded .70), we chose to randomly pick out four items of each subscale of the Perceived Group Inclusion Scale (belonging and authenticity). All items were assessed using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The scale was highly reliable ($\alpha = .90$).

Diversity climate. Perceived diversity climate was assessed with four items based on Harquail and Cox (1993). We slightly adapted the wording of the original items. That is, rather than measuring the perceived work group stance towards differences in general, as the original items do, we rephrased the items to measure the perceived openness towards and appreciation of gender differences in particular. An example item of the scale we used is: "In my work group differences between men and women are seen as positive" ($\alpha = .83$). Again, answer categories ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

Absenteeism. The number of days that people were absent from work for any reason other than

approved vacation was obtained from the organization's personnel administration. At the time of our data collection, the organization's administration system was organized such that absenteeism data was available per calendar year (i.e., the number of days that employees were absent from January 1st to December 31st). We administered the questionnaire in early June of 2012 and used the absence data for the calendar year 2012. In doing so, we made sure that we only used the data of people who were in the same work group as they were at the beginning of the year (and therefore also at the time of our questionnaire). This way, we ruled out the possibility that people had switched groups. Because absence data tend to be highly positively skewed, we performed a square-root transformation. This type of transformation helps to reduce the impact of skew and outliers. Moreover, such a transformation is warranted because absenteeism is a count variable (Bacharach, Bamberger, & Biron, 2010). Consistent with previous research on absenteeism (Avery, McKay, Wilson, & Tonidandel, 2007) and as recommended by statisticians (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003; Howell, 1992; Johns, 1994), we used the following formula to perform the transformation: $Absenteeism_{transformed} = \sqrt{(Days\ absent)} + \sqrt{(Days\ absent + 1)}$.

Control variables. We included the control variables age, gender, staff type (support or educational), and work group size. Gender was not only included to control for its potential relationship with our study variables, but also to be able to assess whether our hypothesized relationships differed for men and women.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics of the study variables and their intercorrelations are displayed in Table 1. Gender dissimilarity was negatively related to perceived inclusion, $r = -.11$, $p = .03$. Consistent with Hypothesis 2, perceived inclusion was negatively correlated with absenteeism, $r = -.12$, $p = .02$. Also

notable, gender was significantly related to gender dissimilarity ($r = .21$, $p < .01$), indicating that male employees were on average more dissimilar than female employees. This finding is a reflection of the organization's demographics, in which the majority of employees (54%) were female. In addition, gender was significantly correlated with absenteeism ($r = -.19$, $p < .01$), indicating that on average men were less absent than women. This is consistent with findings from previous research (e.g., Harrison & Martocchio, 1998). Similarly, respondents that were part of the supporting staff appeared to be absent more often than those in the educational staff ($r = -.14$, $p < .01$). Finally, age and work group size were not significantly related to any of our other main variables and were therefore excluded from further analysis.

Preliminary Analyses

Before testing our hypotheses, we conducted two preliminary analyses. First, we assessed whether our measures could be empirically distinguished. Second, because our data were nested (i.e., employees were part of work groups), we tested whether it was appropriate to adopt a multilevel analytic strategy.

Confirmatory factor analyses. We evaluated the measures' factor structure with confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs). Here, we specifically focused on the study variables that were assessed with Likert-type questionnaire items (i.e., perceived inclusion and perceived diversity climate). First, we estimated a model in which all items loaded on one factor, and found that this model fitted the data poorly, $\chi^2/df = 19.68$, RMSEA = .22, NNFI = .57, CFI = .65. Second, we estimated a two-factor model, distinguishing between perceived inclusion and perceived diversity climate. This model reached acceptable fit, $\chi^2/df = 2.71$, RMSEA = .07, NNFI = .96, CFI = .97. All of the items loaded significantly on their respective factors (standardized factor loadings > .40). Moreover, this model appeared to be a significant improvement over the one-factor model, $\Delta\chi^2 = 930.39$, $p < .01$.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of study variables.

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Gender dissimilarity	0.51	0.27	-							
2. Perceived inclusion	4.01	0.62	−.11*	-						
3. Perceived diversity climate	3.53	0.67	−.09†	.30**	-					
4. Absenteeism	4.56	5.44	.00 *ns*	−.12*	−.09†	-				
5. Age	45.05	10.77	−.03 *ns*	.01 *ns*	.00 *ns*	.04 *ns*	-			
6. Gender (0 = female; 1 = male)	0.40	0.49	.21**	−.02 *ns*	.04 *ns*	−.19**	.20**	-		
7. Staff type (0 = support; 1 = education)	0.43	0.50	.09†	.01 *ns*	.02 *ns*	−.14**	.02 *ns*	.19**	-	
8. Work group size	10.37	4.66	.08 *ns*	−.07 *ns*	−.08 *ns*	−.02 *ns*	−.05 *ns*	−.06 *ns*	−.15*	-

Note. †p < .10. *p < .05. **p < .01.

Necessity of multilevel analysis. We assessed the appropriateness of a multilevel analysis by calculating the intraclass correlation coefficients (ICC1 and ICC2) and $r_{wg(j)}$ scores for our mediator, moderator, and dependent variable (perceived inclusion, perceived diversity climate, and absenteeism). First, ICC1 coefficients were computed. ICC1 is defined as the proportion of between-group variance relative to the total amount of variance (Field, 2005). The ICC1s for perceived diversity climate, perceived inclusion, and absenteeism were respectively .12, .015, and .044. This indicates that about 12% of the variation in scores on perceived diversity climate, 1.5% of the variance in inclusion responses, and 4.4% of the variation of absenteeism were situated at the level of the work group, with the remaining variation located at the individual level. In addition, we tested whether these between-group variance components were significant. This was not the case for absenteeism and perceived inclusion (*p*s > .05). Yet, we did find that the between-group variance component of perceived diversity climate was significant (p < .01). Second, we estimated the ICC2 coefficients, which are an indication of the internal consistency of the group means in a sample. The ICC2s for perceived diversity climate, perceived inclusion, and absenteeism were respectively .29, .05, and .12. In conclusion, the ICC coefficients indicate there was a significant portion of between-group variance of perceived diversity climate. This implies that the nested structure of the data should be controlled for by adopting a multilevel analytic strategy.

Finally, to determine whether it was appropriate to aggregate the individual-level responses to the group level we calculated the $r_{wg(j)}$ coefficients (cf. James, Demaree, & Wolf, 1984). The $r_{wg(j)}$ coefficients for perceived diversity climate, perceived inclusion, and absenteeism were respectively .30, .26, and .32. All these values were well below the conventional cutoff point of .70 (James et al., 1984), indicating there was not sufficient ground to aggregate scores to the group level.

Main Analyses

We tested all of our hypotheses by estimating a multilevel random intercept model in Mplus (L. K. Muthén & Muthén, 2007).[1] This allowed us to control for the nested structure of our data. Consistent with our operationalization, all variables were specified as individual level (Level 1) variables. We used a bootstrapping procedure (1,000 samples) to test the significance of the conditional indirect effect of gender dissimilarity on absenteeism through inclusion. Dummy codes were used for gender (0 = female, 1 = male) and staff type (0 = support, 1 = educational). In addition, the Euclidean distances and perceived diversity climate scores were standardized, and their

Table 2. Results of multilevel regression analyses.

Parameter	Perceived inclusion (mediator)			Absenteeism		
	B	SE (B)	t	B	SE (B)	t
Intercept	4.03	0.05	88.89**	9.80	1.75	5.58**
Gender (0 = female; 1 = male)	−0.05	0.06	−0.78	−1.96	0.56	−3.49**
Staff type (0 = support; 1 = education)	0.03	0.06	0.47	−1.22	0.55	−2.22*
Gender dissimilarity	−0.06	0.03	−1.81†	0.20	0.27	0.47
Perceived diversity climate	0.17	0.03	5.63**			
Gender Dissimilarity x Perceived Diversity Climate	0.07	0.03	2.28*			
Perceived inclusion				−0.98*	0.43	−2.30*
Overall model statistics						
Level 1 variance			0.34			27.41
Level 2 variance			0.01			0.26
−2LL			702.19			2,442.94

Note. Full maximum likelihood estimation was used (N = 397 individuals from 132 work groups). Table displays unstandardized regression weights.
†p < .10. *p < 0.05. **p < 0.01.

interaction term was construed based on these standardized scores (e.g., Cohen et al., 2003; Table 2 shows the results).

Our hypothesized model fitted the data well, χ^2/df = .58, RMSEA = .00, CFI = 1.00. Confirming Hypothesis 1, this relationship was moderated by perceived diversity climate, b = 0.07, $t(260)$ = 2.28, p = .02. An inspection of the simple slopes (see Figure 2) revealed that for group members who perceived their work group to have a negative diversity climate, gender dissimilarity was negatively related to perceived inclusion, b = −0.12, $t(260)$ = −2.77, p < .01. For group members who perceived their work group to have a positive diversity climate, gender dissimilarity was unrelated to the extent to which they perceived to be included, b = 0.01, $t(260)$ = 0.29, p = .77. There also appeared to be a positive main effect of perceived diversity climate on perceived inclusion, b = 0.17, $t(260)$ = 5.63, p < .01.

Turning to the right pane of Table 2, we found that perceived inclusion was negatively related to absenteeism, b = −0.98, $t(260)$ = −2.30, p = .02. This confirms Hypothesis 2. Because absenteeism was a transformed variable in our model, we performed an additional analysis to demonstrate

how perceptions of inclusion were related to the *actual* number of days that people were absent (i.e., the untransformed variable). For each point in the range of the inclusion scale (1–5), we calculated the corresponding number of (untransformed) absence days (assuming all other variables were kept constant) and plotted this in Figure 3.

In addition, the bootstrapping results indicated the presence of a conditional indirect effect, supporting Hypothesis 3. That is, for people experiencing a negative diversity climate, gender dissimilarity was positively related to absenteeism through lower levels of perceived inclusion, ϱ = 0.12, 95% CI [0.02, 0.31]. For people experiencing a positive diversity climate, the indirect effect of gender dissimilarity on absenteeism through inclusion was not significant, ϱ = −0.01, 95% CI [−0.11, 0.07].[2]

Finally, to test whether our estimated effects differed for men and women we conducted a multigroup analysis on our proposed model (Vandenberg, 2002). This is a two-step procedure. First, effect sizes are estimated separately for men and women. Second, the differences between these estimates are tested for statistical
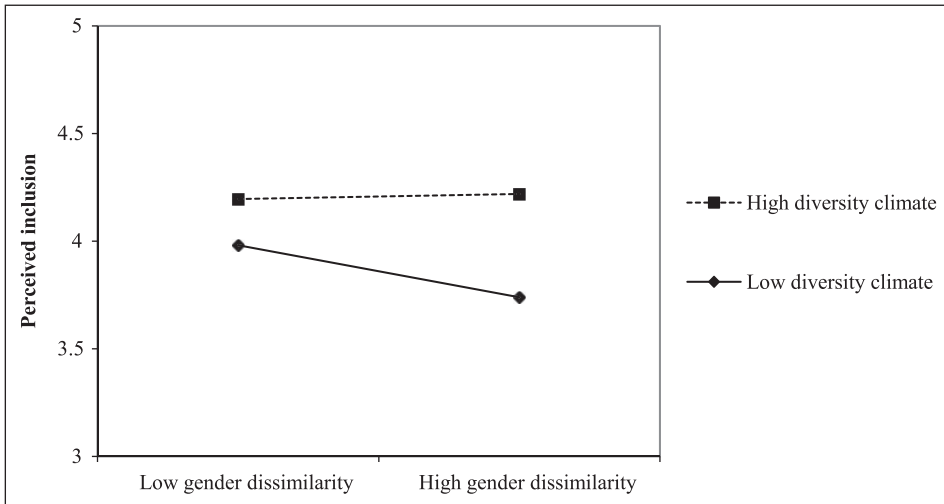
Figure 2. Perceived inclusion as a function of gender dissimilarity and perceived diversity climate.
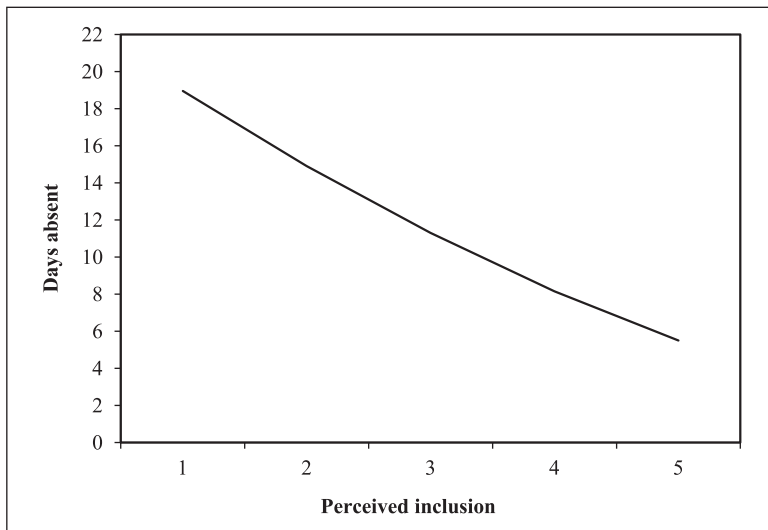

Figure 3. Days absent (untransformed) as a function of perceived inclusion.

significance. The results (see Table 3) indicated that all of the estimated effects were equivalent for men and women.

Discussion

Due to increased labor market participation of women, organizations are becoming progressively gender diverse (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012). While having both men and women represented in the organization may offer important benefits, research indicates that individual employees may struggle with being different from others (Pfeffer, 1983; Tsui & Gutek, 1999). The present study aimed to provide further insight into how and under which conditions being different from others in terms of gender may not be problematic.

Table 3. Regression coefficients for men (*N* = 157) and women (*N* = 240) separately.

Relationship	Men		Women		*Z*-difference
	B	*SE*	*B*	*SE*	
Gender dissimilarity → Inclusion	−0.07	0.06	−0.05	0.04	0.23 *ns*
Perceived diversity climate → Inclusion	0.19	0.06	0.16	0.04	−0.37 *ns*
Gender Diss. x Perc. Div. Climate → Inclusion	0.08	0.05	0.05	0.04	−0.43 *ns*
Gender dissimilarity → Absenteeism	0.22	0.28	0.38	0.41	0.32 *ns*
Inclusion → Absenteeism	−1.16	0.37	−0.83	0.70	0.41 *ns*

Consistent with predictions derived from self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987) and social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) we found that gender dissimilarity was negatively related to the extent to which employees perceived to be included in their work group. In addition, we found that this negative effect was more pronounced when the group was perceived not to be open towards and appreciative of gender differences (i.e., to have a negative diversity climate). Finally, we found evidence for a conditional indirect effect of gender dissimilarity on absenteeism through inclusion. That is, being different from other group members in terms of gender was associated with higher absenteeism through lower levels of perceived inclusion, but only when the group was perceived to have a negative diversity climate.

Implications

The present work extends previous research on gender dissimilarity in a number of ways. First, whereas existing dissimilarity studies have almost exclusively focused on how dissimilarity affects the extent to which the *individual* psychologically connects to the *group* (Guillaume et al., 2012), the current research suggests that dissimilarity may also affect the extent to which the *group* is perceived to be willing to include the *individual*. This is a crucial extension of previous dissimilarity research, as it explicitly focuses on the role that groups play in shaping individual group members' work experience. This novel focus is likely to improve our understanding of how being dissimilar affects individuals, and seems a promising road for future dissimilarity research.

Second, the present study offers further insights into under which conditions the negative effects of dissimilarity within work groups may be attenuated. Specifically, our results suggest that the perception of a positive diversity climate might help to overcome the potential negative effects of being dissimilar. This finding not only advances dissimilarity research, but also may inform organizations as to how to reduce employee absences. In this regard, results from the diversity literature suggest that organizations may establish a positive diversity climate by offering diversity awareness training programs (Homan, Buengeler, Eckhoff, van Ginkel, & Voelpel, 2015), setting up diversity task forces (Kalev, Dobbin, & Kelly, 2006), and including diversity in organizational mission statements (Rau & Hyland, 2003).

Third, our study advances existing dissimilarity research by demonstrating that gender dissimilarity, under conditions of a negatively perceived diversity climate, is positively related to the number of days that people are absent from work. As such, we established that gender dissimilarity not only relates to self-reported outcome measures (as has been demonstrated in previous research; see Guillaume et al., 2012), but is also associated with an objectively assessed work outcome. This finding further underlines the importance for organizations to effectively manage gender differences at work.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research

A notable strength of the present research concerns our research design. We were able to

combine responses to our questionnaire with data from the organization's personnel administration. Such a multiple-source dataset greatly reduces the likelihood of common method variance, allowing for drawing more valid conclusions about the relationships between our measures (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003).

In addition, having access to the organization's personnel administration allowed us to operationalize dissimilarity in an objective and precise manner. Whereas in other studies (e.g., Hofhuis et al., 2012; Jansen et al., 2015) a dichotomous, and arguably rather unsophisticated, distinction is made between majority and minority members (or between racial groups, e.g., McKay et al., 2007; Wolfson et al., 2011), in the present research we operationalized dissimilarity in a more precise manner by calculating for each respondent how much he or she is different from his or her direct colleagues in terms of gender. We consider this an important adaptation, as this allowed for a more refined test of our hypothesized relationships.

While the multisource nature of our data is a considerable strength, at the same time one may posit that our data were cross-sectional, inhibiting our ability to draw conclusions regarding the causality of the relations examined. For example, whether our respondents were more absent and as a result felt less included in their work group, or whether lower levels of perceived inclusion resulted in more absences cannot be determined with our data. As such, we believe that future research may elaborate on our findings by adopting a longitudinal or experimental research design.

Furthermore, while the results of our multigroup analysis indicated that all of the estimated effects were equivalent for men and women, they also revealed that most regression weights for men and women separately were not significant. This could be due to a loss in statistical power. Accordingly, we think that future research may more adequately test the separate effects for men and women by sampling a larger number of respondents.

In addition, future studies may further clarify under which conditions dissimilarity effects may be stronger for men or women. As already hinted

at earlier, previous research is inconsistent as to whether dissimilarity effects are stronger for men than for women (cf. Chattopadhyay et al., 2015). Interestingly, both the prediction that men are more affected by dissimilarity than women and the opposite prediction that women are more affected by being dissimilar than men depart from the same assumption: men are a higher status group than women. Researchers predicting that dissimilarity is more consequential for men than for women continue to posit that members of high-status groups may feel more threatened when they are more dissimilar (Chatman & O'Reilly, 2004; Tsui et al., 1992). In contrast, researchers predicting that dissimilarity has a stronger impact on women than men continue the argument by positing that members of low-status groups, when placed in a numerical minority, are subject to higher visibility, scrutiny, and performance standards than members of high-status groups (Roth, 2004). As already mentioned, in the present research we did not find any gender differences in our hypothesized relationships. Considering the previous arguments, this could be because in our specific sample, there were no perceived status differences between men and women. Yet another explanation is that the two processes described before may have operated at the same time. That is, while for men dissimilarity may have been positively associated with perceived levels of threat, for women being more dissimilar could have been accompanied with increased concern for how one is evaluated. Thus, future dissimilarity research may further clarify under which conditions being dissimilar will be more consequential for either men or women, by measuring the extent to which men and women are perceived to differ in status and by simultaneously considering how dissimilarity is related to threat and concern for evaluations by others.

Related to this, dissimilarity research may be further refined by taking into account the moderating role of occupational demography. In this respect, research assuming a compositional approach to diversity has found that occupational gender composition moderated the negative effect of team gender diversity on performance,

such that the effect was weaker in gender-balanced occupations (Joshi & Roh, 2009). A similar effect may be expected with regard to gender dissimilarity. That is, dissimilarity may have a stronger impact on employees in professions that are less gender-balanced. Applying this prediction to the present research, we can expect that the dissimilarity effects we found would have been even stronger if we had focused on an organization that operates in a less gender-balanced sector than the specific one we considered (i.e., higher education). In addition, whereas in male-dominated occupations one might expect that being different from others in terms of gender is especially consequential for women, in female-dominated occupations gender dissimilarity is likely to have the strongest effects for men. Future research may provide an adequate test of these predictions by systematically sampling respondents from different occupational settings.

Together, the present research substantially enhances our understanding of how individual employees are affected by gender dissimilarity. It demonstrates that being different sometimes implies being more absent, and highlights that establishing a positive diversity climate is essential to make gender diversity beneficial to organizations and their employees.

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Notes

1. Considering that absenteeism is a count variable, which is typically not normally distributed, scholars (e.g., Bacharach et al., 2010) have argued it is most appropriate to estimate a Poisson model. Yet, because we performed a square-root transformation and used multilevel modelling, which allows to treat count variables as continuous variables (B. O. Muthén, 2011), we decided not to estimate a Poisson model.

2. We also estimated an alternative model to check for the presence of feedback effects. Specifically, we assessed whether a model in which inclusion and absenteeism were switched in their position provided a better fit to the data than our hypothesized model. The results indicated that this alternative model yielded a significantly worse fit to our data than our hypothesized model, $\Delta\chi^2 = 37.82$, $p < .01$. In addition, the bootstrapping results indicated that, this time, there was no conditional indirect effect. That is, regardless of the level of perceived diversity climate, gender dissimilarity was not related to inclusion through absenteeism. These results suggest that feedback effects did not play a substantial role in our model.

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