A reflection of society?
Social stressors, social support, and well-being
in ethnically diverse retail teams

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von
Franziska Josefine Kößler, M. Sc.

Präsidentin der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin:
Prof. Dr. Julia von Blumenthal

Dekan der Lebenswissenschaftlichen Fakultät:
Prof. Dr. Dr. Christian Ulrichs

Gutachter:innen:
1. Prof. Dr. Annekatrin Hoppe
2. Prof. Ute-Christine Klehe, PhD
3. Prof. Dr. Petra Klumb

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Abstract

Increased ethnic diversity in workplaces has fueled discussions on whether this diversity is an asset or a liability. These discussions often focused on performance but paid limited attention to well-being and health. As work represents an important determinant of health and well-being, this dissertation aimed to understand how associations between social stressors, social support, and well-being relate to ethnic minority status and ethnic diversity at work. Two papers addressed this aim. To discuss their research findings later in the broader contexts of work and society, I additionally introduced the work-society reflection model.

The first paper examined *ethnic minority status as a moderator* in a multi-group path model. The analysis showed that the negative indirect association between customer verbal aggression and work-related positive affect via emotional dissonance did not vary between ethnic minority and ethnic majority workers. However, supervisor support moderated this indirect association only among ethnic minority workers. Unexpectedly, the negative indirect relationship between customer verbal aggression and work-related positive affect via emotional dissonance was stronger in ethnic minority workers with high levels of supervisor support.

The second paper examined the *association between ethnic diversity and emotional strain* via emotional conflicts. To investigate whether this *association varied between the team and individual levels,* this paper combined ethnic diversity at both levels in a multilevel path model. In fact, the results indicated a difference between the team and individual levels: At the team level, ethnic diversity related positively to emotional strain via emotional conflicts. However, this association was negative at the individual level. This difference highlights the complexity of ethnic diversity.

Finally, I integrated these research findings in the work-society reflection model to provide a broader perspective on this topic and outlined implications for research and practice.

Zusammenfassung

Betriebe werden immer vielfältiger. Diskussionen über dessen Vor- und Nachteile konzentrieren sich oft auf Leistungsaspekte, aber selten auf Gesundheit und Wohlbefinden. Dennoch hat Arbeit einen maßgeblichen Einfluss auf Gesundheit und Wohlbefinden. Deshalb betrachtete diese Dissertation in zwei Forschungsarbeiten, wie Zusammenhänge zwischen sozialen Stressoren, sozialer Unterstützung und Wohlbefinden mit der Angehörigkeit zu einer ethnischen Minderheit und ethnischer Diversität in Arbeitsteams assoziiert sind. Um darüber hinaus Forschungsergebnisse im Kontext von Arbeit und Gesellschaft diskutieren zu können, wurde das Arbeits-Gesellschafts-Widerspiegelungsmodell entwickelt.

Die erste Forschungsarbeit untersuchte in einer Mehrgruppenanalyse, inwiefern sich Zusammenhänge zwischen Beschäftigten, die einer ethnischen Minderheit angehörten, und Beschäftigten, die der Mehrheit angehörten, unterschieden. In beiden Gruppen gab es einen negativen indirekten Zusammenhang zwischen verbaler Aggression durch Kund:innen und arbeitsbezogenem positivem Affekt über emotionale Dissonanz. Nur bei Beschäftigten, die einer ethnischen Minderheit angehörten, moderierte Vorgesetztenunterstützung diesen indirekten Zusammenhang. Bei diesen Beschäftigten war die negative indirekte Beziehung zwischen verbaler Aggression durch Kund:innen und arbeitsbezogenem positivem Affekt unerwarteterweise dann besonders stark ausgeprägt, wenn ihre Vorgesetzten sie in hohem Maße unterstützten.

Die zweite Forschungsarbeit bezog sich auf ethnische Diversität. Sie untersuchte, ob ethnische Diversität mit emotionalen Konflikten zusammenhängt und ob diese wiederum mit emotionaler Irritation korrelieren. Um Unterschiede zwischen Team- und Individualebene zu untersuchen, wurde ethnische Diversität auf beiden Ebenen in einem Mehrebenen-Modell kombiniert. Die Ergebnisse wiesen auf einen Unterschied zwischen beiden Ebenen hin: Auf Teamebene gab es einen positiven Zusammenhang zwischen ethnischer Diversität und emotionaler Irritation, der durch emotionale Konflikte vermittelt wurde. Jedoch war dieser Zusammenhang auf Individualebene negativ. Dieser Unterschied zwischen beiden Ebenen verdeutlicht die Komplexität ethnischer Diversität.

Abschließend diskutierte ich diese Forschungsergebnisse mithilfe des Arbeits-Gesellschafts-Widerspiegelungsmodells und leitete daraus Implikationen für Forschung und Praxis ab.

List of Original Papers

Paper 1:

Kößler, F. J., Wilbert, J. B., Veit, S., & Hoppe, A. (2022). The role of supervisor support for dealing with customer verbal aggression. Differences between ethnic minority and ethnic majority workers. *German Journal of Human Resource Management: Zeitschrift Für Personalforschung*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/ 10.1177/23970022221140560

Paper 2:

Kößler, F. J., Fujishiro, K., Veit, S., & Hoppe, A. (2022). Ethnic differences in context: Does emotional conflict mediate the effects of both team- and individual-level ethnic diversity on emotional strain? *Occupational Health Science*, *6*(1), 27–49. https://doi.org/10.1007/s41542-021-00105-5

Chapter 1. Introduction

The Guardian used the metaphor of 'work as a reflection of society' to demand changes regarding the demographic composition of the workforce (Exter, 2015). Such a reflection can be particularly desirable in organizations that hope to attract a diverse customer base through a diverse workforce (e.g., Bendick et al., 2010; Thomas & Ely, 1996). Thus, it is not surprising that retail organizations were among the first ones that employed ethnic minority members to increase ethnic diversity explicitly (Noon, 2007).

While a large body of literature focuses on how social stressors and support relate to well-being in supposedly general populations (e.g., Gerhardt et al., 2021; Halbesleben et al., 2014; Mathieu et al., 2019), these associations are less well understood when it comes to ethnic minority status (i.e., having an ethnic background that is distinct from the dominant population; Agu et al., 2019). In most studies, supervisor support had a stronger positive impact on the well-being of ethnic minority workers compared to ethnic majority workers (e.g., Hoppe, 2011; Hoppe et al., 2017; cf. Ko et al., 2015). In contrast, results were mixed for social stressors (e.g., Hoppe, 2011; Kern & Grandey, 2009). To gain insights into these mixed findings, the first paper of this dissertation compares associations of an occupation-specific social stressor, social support, and well-being between ethnic minority and ethnic majority workers in retail.

Retail has been relying on teamwork for a long time (Voss-Dahm & Lehndorff, 2003). When teamwork is strongly present, it seems obvious that also team variables such as team composition are associated with well-being (S. Liu & Liu, 2018; Razinskas & Hoegl, 2020). Yet, ethnic diversity has rarely been studied as a predictor of health and well-being, especially in studies that measured ethnic diversity as a compositional team-level variable (i.e., team-level ethnic heterogeneity; Harrison & Klein, 2007). At the individual level, at least a few studies on individual-level ethnic dissimilarity examined

workers' health and well-being (e.g., Enchautegui-de-Jesús et al., 2006; Hoppe et al., 2014). Additionally, most studies focused either on the team or the individual level (cf. Brodbeck et al., 2011; Leonard & Levine, 2006), which limits our understanding of ethnic diversity as a multilevel concept. In contrast, this dissertation views ethnic diversity as a multilevel concept that captures the facts that individuals are nested in teams and that their well-being is thus subject to team- and individual-level influences (see also Joshi et al., 2011; Razinskas & Hoegl, 2020). Thus, the second paper examines associations between team- and individual-level ethnic diversity, a social stressor, and well-being.

Taken together, this dissertation aims at understanding ethnic minority status and ethnic diversity in relation to social stressors, social support, and well-being. To do justice to the complexity of ethnic minority status and ethnic diversity, I pick up the metaphor that work reflects society to create a work-society reflection model in Chapter 2. Then I divide my aim into two sub-aims: First, I want to examine the moderation effect of ethnic minority status (Paper 1). Second, I am interested in the relationship between ethnic diversity and well-being and its variation between the team and individual levels (Paper 2). After reviewing the literature on these sub-aims (Chapter 3), I summarize my findings on them (Chapter 4). Finally, I integrate my findings into the work-society reflection model to enrich them with relevant aspects of work and society (Chapter 5).

Chapter 2. The Reflection of Society in Work

To look at relevant mechanisms on a larger scale, I take the metaphor that work reflects society as a starting point for developing a work-society reflection model based on philosophical reflection theory (Section 2.1). Then I give an overview of relevant aspects regarding the components of the reflection metaphor – work (Section 2.2) and society (Section 2.3).

2.1 From Characteristics of Mirrors Toward a Work-Society Reflection Model

The philosopher Holz (2003) suggested that the relationship between human thinking and being exactly corresponds to the logical structure of the relationship between a mirror and a reflected object. This understanding of reflections suggests that the content of reflection may vary and that the reflection and its content (i.e., the reflected object) have a mutual relationship (see also Leontjew, 1975/2012). Similarly, humans modify their environment in interaction with the conditions they find there (see also Holzkamp, 1990). For example, a retail worker may calm down a customer by offering them a discount; this is more difficult however if the retail worker is forbidden to do so. To create a model based on these considerations, it is crucial to visualize four aspects of reflections.

First, a reflection of an object and its context appears if that object to some extent faces a reflective surface like a mirror (Holz, 2003). This reflection shows the object within its context but only from the side the mirror faces. For example, the reflection in Figure 1 shows an apple on a book but not its leaf because that side of the apple does not face the mirror. Thus, a snippet of the object and its context appears in the reflection.

Second, the position (i.e., angle and distance) of the mirror and object to each other can influence the proportions of the reflection (Holz, 2003). For example, the reflection of a cube looks like a trapezoid when the mirror is tipped to the back. Thus, the

proportions of an object may appear differently in the reflection, depending on the position of the mirror.

Figure 1

An Apple on a Book Reflected in a Mirror

Third, adding another mirror alters the reflection because two mirrors do not only reflect an object but also each other (Ucke & Schlichting, 2014). More specifically, physical laws stated that the angle of two mirrors to each other determines the number of mutual reflections: A small angle ε between both mirrors results in a finite number of

reflections (360°/(ε-1)). For example, four reflections of an object appear if two mirrors stand in a 90-degree angle. Two parallel mirrors reflect each other and the object between them infinitely (see Ucke & Schlichting, 2014, for visualizations).

Fourth, distortions of the reflective surface may alter the reflection (Holz, 2003). Among these distortions are cracks, which add lines to the reflection. Depending on their shape and depth, cracks can even alter proportions, cut off parts of a reflection, or duplicate them. Other distortions are opacity, which puts a foggy tone over the reflection, or black spots, which look like holes in the reflection. Additionally, the curvature of a mirror may magnify or shrink aspects of the reflection. Because mirrors including distortions are tangible objects, these distortions are part of reality (Holz, 2003).

These aspects along with the considerations that the content of reflection may vary and that it has a mutual relationship with its reflection have a mutual relation constitute two ideas of the work-society reflection model. The first idea is that work may not only reflect the ethnic composition and other supposedly static characteristics of society but also the linking mechanisms in society (e.g., between ethnic minority status and well-being). The second idea says that work is no more a passive reflective surface because it may also affect society (see also Islam & Zyphur, 2009). Thus, work and society may reflect mechanisms that link ethnic minority status and ethnic diversity with well-being and each other.

The following concepts of work and society underline both implications. Generally, work has been defined as a purposeful and conscious production of value that is determined and organized by society (Rieder, 1998; Vahle-Hinz & Mohr, 2012). More specifically, interaction work (e.g., in retail) is paid work (i.e., a profit-oriented exchange of work performance for money) in which other persons (e.g., customers) influence the interaction and reduce its predictability. To achieve the aim of retail (i.e., exchanging

goods for money), workers need to influence customers to some degree and anticipate their wishes and knowledge (Böhle & Weihrich, 2020; Hacker et al., 2020). Encompassing more domains, society is a large heterogeneous set of people whose coexistence and interaction are organized (Lehner, 2011). Sociologists explained this organization with, among other things, work and its distribution (e.g., Durkheim, 1893/1992; Marx, 1859/1971). These concepts underline that work and society influence and thus reflect each other.

Based on that, this dissertation introduces the work-society reflection model. In this discussion framework, work and society are both surfaces that reflect research findings in their context (see Figure 2). The accuracy of these reflections depends on where the research findings are in relation to work and society and what distortions (i.e., own characteristics) work and society have. The dynamic interplay between the reflected object and its reflection implies that research findings also capture aspects of the reflections in work and society. Additionally, work and society may also reflect each other to some degree. Therefore, the work-society reflection model is a tool for exploring where work and society are positioned in regard to research findings, what bias distortions induce in research findings, and, finally, how they are positioned in regard to each other. Practically, researchers may discuss phenomena in work and society that explain or resemble their findings.

Figure 2

The Work-Society Reflection Model with the Research Findings in their Context (Gray

Area)
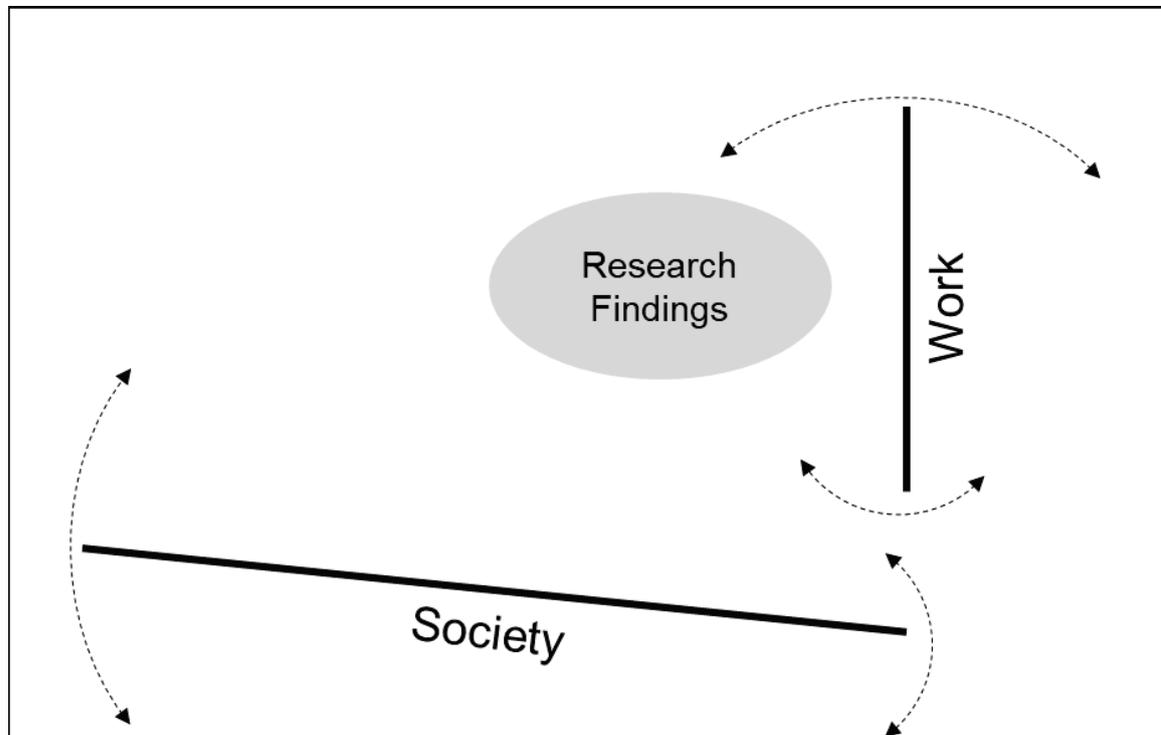
Note. Research findings are static in this model to simplify the use of the model.

2.2 Work in Retail

The contact between retail workers and customers provides retail organizations

with a crucial tool for guiding customers' behavior and eventually increasing profits

(Argo & Dahl, 2020; Hacker et al., 2020; Hochschild, 1983/2012). In the spirit of

competition, retail organizations try to enchant their customers and make them feel

sovereign (e.g., by promising free, hedonistic consumption; see also Korczynski & Ott,

2004). Attracting customers, this enchantment serves the interest of the retail organization

but may also explain why customers sometimes behave aggressively toward retail

workers. For instance, customers engage in customer verbal aggression (i.e., hostile

verbal attacks or criticism by customers against workers; Dormann & Zapf, 1999;

Dudenhöffer & Dormann, 2015) when they notice a break with their expectations of enchantment or perfect service (Korczynski & Evans, 2013; Yagil, 2017). Additionally, customers' threshold for aggression may be lower because of their control over future interactions with retail workers (Grandey et al., 2007), lack of obligation to behave in a friendly manner (Ben-Zur & Yagil, 2005), and anonymity (Grandey et al., 2007).

Also driven by competition, retail organizations may demand workers to stay friendly (Hochschild, 1983/2012). Retail organizations communicate this demand more or less explicitly through display rules that tell retail workers which emotions they should show how and when (Diefendorff & Gosserand, 2003; Ekman, 1973/2006). Additionally, they may provide customers with evaluative tools (e.g., surveys; J. Bell et al., 1997). To avoid potential sanctions, retail workers may not react naturally to aggressive customers (e.g., by fight or flight) but stick with the display rules (Grandey et al., 2015; Yagil, 2017).

Finally, competition may also motivate retail organizations to employ a more ethnically diverse workforce. Trying to attract a more heterogeneous customer base, retail organizations hire workers whose demographics match those of aspired customers in hopes that these workers can relate to them more easily (e.g., Bendick et al., 2010; Sacco & Schmitt, 2005; Thomas & Ely, 1996).[1] Although one might expect a match between customers' and workers' ethnic backgrounds to result in more harmonious customer-worker relationships and higher well-being (as suggested by the similarity/attraction paradigm; Byrne, 1971), Bendick and colleagues (2010) noted that this practice increased

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[1] Generally, proponents of this 'business case for diversity' (e.g., S. T. Bell et al., 2011; Bendick et al., 2010) have conceived ethnic diversity as a tool to raise profits within the specific organizational context. Outside of retail, the underlying assumption has been that ethnic diversity provides teams with various perspectives, which foster decisions, creativity, and, ultimately, profits (van Dijk, van Engen, & Paauwe, 2012). Support for this assumption has been limited outside of laboratories (S. T. Bell et al., 2011). Another supposed motivation for implementing diversity is reducing inequalities and empowering ethnic minority workers (Noon, 2007). Yet, organizations may easily coopt this motivation to improve their image (Degen, 2022) while, in fact, disengaging from equality policies (Noon, 2007). These efforts might also be rather symbolic because of historically developed and maintained interests (Vassilopoulou, 2017).

workforce segregation and thus discrimination within retail organizations. Analyzing employment data, they found that retail organizations in the United States placed ethnic minority workers in neighborhoods with high numbers of ethnic minority residents but also low incomes and high crime rates, which implied lower sales and a more stressful work environment. This matching may also fail in Germany because of the heterogeneity of ethnic minority groups (e.g., Russian and Arabic people both count as ethnic minorities; Statistisches Bundesamt, 2023; see also Section 2.3). Thus, instrumentalizing ethnic diversity without considering the societal context may indeed backfire.

In addition to customer contact, retail workers execute various tasks, such as operating the cash register, stocking shelves, and maintaining advertisement displays. Although they may work on most tasks individually, a number of these tasks require teamwork (e.g., lifting heavy items or replenishing the warehouse) and, thus, trust in each other (van Dijk, 2022). A direct supervisor plans shifts and coordinates both teamwork and individual parallel work.

2.3 Ethnic Minority Status and Ethnic Diversity in the German Society

As ethnic minority status and ethnic diversity are strongly entangled with migration in German society (Salentin, 2014), the following provides an overview of the latest history of migration. After World War II, the Federal Republic of Germany had a high need for (cheap) labor due to the realization of European-wide economic growth (Vonyo, 2008) and the installation of the armed forces (Höhne et al., 2014). To satisfy this need for labor, Germany made labor recruitment agreements with several countries, primarily in the Mediterranean region (Berlinghoff, 2018).[2]

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[2] Additionally, freedom of movement within Europe has facilitated migration since the 1950s (Berlinghoff, 2018).

These agreements created a reserve labor force that continuously provided employers with numbers of unemployed people who competed for even the most poorly paid jobs (Sarbo, 2022).[3] These 'guest workers', who often lived in barracks, had to work extra hours in low-wage occupations to achieve an income similar to German workers (Höhne et al., 2014). Some of them tried to escape these occupations by demonstrating diligence, which sometimes gave rise to resentments that accused migrants of pressuring wages (Sarbo, 2022). At the same time, these labor recruitment agreements allowed parts of the German workforce to exchange physically strenuous labor for office work and promoted their social advancement (Höhne et al., 2014).

As is apparent from the term 'guest workers', the German government assumed these migrants would leave Germany after working for a fixed period (Berlinghoff, 2018). In 1973, the labor recruitment agreement stopped as a consequence of the economic oil crisis (Arendt, 1973).[4] While the German government hoped that migrants would leave, many of them sought to bring their families to Germany and entered the same labor and housing markets as ethnic majority workers (Berlinghoff, 2018; Sarbo, 2022). In the following years, public narratives on migration overrepresented negative aspects and fueled racist violence (Kunz, 2021). At the same time, the children of the former guest workers entered the German school system, which prompted discussions on integration regarding issues of schooling and daily life (Sarbo, 2022). Based on the assumptions that migrants had different values and lived in parallel worlds,[5] these discussions problematized ethnic minorities and eventually deepened segregation (Sarbo, 2022). For example, installing special integration classes in schools contributed to a segregated

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[3] Other European countries (e.g., France and the United Kingdom) created this reserve labor force with people from former colonies (Grosfoguel, 1997; Noon, 2007).

[4] At the same time, workers from Cuba, Mozambique, and Vietnam migrated to the German Democratic Republic (Berlinghoff, 2018).

[5] In contrast to times of colonialism and fascism, assumed cultural differences became the basis of racism, which had a supposedly biological connotation (Sarbo, 2022).

school system, which disadvantaged ethnic minority students (e.g., Baysu & de Valk, 2012; Heckmann, 2008). Thus, these assumptions contributed to institutionalized inequalities (Schulte, 2011).

After the end of the Cold War, 7.3 million people from the former Soviet Union migrated to Germany, half of whom stayed for a longer period (Berlinghoff, 2018). At this point, racist narratives that claimed scarcity due to migration (e.g., both right-wing parties and Spiegel magazine picked up the phrase 'the boat is full') culminated in racist attacks in both Western and Eastern Germany (Berlinghoff, 2018; Kunz, 2021). At the same time, German economists, social scientists, and counselors adopted diversity management from the United States, primarily motivated by the hope that managing diversity would give more heterogeneous organizations advantages over homogeneous ones (Vedder, 2006).

Additionally, refugees from various countries have always sought asylum in Germany (Berlinghoff, 2018). This was also the case in the 'refugee crisis' between 2015 and 2017, during which nearly 1.5 million people applied for asylum (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, 2018). A large number of volunteers supported these migrants (Karakayali, 2019). Yet, as in the 1970s and 1990s, right-wing parties and movements mobilized people by drawing, once again, on the narrative of scarce resources; the media contributed to this mobilization because they presented these right-wing positions less critically than in earlier decades (Kunz, 2021).

Contradictory political decisions emphasized these different reactions of the German people: On the one hand, politicians symbolically invited people to Germany emphasizing humanitarian duty (Sökefeld, 2017). On the other hand, several actions regarding migration revealed a neoliberal agenda: First, the German government authorized the delivery of weapons to regions of crisis (Ley, 2022). Second, it passed a package of migration laws. This package included the Skilled Worker Immigration Act

(Bundesministerium des Innern, für Bau und Heimat, 2019a), which attempted to attract only skilled workers, and the Orderly Return Act, which facilitated the deportation of rejected asylum seekers (Bundesministerium des Innern, für Bau und Heimat, 2019b).

German authorities (e.g., migration offices, job center) have always executed these and previous laws (Borrelli & Wyss, 2022). While some ethnic minority members experienced contact with these authorities as positive (Nowicka, 2021), others were discriminated against and had to provide a relatively large number of proofs and certificates (e.g., of language command) to stay or receive welfare (Borrelli & Wyss, 2022; Ratzmann, 2021, 2022). Among others, these laws and their execution exemplify the mutual influences of work and society, suggested at the beginning of this chapter.

The relationship between work and society is also apparent from the fact that, until now, German workplaces are segregated along the lines of ethnic minority status. Ethnic minority members are more likely to be unemployed, work in lower-income groups, or be employed atypically (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2023). They are also more likely to work under hazardous conditions (Becker & Faller, 2019) or in low-skilled occupations (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development & European Union, 2016). Before discussing the relationship between work and society with regard to the findings of this dissertation, the following chapter describes the theoretical bases of these findings.

Chapter 3. Linking Ethnic Minority Status and Ethnic Diversity to Well-Being

Ethnic minority status and ethnic diversity are central constructs in this dissertation. Therefore, I introduce them (Section 3.1) and outline their links to well-being (Section 3.2-3.3) to derive my research questions and hypotheses (Section 3.4).

3.1 Defining and Demarcating Ethnic Minority Status, Team-Level Ethnic Heterogeneity, and Individual-Level Ethnic Dissimilarity

First, I introduce ethnic minority status and ethnic diversity at team and individual levels – team-level ethnic heterogeneity and individual-level ethnic dissimilarity (see also Figure 3). Then I compare and contrast the three constructs to further clarify them.

Figure 3

Visualization of Ethnic Minority Status, Team-Level Ethnic Heterogeneity, and Individual-Level Ethnic Dissimilarity
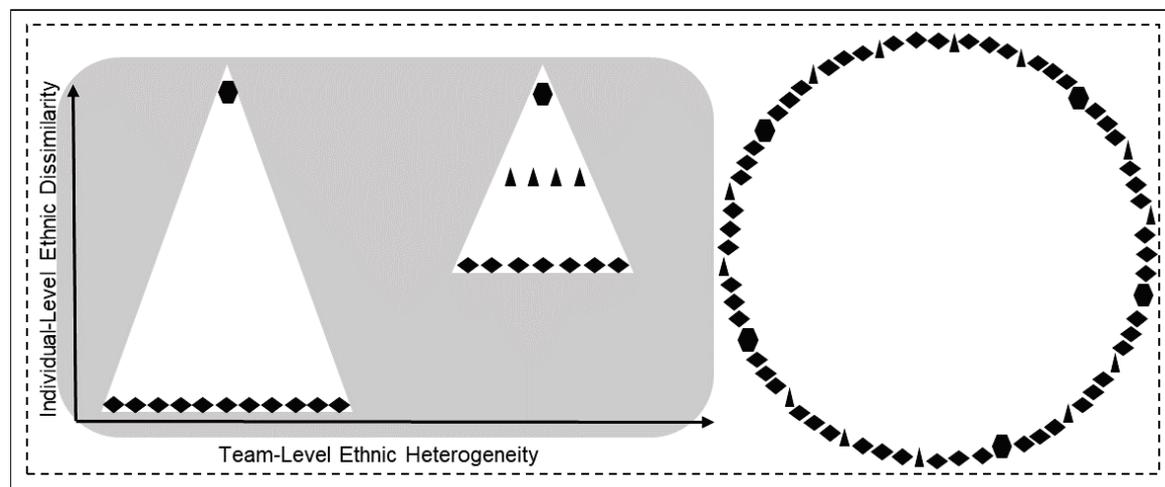
Note. The dashed frame represents society, the gray area represents an organization, and the white triangles represent teams. The black geometric forms represent different ethnic backgrounds (ethnic majority members as rhombuses).

In Paper 1, the term *ethnic minority status* refers to the distinction between ethnic minority and ethnic majority members. Agu et al. (2019) define ethnic minority members

as people whose ethnic background differs from the dominant population in their country of residence. In line with researchers in Germany and other European countries (Fibbi et al., 2021; Slade, 2014),[6] I draw this distinction based on one or both parents' countries of birth. In the German context, ethnic minority members include people whose parents are born outside of Germany (e.g., in Morocco, Romania, or Peru), which is consistent with the entanglement between migration and ethnic minority status (see Section 2.3). Example research questions on ethnic minority status would be whether social stressors affect ethnic minority and ethnic majority workers' well-being differently (e.g., Bergbom et al., 2015; X. Liu et al., 2020).

Paper 2 examines ethnic diversity at two different levels – the team and individual levels. In line with Harrison and Klein (2007), *team-level ethnic heterogeneity* describes "the distribution of differences among the members of a [team] with respect to [the ethnic background]" (p. 1200). For example, a team in which all members are Germans is homogeneous, a team in which half of the members are Germans and the other half are Turkish people is less heterogeneous than a team in which as many ethnic backgrounds as team members are present. This example demonstrates that team-level ethnic heterogeneity is a team-level variable that is invariant within a team but varies between teams (see also Joshi et al., 2011). Similarly, the team (white triangle) on the right hand in Figure 3 is more heterogeneous than the team on the left hand, as indicated by the geometric forms in the triangles. As such, researchers often investigate team-level ethnic heterogeneity in relation to other team-level variables (e.g., team conflicts, performance; Joshi et al., 2011).

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[6] Other countries, such as the United States, determine ethnic minority status based on race and ethnicity rather than the birthplace. However, collecting data on race and ethnicity is an uncommon practice in Europe (Fibbi et al., 2021).

According to Riordan (2000), *individual-level ethnic dissimilarity* is the degree to which a focal team member's ethnic background differs from the rest of the team. For example, a Moroccan worker who is in a team with two other Moroccan and five Turkish workers has a higher individual-level ethnic dissimilarity than one of their Turkish coworkers. Thus, individual-level ethnic dissimilarity varies within teams and can be called an individual-within-the-team-level variable (i.e., a cross-level construct that is operationalized at the individual level; Guillaume et al., 2012; Klein et al., 1994). In Figure 3, the hexagon has the highest dissimilarity within both teams whereas the rhombuses have the lowest dissimilarity. As individual-level ethnic dissimilarity considers the individual's ethnic background in relation to their team (Riordan, 2000), researchers have investigated its relationship with individual-level variables (Guillaume et al., 2012), such as health and well-being (e.g., Hoppe et al., 2014).

The three constructs differ in two aspects. First, these constructs have different frames of reference (see also Figure 3): Ethnic minority status is determined primarily in reference to society (Agu et al., 2019; DiTomaso et al., 2007) whereas team-level ethnic heterogeneity and individual-level ethnic dissimilarity are determined in reference to a team (Harrison & Klein, 2007; Riordan, 2000).[7] Therefore, I study how ethnic minority status is associated with a team-external social stressor and team-internal social support. In contrast, I examine team-level ethnic heterogeneity and individual-level ethnic dissimilarity only in relation to team-internal social stressors.

Second, the three constructs vary in their levels of theory and analysis. Determining the correct level is the most challenging for ethnic minority studies. Several studies conceived ethnic minority status as an individual-level variable and examined its

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[7] Both constructs can also be conceptualized in reference to smaller (e.g., supervisor–worker dyads) or larger units (e.g., neighborhoods; Riordan, 2000).

associations with other individual-level variables (e.g., Bergbom & Kinnunen, 2014; Shirmohammadi et al., 2023). This conception offers insights into individual-level outcomes of ethnic minority status. However, critics have argued that it individualizes and culturizes differences between ethnic minority and ethnic majority members actually based on economic, historical, social, and political conditions (Fibbi et al., 2021; Premji, 2019). The importance of considering these conditions becomes apparent in the example of Romanian workers who are channeled into hazardous and precarious employment situations in Germany by a combination of laws, resources for employment search in Germany, and the economic situation in Romania (Bouali, 2022). In contrast, the conceptualizations of team-level ethnic heterogeneity and individual-level ethnic dissimilarity as team-level and individual-within-the-team-level variables, respectively, are more straightforward (Harrison & Klein, 2007; Riordan, 2000). Following these conceptualizations, I operationalize ethnic minority status and individual-level ethnic dissimilarity at the individual level and team-level ethnic heterogeneity at the team level. In line with the work-society reflection model, I consider both work and society when interpreting research findings.

Taken together, ethnic minority status, team-level ethnic heterogeneity, and individual-level ethnic dissimilarity differ regarding their frames of reference and levels of theory and analysis. Due to these differences, each construct is relevant for studying specific associations, such as those introduced in the following sections.

3.2 A Matter of Perspective? Ethnic Minority Status as a Moderator

This section focuses on the moderation effect of ethnic minority status. After establishing an indirect association between customer verbal aggression and work-related positive affect through emotional dissonance, I argue why this association might vary

between ethnic minority and ethnic majority workers. Then I propose supervisor support

as an additional moderator, as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Conceptual Model on Ethnic Minority Status as a Moderator (Paper 1)
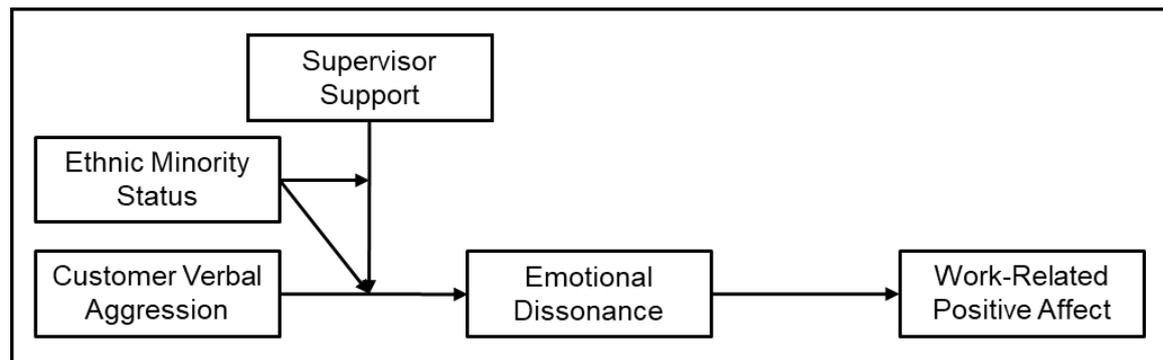
Note. To improve the readability and illustrate my argument, I adapted this figure slightly from the first

paper of this dissertation "The role of supervisor support for dealing with customer verbal aggression.

Differences between ethnic minority and ethnic majority workers" by F. J. Kößler, J. B. Wilbert, S. Veit, and

A. Hoppe, 2022, *German Journal of Human Resource Management: Zeitschrift Für Personalforschung*,

advance online publication (https://doi.org/10.1177/23970022221140560).

According to the conservation of resources theory (COR; Hobfoll, 1989), workers

strive to protect and nourish their resources. COR further suggests that actual or imminent

resource losses evoke negative emotions in workers. As mentioned before, customer

verbal aggression is a central stressor for retail workers and may threaten their resources

(e.g., by increasing distress; Sommovigo et al., 2019). As argued in Section 2.2, workers

may not react naturally to customer verbal aggression but stay friendly (e.g., Dudenhöffer

& Dormann, 2015). This discrepancy between felt and displayed emotions, called

emotional dissonance (Morris & Feldman, 1996), can be considered a secondary resource

loss – an ineffective, excessively energy-consuming coping strategy (Grandey et al.,

2012; Nesher Shoshan et al., 2023). As this secondary resource loss may impair well-

being (Hobfoll, 2001), such as work-related positive affect (e.g., joy, enthusiasm, or calmness perceived in reference to work; Diener et al., 2010), emotional dissonance may link customer verbal aggression to workers' diminished well-being (e.g., Dudenhöffer & Dormann, 2015; Goussinsky, 2011; Molino et al., 2016).[8]

The indirect association between customer verbal aggression and work-related positive affect may vary between ethnic minority and ethnic majority workers. Two mechanisms explain this variation. First, customers may activate rather positive stereotypes about ethnic majority workers as the cultural default but mixed or even negative stereotypes about ethnic minority workers (Fiske et al., 2002). Before activating stereotypes, customers need to categorize workers based on their ethnic backgrounds (Reynolds & Oakes, 2000), which may be easy in retail due to name tags (Thijssen et al., 2021), outer appearance (Weichselbaumer, 2017), or accent (Rakić et al., 2020). As stereotypes guide how people behave, customers are more likely to engage in passive (e.g., ambiguous communication) or even active aggression toward ethnic minority workers (e.g., direct insults; Cuddy et al., 2007; Sliter & Jones, 2016).

Second, customer contact, as an evaluative situation with out-group members (e.g., bystanders, customers), may activate meta-stereotypes in ethnic minority workers (i.e., beliefs about how people with another ethnic background view them; Gómez, 2002). These meta-stereotypes, in turn, shape ethnic minority workers' emotions and behaviors. For example, a study on international students showed that loneliness and self-disclosure mediated between negative meta-stereotypes and depression (Imai, 2017). As customer verbal aggression toward ethnic minority workers is more likely to involve stereotypes and increase the salience of meta-stereotypes in ethnic minority workers, they might

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[8] Note that Paper 1 derives the indirect association between customer verbal aggression and work-related positive affect through emotional dissonance from control theory (Diefendorff & Gosserand, 2003). Both control theory and COR come to similar conclusions but differ slightly in their focus.

experience customer verbal aggression more negatively and, thus, adapt their emotional expression more strongly (i.e., experience elevated emotional dissonance; Diefendorff & Gosserand, 2003).

An extension of COR, the conservation of social resources theory (Hobfoll et al., 1990), suggests that social support helps workers in stressful situations and widens their pool of resources. Therefore, social support can be considered a resource gain, which becomes more salient when resources are at stake or lost. Especially supervisor support might be helpful in this respect because supervisors often have work experience in this field (Thoits, 2011), which might enable them to share memories of similar encounters, react empathically with workers, and give workers practical tools for dealing with customer verbal aggression (e.g., encourage mutual support among workers). Supervisors might also reduce workers' fear of consequences for not following display rules in the face of severe customer verbal aggression (see Mathieu et al., 2019, for a meta-analysis on the buffering effect of supervisor support). Thus, supervisor support might buffer the positive relationship between customer verbal aggression and emotional dissonance and, in turn, work-related positive affect.

In particular, ethnic minority workers might benefit from supervisor support because the suggested pronounced impact of customer verbal aggression might also make this resource gain more salient (Hobfoll et al., 1990). Additionally, ethnic minority workers might generally face more stressors in life, for example, resulting from migration experiences and discrimination (Hill et al., 2019; Shirmohammadi et al., 2023). They may also have experienced discrimination from previous supervisors and thus appreciate supervisor support more (de Castro et al., 2006). In line with these suggestions, studies have shown direct and buffering effects (e.g., regarding time pressure and well-being) of supervisor support to be more pronounced in ethnic minority workers regarding other

stressors (e.g., Hoppe, 2011; Hoppe et al., 2017). Thus, both the indirect association between customer verbal aggression and work-related positive affect through emotional dissonance and the buffering effect of supervisor support on this association might be stronger in ethnic minority workers.

3.3 A Matter of the Level? Linking Ethnic Diversity and Well-Being

This section derives the associations between ethnic diversity and well-being. To study ethnic diversity as a multi-level concept, I focus on team-level ethnic heterogeneity and individual-level ethnic dissimilarity (see Section 3.1). Before presenting their common theoretical basis, I compare and contrast them and give an outlook of the expected associations with emotional conflicts and emotional strain (see Figure 5).

Figure 5

Conceptual Model on the Linkage between Ethnic Diversity and Well-Being at both the Team and Individual Levels (Paper 2)
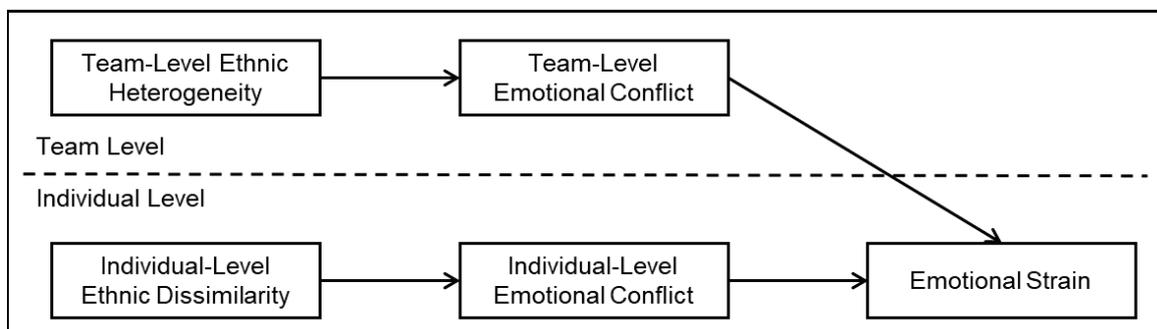
Note. To improve the readability and illustrate my argument, I adapted this figure slightly from the second paper of this dissertation "Ethnic Differences in Context: Does Emotional Conflict Mediate the Effects of Both Team- and Individual-Level Ethnic Diversity on Emotional Strain?" by F. J. Kößler, K. Fujishiro, S. Veit, and A. Hoppe, 2022, *Occupational Health Science, 6*(1), p. 31 (https://doi.org/10.1007/s41542-021-00105-5).

Concerning the team level, previous studies have focused on team-level ethnic heterogeneity assuming that it affects various team outcomes. For example, previous studies found that ethnically heterogeneous teams face more team-level emotional conflicts in various samples (e.g., nursing teams; Drach-Zahavy & Trogan, 2013; Mansoor et al., 2019; cf. Mohammed & Angell, 2004; Pelled et al., 1999), during which team members share perceptions (based on first- or second-hand experiences) of friction and mutual dislike (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Jehn & Mannix, 2001; Klein & Kozlowski, 2000).

Regarding the individual level, researchers have examined individual-level ethnic dissimilarity often finding that workers show more positive attitudes and behaviors toward a team with many team members who are similar to them than toward a team with few similar team members (e.g., Chattopadhyay, George, et al., 2004; Choi, 2017; Jehn et al., 1999; Riordan, 2000). In line with that, a meta-analysis found a negative relationship between demographic dissimilarity and social integration (i.e., team attachment, satisfaction, and quality of social relations) when team members work on relatively independent tasks (Guillaume et al., 2012).

Most studies on team-level ethnic heterogeneity and individual-level ethnic dissimilarity focused on their respective levels, which limited the selection of studied outcomes and simplified the complex experience of working in a team. For instance, previous research on team-level ethnic heterogeneity has studied its associations with team-level outcomes (e.g., performance) other than health and well-being (e.g., Lu et al., 2018; van Dijk, van Engen, & van Knippenberg, 2012). In contrast, studies on individual-level ethnic dissimilarity were more open to studying health and well-being, yet they rarely acknowledged the team composition as a context (e.g., Enchautegui-de-Jesús et al., 2006; Hoppe et al., 2014, also mention this limitation). Being dissimilar from all other

team members may be a different experience if that team is homogeneous compared to heterogeneous. Few studies combined both levels and found that the association between ethnic diversity and performance outcomes varied between the team and individual levels (e.g., Brodbeck et al., 2011; Leonard & Levine, 2006), which underlines the need for studies to investigate ethnic diversity at both levels simultaneously.

Studies on both team-level ethnic heterogeneity and individual-level ethnic dissimilarity referred to the social identity approach (e.g., Gonzalez, 2016; Leslie, 2017). This combination of the social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986) and the self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987) suggests that people categorize themselves and others as in- or out-group based on social categories they can access easily (e.g., ethnic backgrounds) and they see as indicators for actual differences in their social environment (Brewer, 1988; Hornsey, 2008). Under certain circumstances (e.g., identity threats), these categorizations might foster inter-group biases, that is, in-group favoritism as well as derogation toward out-groups (Brewer, 1979; see also Byrne, 1971). Researchers viewed this approach as an explanation for a positive relationship between team-level ethnic heterogeneity and team-level emotional conflicts (e.g., Drach-Zahavy & Trogan, 2013; van Knippenberg et al., 2004) and, likewise, for a positive association between individual-level ethnic dissimilarity and individual-level emotional conflicts (e.g., Jehn et al., 1999; Riordan, 2000).

According to COR and other stress theories, emotional conflicts are negatively associated with well-being (De Dreu & Beersma, 2005; Dormann & Zapf, 2002; Spector & Bruk-Lee, 2008; Spector & Jex, 1998). While the individual-level association may be derived from COR and other stress theories (e.g., Somaraju et al., 2022), the team-level association requires considering additional mechanisms, such as emotional contagion, which spreads emotions within a team (Barsade, 2002; Hatfield et al., 1993). Supporting

emotional contagion, Leon-Perez and colleagues (2016) showed a positive association between team-level emotional conflict and team members' burnout. Team stress research points to similar associations between emotional conflicts and well-being at both levels (S. Liu & Liu, 2018; Razinskas & Hoegl, 2020). Thus, emotional conflicts might link ethnic diversity at team and individual levels to emotional strain (i.e., a state of impaired well-being in which people are quickly upset and irritated; Mohr et al., 2006).

3.4 Research Questions and Hypotheses

Again, the aim of this research is to understand social stressors, social support, and well-being in relation to ethnic minority status and ethnic diversity. Based on the theoretical considerations in this chapter, the following research questions and hypotheses address this aim:

Research question 1: Does ethnic minority status moderate the associations between social stressors, social support, and well-being?

Hypothesis 1: The negative indirect association between customer verbal aggression and work-related positive affect via emotional dissonance is more pronounced among ethnic minority workers than ethnic majority workers.

Hypothesis 2: The buffering effect of supervisor support on the negative indirect association between customer verbal aggression and work-related positive affect via emotional dissonance is more pronounced among ethnic minority workers than ethnic majority workers.

Research Question 2: Do the associations between ethnic diversity and well-being via social stressors vary between the team and individual levels?

Hypothesis 3: Team-level ethnic heterogeneity is positively associated with team-level conflicts, which are positively associated with emotional strain.

Hypothesis 4: Individual-level ethnic dissimilarity is positively associated with individual-level emotional conflicts, which are positively related to emotional strain.

Chapter 4. Summaries of Papers

This chapter summarizes the two papers (see the Appendix for the full versions).

4.1 Paper 1

The role of supervisor support for dealing with customer verbal aggression. Differences between ethnic minority and ethnic majority workers

This paper investigated whether ethnic minority status moderated the association between an occupation-specific social stressor – customer verbal aggression – and work-related positive affect. Specifically, it tested this moderation regarding the indirect association between customer verbal aggression and work-related positive affect through emotional dissonance (Hypothesis 1). Moreover, it examined whether the mitigating effect of supervisor support on the association between customer verbal aggression and emotional dissonance varied between ethnic minority and ethnic majority workers (Hypothesis 2).

A sample of 603 retail workers who all worked in the same retail organization participated in this study, implying a low influence of occupational and organizational characteristics. They completed a paper-pencil survey at two measurement points. Most of them were ethnic majority members (84%) based on their parents' birthplaces.[9] To test our hypotheses, we applied multi-group path modeling with ethnic minority status as a dichotomous grouping variable (see Paper 1 for details).

We found no moderation effect of ethnic minority status on the negative indirect association between customer verbal aggression and work-related positive affect through emotional dissonance. That is, we observed this indirect association in both ethnic

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[9] In a few cases, data on parents' birthplaces were not available. As described in both papers, we could substitute this information using administrative data.

minority and ethnic majority workers. Thus, Hypothesis 1 was not supported. However, the moderation effect of supervisor support varied between ethnic minority and ethnic majority workers. More specifically, we detected a significant moderation effect of supervisor support on the indirect association between customer verbal aggression and work-related positive affect through emotional dissonance only in ethnic minority workers. In contrast to Hypothesis 2, the indirect association was significant and *negative* among ethnic minority workers with high levels of supervisor support but not significant among ethnic minority workers with low levels of supervisor support. In ethnic majority workers, we did not find a moderation effect of supervisor support but direct significant correlations with emotional dissonance and work-related positive affect.

In sum, this paper raises questions on the effectiveness of supervisor support as a buffer of customer verbal aggression in both ethnic minority and ethnic majority workers. It further questions the helpfulness of supervisor support for ethnic minority workers.

4.2 Paper 2

Ethnic differences in context: Does emotional conflict mediate the effects of both team- and individual-level ethnic diversity on emotional strain?

This paper investigated the association between ethnic diversity and emotional strain and compared this relationship between the team and individual levels. We examined the indirect association between team-level ethnic heterogeneity and emotional strain through team-level emotional conflict (Hypothesis 3). In the same model, we also tested the association between individual-level ethnic dissimilarity and emotional strain through individual-level emotional conflict (Hypothesis 4).

At two points of measurement, 50 teams of retail workers ($n = 602$) participated in the study. Based on the team members' ethnic backgrounds, we calculated team-level

ethnic heterogeneity as Blau's index (i.e., the extent to which team members spread across different ethnic backgrounds; Blau, 1977) and individual-level ethnic dissimilarity as proportional dissimilarity (i.e., the share of coworkers whose ethnic background is dissimilar from a focal team member; Williams & Meân, 2004).[10] In a multilevel path model, we included the indirect relationships at both the team and individual levels.

In this model, team-level ethnic heterogeneity was positively associated with emotional strain through team-level emotional conflict, supporting Hypothesis 3. However, the model also showed a negative indirect association between individual-level ethnic dissimilarity and emotional strain through individual-level emotional conflicts. Thus, Hypothesis 4 was not supported.

To gain a better understanding of our results, we inspected descriptive statistics, which showed that ethnic majority workers were numerically dominant in all teams and had considerably lower levels of ethnic dissimilarity than ethnic minority workers. Viewing our findings with these statistics in mind, we discussed that ethnic majority workers whose ethnic dissimilarity was generally low felt a stronger need for distinction in ethnically heterogeneous teams potentially resulting in more conflicts. At the same time, ethnic minority workers whose levels of ethnic dissimilarity were high may have perceived less emotional conflict, potentially because they were more used to being ethnically dissimilar.

The positive association at the team level may particularly represent the perception of ethnic majority workers whereas the individual-level association may provide a more complex picture influenced by the perceptions of ethnic minority workers.

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[10] For details on measures (including the formulae of the Blau's index and proportional dissimilarity), sample, and procedure, refer to Paper 2 in Appendix B.

Chapter 5. General Discussion

This dissertation aimed at understanding social stressors, social support, and well-being in relation to ethnic minority status and ethnic diversity. More specifically, I examined whether ethnic minority and ethnic majority workers experience these associations differently (Research Question 1) and how ethnic diversity at the team and individual levels affects well-being (Research Question 2).

Regarding this aim, the following discussion addresses three main findings. First, ethnic minority and ethnic majority workers experience customer verbal aggression as equally disturbing to their well-being. Second, ethnic majority workers benefit more from supervisor support than ethnic minority workers. That is apparent from the non-significant association between supervisor support and work-related positive affect as well as the amplifying effect of supervisor support on the indirect association between customer verbal aggression and their work-related positive affect through emotional dissonance. Third, the different indirect associations between ethnic diversity and emotional strain at the team and individual levels highlight the complexity of ethnic diversity and introduce ethnic minority status as an explanatory factor. As these findings only partially line up with previous literature, it is necessary to consider explanations beyond work while highlighting work-specific characteristics.

By reflecting findings in work and society, the work-society reflection model allows learning more about characteristics that are specific to work and society (i.e., distortions in the work-society reflection model). This reflection also shows how work and society are positioned to each other and provides ideas for future research. Therefore, I integrate my findings into the work-society reflection model and discuss its implications in the following sections.

5.1 Central Findings in the Work-Society Reflection Model

Before discussing the three main findings, it is crucial to note that the proportion of ethnic minority workers in this sample was representative of retail around the data collection period (Schäfer & Schmidt, 2016). Yet, this proportion was lower than in the general workforce, where the proportion of ethnic minority members was also lower than in general society (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2017). This underrepresentation in the general workforce may reflect the limited access ethnic minority workers have to the labor market. In one out of several field experiments, the likelihood of discrimination against fake applicants was higher for ethnic minority applicants (e.g., Thijssen et al., 2021). In the work-society reflection model, labor market access might be the interface between work and society.

Additionally, ethnic minority workers of the first and second generations clustered in lower positions in this sample, implying few working hours. Generally, work reflects that because ethnic minority workers until today are more likely to be atypically employed (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2023). Looking at this phenomenon outside of work, society shows that ethnic minority workers often have a lower socio-economic status and fewer resources, which may be passed on to the next generation through a stratified school system (Alba & Foner, 2016). Thus, schooling veils and justifies the inheritance of inequalities (Bourdieu, 2006). In the work-society reflection model, this inheritance may appear as multiple and potentially infinite reflections of work in society and vice versa.

5.1.1 Similar Experiences of Customer Verbal Aggression

The negative indirect relationship between customer verbal aggression and work-related positive affect did not vary between ethnic minority and ethnic majority workers. This finding does not line up with a study that found a stronger effect of customer verbal aggression on ethnic minority workers' well-being (Hoppe, 2011; cf. Kern & Grandey,

2009). Potentially, the frequency and centrality of customer contact explain the difference between my study and Hoppe (2011) who investigated postmen with some customer contact aside from many other tasks. It is possible that my sample was already used to milder levels of customer verbal aggression due to frequent and central customer contact. This lacking variation is still surprising because society reflects the social relationships of customers and workers as superficial short-term encounters with strangers (i.e., earlier stages of impression formation) in which social categorization and corresponding stereotype activation are more likely (Fiske et al., 2018; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990). However, the unequal terms to which customers and workers meet represent a difference from other encounters with strangers and may explain this finding (Ben-Zur & Yagil, 2005; Grandey et al., 2007; Yagil, 2017).

As described in Section 2.2, these unequal terms may be based on competition for customers. This competition involves practices in which management and customers instrumentalize workers: On the one hand, customers may use verbal aggression to secure desired items or discounts under unlikely circumstances (Sliter et al., 2010). On the other hand, management draws on workers' behaviors and emotional expressions to sell products (Argo & Dahl, 2020; Hacker et al., 2020; Hochschild, 1983/2012). To secure their employment, workers may adapt their emotional expressions in compliance with management's expectations and potentially experience emotional dissonance in response to customer verbal aggression. These practices at work reflect the competition between retail organizations in society. At the same time, society reflects these practices as the illusion of free consumption (Korczynski & Ott, 2004), which suggests a stabilization of these practices. Thus, work and society reflect each other infinitely and face each other directly in the work-society reflection model.

In conclusion, the similar associations between customer verbal aggression and well-being might be understood by mechanisms in place in work and society. Instead of stereotyping and meta-stereotyping, work reflects competition and instrumentality of the customer-worker relationship and thus central aspects of neoliberalism in society (see also Bal & Dóci, 2018). This strong emphasis on competition and instrumentality implies that work magnifies these societal aspects. In the work-society reflection model, this magnification appears as a curvature of work.

5.1.2 Differential Returns of Supervisor Support

Ethnic minority workers profited less from supervisor support than ethnic majority workers. This finding contrasts previous research showing the benefits of supervisor support for ethnic minority workers' well-being (Hoppe, 2011; Hoppe et al., 2017; Ko et al., 2015). Yet, this finding supports the results of a literature review in which support from friends, family, and spiritual communities was a more important buffer of work-related stress in ethnic minority workers (Shirmohammadi et al., 2023).

An explanation for the finding of this dissertation is that, aside from support, the supervisor-worker relationship may involve evaluation and hierarchy (Mathieu et al., 2019), which society might reflect as German authorities. This reflection is underlined by the underrepresentation of ethnic minority members in both supervisor positions in this sample and German authorities (12%; Ette et al., 2020). As suggested in Section 2.3, ethnic minority members do not necessarily perceive contact with these authorities as helpful and pleasant (e.g., Nowicka, 2021; Ratzmann, 2022). Two mechanisms might explain the reflection in more detail.

One explanation is the quality and quantity of supervisor support ethnic minority workers receive. Potentially, the underrepresentation of ethnic minority workers in supervisor positions implies that ethnic minority workers are less likely to have an ethnic

minority supervisor who can react sympathetically to discrimination experiences and

other stressors they face more frequently (Shirmohammadi et al., 2023). The supervisor,

in contrast to German authorities, has direct contact with the workers on a daily basis and

may intervene in team processes (Fiset & Boies, 2018). Over time, this social relationship

may become more personal. Ethnic majority workers seem to benefit more from this

social relationship in terms of their well-being than ethnic minority workers who might

receive less or perhaps even inferior support from their supervisor. Thus, the reflections in

work and society look almost the same but become opaque when it comes to ethnic

minority workers.

       Another explanation is that both ethnic minority and ethnic majority workers

benefit equally from supervisor support but that the experiences with German authorities

hinder ethnic minority workers from fully enjoying this support. This explanation is based

on qualitative research which showed that minorities often react with resistance and

distrust to supervisor or management measures that are supposed to support and protect

them against discrimination (Degen, 2022). In that case, work may reflect and magnify

experiences with German authorities for ethnic minority workers suggesting close

proximity of work and society.

       Taken together, either the unequal support or the influence of negative past

experiences with authorities may explain the differential returns of supervisor support.

These explanations imply contradictory assumptions regarding the relations between

work and society. On the one hand, unequal support means that work and society reflect

this social relationship similarly with ethnic minority workers getting less out of it. In the

work-society reflection model, this means that work stands next to society and has an

opaque spot. On the other hand, the influence of experiences with authorities suggests

that the angle between work and society is small and that work has a curvature, which

highlights ethnic minority workers' experience with authorities. If the experience with a supervisor feeds into the experiences with German authorities, work and society may face each other implying an infinite reflection. However, it is up to future research to determine in interviews whether unequal support, the influence of experiences with authorities, or both play a role.

5.1.3 The Entanglement of Ethnic Minority Status and Ethnic Diversity

The difference between the team- and individual-level associations between diversity and emotional strain underline the value of conceptualizing ethnic diversity at multiple levels. These findings emerged in the worker-team relationship in which people collaborate on a common goal (Drach-Zahavy & Freund, 2007; S. Liu & Liu, 2018). This social relationship may reflect similar others in society (e.g., neighbors; see Thoits, 2011 for the distinction between similar and significant others). This finding does not fully support the suggestion that ethnic diversity results in inter-group bias (see Section 3.3). Neither does it underpin the opposite, saying that people develop more nuanced and less stereotypical views of each other when they collaborate over a longer period (continuum model of impression formation; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990).

As described in detail in Paper 2, the differences between team and individual levels suggest that ethnic majority workers perceived ethnic diversity as more stressful than ethnic minority workers. This suggestion is consistent with the theoretical notion that researchers should incorporate the social status of one's ethnic group along with hopes and beliefs about the stability of this status in the theorizing on ethnic diversity (Chattopadhyay, Tluchowska, et al., 2004). For example, we argued that ethnic minority members, who have a high ethnic dissimilarity, may perceive low levels of emotional conflict in a relatively homogeneous team with a dominant ethnic majority because they may try to keep peace with the large group of ethnic majority workers but also with the

small fraction of ethnic minority workers. In a more heterogeneous team, they may also have a relatively high ethnic dissimilarity and interact in a friendly manner with ethnic majority workers but distanced from ethnic minority workers because they may perceive the boundary between themselves and the ethnic majority to be more permeable. These differences between ethnic minority and ethnic majority workers also support the asymmetry hypothesis saying that ethnic minority workers perceive ethnic dissimilarity more positively than ethnic majority workers (e.g., Hoppe et al., 2014).

In society, status hierarchies implicitly develop during goal-directed interactions between people who belong to different social categories (e.g., ethnic backgrounds; Ridgeway, 2010). While people hardly notice how these hierarchies develop (e.g., an ethnic majority member takes the lead in decision-making), they become aware of their membership in different social categories. This difference becomes the basis of status beliefs that, for example, attribute more respect to members of a higher-valued social category. After adopting status beliefs (e.g., in school), members of higher- and lower-valued categories share and spread them in future interactions (Ridgeway, 2010).

Therefore, people might develop and spread status beliefs at work and in other parts of society so that work and society might reflect each other infinitely regarding social status. Work may even contribute to status beliefs because of unequally distributed resources (e.g., high-ranked positions in this sample; Ridgeway, 2010, on inequality and status), which may appear as a crack in the mirror that multiplies reflections. As suggested by the mutual reflection, work and society might stabilize this spreading.

5.1.4 Combining Three Main Findings in the Work-Society Reflection Model

Viewing the three main findings regarding the influence of ethnic minority status shows that there is a difference between social relationships with insiders (i.e., supervisors and team) and outsiders (i.e., customers). While the moderation effect of

supervisor support and the association between ethnic diversity and well-being varied between ethnic minority and ethnic majority workers, customer verbal aggression was equally destructive for both of them. Grandey and colleagues (2007) argued that social relationships with insiders and outsiders differed in two aspects: First, customers are often anonymous to workers and can avoid future interactions with them, which is more difficult for organizational insiders. Second, retail organizations enforce more explicit expectations for interactions with customers than with insiders. It is possible that the uneven terms in which customers and workers meet produce such a strong burden on workers, that they are similarly affected, regardless of whether stereotypes or meta-stereotypes are present in the interaction.

Another possibility is that the differences between ethnic minority and ethnic majority workers regarding education and positions contributed to more homogeneous subgroups, which fostered the tendencies of socially categorizing and stereotyping people based on their ethnic minority status (Oakes et al., 1994; van Knippenberg et al., 2004). These differences regarding education and position may be less obvious to customers but could affect the distribution of responsibilities and tasks within teams.

5.1.5 Applying the Work-Society Reflection Model

Applying the work-society reflection model to the research findings of this dissertation provided insights into the relationship between work and society. Work and society reflect each other to some extent regarding most findings. In the case of customer verbal aggression and ethnic diversity, the integration in the work-society reflection model suggested an infinite reflection. This infinite reflection indicates that work and society stabilize each other and opposes the initial claim of the reflection metaphor saying that work reflects society. This mutual reflection illustrates Holz's (2003) understanding of reflections (see also Leontjew, 1975/2012).

The application revealed the need for a practical modification of the work-society reflection model because I recognized distortions mostly in the reflections in work, which may be due to my focus on occupational health psychology. This bias could be balanced by comparing the application of the work-society reflection model across researchers from different disciplines (e.g., political science).

Finally, researchers may apply the work-society reflection model to other phenomena (e.g., precarious employment, reduction of working hours). Comparing the resulting reflections across phenomena might inform us about the general relationship between work and society.

5.2 Research Implications

Owed to their place in educational institutions, work and organizational psychology (WOP) and occupational health psychology (OHP) are part of society. As suggested by their names, they are supposed to reflect work. In the work-society reflection model, their reflections could be considered as relative truth of their research (Holz, 2003). Distortions, however, may indicate research gaps or accumulations (e.g., of popular topics). Thus, the present section announces research implications with respect to the topic of this dissertation.

Including society in theory and discussion may help to understand the commonly mixed findings in psychology (see also Holzkamp, 1990). For example, the finding that ethnic minority workers benefitted less from supervisor support is inconsistent with previous studies but may be explicable by considering society (Hoppe, 2011; Hoppe et al., 2017). One of these previous studies took place in a country with a different conception of ethnic minority status (Hoppe et al., 2010, 2017). Another one studied primarily first-generation migrants (Hoppe, 2011) in whom supervisor support may have signaled belonging (see also Bergbom & Kinnunen, 2014). Potentially, the sample of the

present dissertation (i.e., second-generation migrants and migrants who had been in Germany for a long time) did not interpret supervisor support this way after long-term experiences with German authorities and assimilation demands at work (Vassilopoulou, 2017). Future research should look into these explanations beyond established paradigms of WOP and OHP and, thus, further develop the work-society reflection model.

Similarly, WOP and OHP researchers often adopt a management perspective (Gloss et al., 2017; McDonald & Bubna-Litic, 2012), as is apparent from the strong interest in productivity and performance in diversity research (especially at the team level; Degen, 2022; Jackson et al., 2003; Yadav & Lenka, 2020). This perspective represents a black spot (i.e., research gap) in the reflection of work. This black spot potentially hides the interests of those who do not share a management perspective and more or less explicitly reproduces neoliberal ideology (Bal & Dóci, 2018). To remove this and other black spots, researchers may study their own biases using positionality statements (i.e., explain how they became the researchers they are; Gillborn et al., 2018; Holmes, 2020).

In a similar vein, WOP and OHP focus in large parts on POSH samples (i.e., being Professionals, Officially working in the formal economy, being comparably Safe from discrimination, and living in High-income countries; Bergman & Jean, 2016; Gloss et al., 2017; Puplampu & Lewis, 2021). This focus limits the section of workers that WOP and OHP reflect. However, the working conditions and tasks of my sample vary considerably from those of academics or seasonal farm workers. These conditions and tasks may interact with ethnic diversity (van Knippenberg et al., 2004). Thus, researchers, editors, and funding organizations should encourage the representation of a broad range of samples and studies on less POSH groups.

Additionally, lacking exchanges with other countries limit the theorization of WOP and OHP. For example, people may be more likely to accept working in a hazardous occupation in Germany for a combination of reasons embedded in their personal situation (e.g., debts) but also in the societal conditions in their host country (e.g., laws and institutions) and their country of origin (e.g., the economic situation; Hoppe & Fujishiro, 2015; Kößler et al., 2023; see Salazar et al., 2004, for an empirical example). Thus, future research should discuss their findings on ethnic minority workers with researchers outside of high-income countries. The work-society reflection model might support these exchanges because it allows us to add further societies as reflective surfaces.

Due to their focus on work, the reflection of *society in work* may be more prominent in WOP and OHP although a reflection of *work in society* is also plausible. Latest developments in statistics allow the creation of such bottom-up models in which lower-level variables influence upper-level variables (e.g., 1-2-2 mediation; Neubauer et al., 2022). These developments may give WOP and OHP the chance to investigate or discuss the reflection of work in society (e.g., how racist discrimination in workplaces affects the climate in society).

5.3 Practical Implications

The mutual reflection of work and society implies that work is not a passive mirror that simply reflects society. Yet, society also reflects work. This view of society as a mirror of work underlines the responsibility of work and the corresponding decision-makers. Part of this responsibility may be to reduce inequalities between ethnic minority and ethnic majority workers (e.g., reduce unequal access to higher positions), which may reflect back to society and thus inspire changes outside of work. At the same time, the work-society reflection model may also point out which parts of society should change.

Although previous literature highlighted the benefits of supervisor support for ethnic minority workers (e.g., Hoppe, 2011), I found a positive direct relationship between supervisor support and well-being only in ethnic majority workers. These differential returns of supervisor support challenge its role as a resource for everyone (see also Assari, 2018). Ensuring that resources serve all workers' well-being similarly is difficult, as shown by a study where objectively measured job control related to health only in ethnic majority workers (Fujishiro & Koessler, 2020). Therefore, retail organizations may rather tailor resources to the needs of different social groups and evaluate them constantly (e.g., in a psychological risk assessment).

5.4 Strengths and Limitations

This section provides the limitations of this dissertation as a whole. For the limitations of each paper, refer to the limitation section of the respective paper.

A theoretical limitation of this dissertation is that I focused only on social stressors and support in relation to ethnic minority status, ethnic diversity, and well-being. Including social stressors and support was a logical step because of the well-established associations between these variables and well-being (e.g., Gerhardt et al., 2021; Halbesleben et al., 2014; Mathieu et al., 2019). However, it is plausible that other variables play a role in the associations between ethnic minority status, ethnic diversity, and well-being (e.g., training opportunities; DiTomaso et al., 2007). Future research might investigate such alternative variables.

Another limitation is that I based my theories mostly on literature from other national contexts. However, several aspects addressed in this dissertation may be sensitive to the national context, such as the working conditions (e.g., labor law; Fisher et al., 2016), display rules (e.g., Grandey et al., 2005), and stereotypes (e.g., Cuddy et al., 2009). These examples show that simply transferring a theory to another context bears problems

and underline the inclusion of society as suggested by the work-society reflection model –
potentially also at earlier stages of the research process.

A methodological limitation is that I operationalized the ethnic background by
asking workers about their parents' birthplaces instead of asking them what ethnic groups
they identify with. I still chose this operationalization to capture the second generation,
who often inherits discrimination and socio-economic status from their parents (Bourdieu,
2006; Fibbi et al., 2021).

Another methodological limitation is that I did not account for temporal dynamics.
Doing so would have been useful for investigating cycles of customer verbal aggression,
emotional dissonance, and work-related positive affect (see also Nesher Shoshan et al.,
2023). Additionally, it may have allowed examining changes in ethnic diversity over time
(e.g., due to leaving team members; Li et al., 2018). Yet, in the narrow time frame of data
collection, such changes in the team composition were unlikely. Future research might
choose a study design with multiple measurement points over an extended period to
capture temporal dynamics. Such a stronger design may also allow testing causalities
rather than associations. However, I followed Spector (2019) and chose this weaker
design, as studying team-level ethnic heterogeneity required elaborate data collection and
touched quite novel research questions (e.g., on ethnic diversity and well-being).

A final limitation is that both papers are based on the same dataset. The American
Psychological Association (APA; 2020) considers such re-usage as incoherent with the
standards of good scientific practice because it may confuse researchers who write meta-
analyses. However, this re-usage enabled me to examine my research questions in three
different social relationships in a unique sample in which all workers worked in the same
occupation and organization. To limit the harm of that practice, I informed the editor of
Paper 1 about the overlap with Paper 2, as suggested by the APA.

5.5 Conclusion

This dissertation started with the metaphor of work as a reflection of society. To understand how ethnic minority status and ethnic diversity relate to social stressors, social support, and well-being, this dissertation developed the work-society reflection model, which expanded this metaphor so that both work and society were treated as reflective surfaces. This approach supported a broader discussion of the research findings of this dissertation and pointed to multiple layers that play a role in the experience of work. These layers include hierarchies within teams, occupational roles, and ethnic minority status. Although these layers are not new, the application of the work-society reflection model illustrated them and their entanglement supporting the comprehension of ethnic minority status and ethnic diversity. Future research should investigate these suggestions and add other mirrors, such as housing or family to gain an even better understanding. In general, the work-society reflection model might be helpful when research needs to break out of established paradigms.

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Appendix A: Paper 1

Kößler, F. J., Wilbert, J. B., Veit, S., & Hoppe, A. (2022). The role of supervisor support for dealing with customer verbal aggression. Differences between ethnic minority and ethnic majority workers. *German Journal of Human Resource Management: Zeitschrift Für Personalforschung*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1177/23970022221140560

In addition to the paper, this appendix includes its supplemental material.

Article

The role of supervisor support for dealing with customer verbal aggression. Differences between ethnic minority and ethnic majority workers

Franziska J Kößler(iD)
Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Germany
WZB Berlin Social Science Center, Germany

Jana B Wilbert
Freie Universität Berlin, Germany

Susanne Veit
German Center for Integration and Migration Research (DeZIM-Institut), Germany
WZB Berlin Social Science Center, Germany

Annekatrin Hoppe
Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Germany

Abstract
Customer verbal aggression is a core social stressor among retail workers which impairs wellbeing via emotional dissonance. This study examined two moderators—supervisor support and ethnic minority status—in this well-established relationship. In addition, it tested a moderated moderated mediation model to explore whether the moderation effects of supervisor support on the indirect relationship between customer verbal aggression and wellbeing (measured as positive affect) via emotional dissonance vary between ethnic minority and ethnic majority workers. Retail workers of one retail chain ($N = 603$) completed our paper-pencil survey at two measurement points. Path modeling showed that emotional dissonance mediates between customer verbal aggression and positive affect. Taken alone, neither supervisor support nor ethnic minority status moderated this relationship. However, their combination had a significant moderating effect;

Corresponding author:
Franziska J Kößler, Department of Psychology, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Rudower Chaussee 18, Berlin 12489, Germany.
Email: koesslfr@hu-berlin.de

supervisor support moderated the indirect effect of customer verbal aggression on positive affect through emotional dissonance only among ethnic minority workers. Surprisingly, supervisor support amplified this mediation. We discuss our findings by considering the role of supervisor support and the status of ethnic minority workers.

Retail workers are exposed to customer-related social stressors such as customer verbal aggression. Factors inherent to working in retail, such as the power imbalance between customers and workers or the high degree of customer orientation, facilitate customer verbal aggression (Rafaeli et al., 2012; Sommovigo et al., 2019). The literature provides strong evidence that customer verbal aggression is a major stressor for retail workers and that it impairs their wellbeing (Dudenhöffer and Dormann, 2013; e.g., burnout symptoms; Sommovigo et al., 2019). Furthermore, customer verbal aggression is costly for organizations because workers engage in service recovery performance (e.g., Kim et al., 2012), provide lower service quality (Rafaeli et al., 2012), and are more likely to leave the organization (Li et al., 2013; Sommovigo et al., 2019). These costs for workers and organizations highlight the importance of understanding the underlying mechanisms and boundary conditions that alleviate or strengthen the negative effect of customer verbal aggression on workers' wellbeing.

Several studies provide evidence that the relationship between customer verbal aggression and workers' wellbeing is mediated by emotional dissonance, which is an incongruency between the negative emotions evoked by customer verbal aggression (e.g., Grandey et al., 2002; Sommovigo et al., 2020) and the positive emotions required by management (Hochschild, 2012; Sommovigo et al., 2019; Yagil, 2017). While emotional dissonance as an underlying mechanism in the relationship between customer verbal aggression and impaired workers' wellbeing is well researched, we know little about the alleviating and strengthening boundary conditions of this relationship. Accordingly, in their recent systematic review on customer verbal aggression, Sommovigo et al. (2019) concluded that the role of supervisor support, as a boundary condition which alleviates the effects of customer verbal aggression, needs to be further explored. The conservation of social resources theory suggests that social support can provide a substantial reservoir of resources that nurtures wellbeing (Hobfoll et al., 1990). A large number of empirical studies have shown that supervisor support has these wellbeing-enhancing effects while other studies, surprisingly, show the opposite (Beehr et al., 2010; see Mathieu et al., 2019 for a review). To shed light on these opposing effects, we investigate supervisor support as a moderator in the relationship between customer verbal aggression and emotional dissonance.

Next, we focus on ethnic minority status as a boundary condition, again following Sommovigo et al. (2019) who call for research on the interaction between workers' characteristics and customer verbal aggression. Regarding workers' characteristics, research on customer contact jobs (e.g., retail workers) has traditionally focused on gender (e.g., Hochschild, 2012). Shifting attention to ethnic minority status is important because
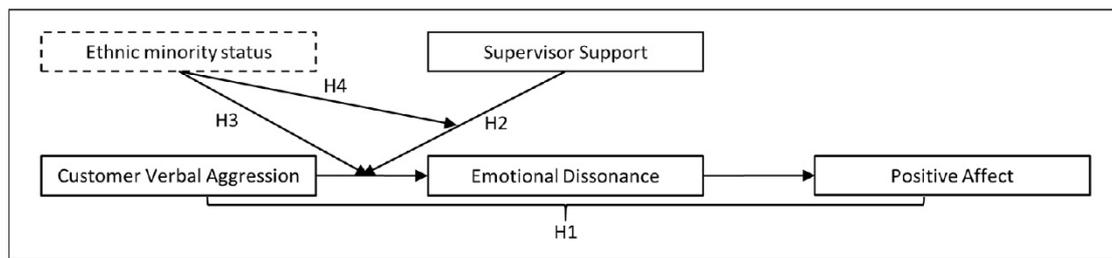
Figure I. Conceptual Model Including Hypotheses (H). Ethnic Minority Status (Framed by Dashed Lines) is the Dichotomous Grouping Variable of the Multi-Group Model.

ethnic minority workers are strongly represented or even overrepresented in these jobs (OECD, 2021). When customers become verbally aggressive, they might make racist or discriminatory remarks (Sliter and Jones, 2016). Such remarks are likely to pose an additional threat to ethnic minority workers' identity and thus have stronger negative effects on their wellbeing (Ellemers et al., 2002; Williams et al., 2019). Hence, we explore whether ethnic minority status affects the mediation of customer verbal aggression on workers' wellbeing via emotional dissonance.

Finally, this study examines the combination of both boundary conditions – supervisor support and ethnic minority status. Several studies on ethnic minority workers in various countries and across occupations have shown that supervisor support has more pronounced effects on the wellbeing of ethnic minority workers (Hoppe, 2011a; Hoppe et al., 2010, 2017). However, none of these studies examined supervisor support in relation to customer verbal aggression, and two out of the three studies applied a cross-sectional design with only one point of measurement (Hoppe, 2011a; Hoppe et al., 2010).

The present study makes two contributions. First, we expand research on customer verbal aggression by including supervisor support as a moderator. Empirically, only one study in the systematic review by Sommovigo et al. (2019) showed that supervisor support buffered the relationship between customer incivility (a more subliminal customer-related social stressor than customer verbal aggression; Cortina et al., 2001) and burnout symptoms among restaurant frontline service workers (Han et al., 2016). More generally, there is evidence that supervisor support has a substantial impact on workers' wellbeing and is capable of reducing stressor-strain relationships (cf. Beehr et al., 2010; Mathieu et al., 2019). At the same time, the severe consequences of customer verbal aggression (Sommovigo et al., 2019) underline the necessity of examining the potential buffering effects of social resources on customer verbal aggression. Thus, we examine the buffering effect of supervisor support on the relation between customer verbal aggression and emotional dissonance and, in turn, positive affect, which is a state that combines pleasurable emotions such as enthusiasm, calmness, or joy (Diener et al., 2010). As all these constructs have an emotion-laden nature, we can expect strong relationships based on the triple-match principle (de Jonge and Dormann, 2006).

Second, we contribute to the discussion of whether social stressors and resources affect the wellbeing of ethnic minority and ethnic majority workers differentially. By comparing the interaction of supervisor support and customer verbal aggression between ethnic minority and ethnic majority workers within a single organization among workers in similar jobs (see Figure 1), our study minimizes confounding factors related to the occupation

or organization. Hence, a unique sample of retail workers participated in this two-measurement point study. A high participation rate of 86% ensured a sufficient sample size, allowing us to test for differences between ethnic minority and ethnic majority workers.

Customer verbal aggression toward retail workers

Customer verbal aggressions are defined as "direct verbal aggressions and criticism by customers" (Dudenhöffer and Dormann, 2015: 166) with a clear intention to harm workers (Dormann and Zapf, 2004). Customers may engage in verbal aggression and other customer-related social stressors for various reasons (Sliter and Jones, 2016; Sommovigo et al., 2019). For instance, customers may vent their frustration due to dissatisfaction with the service (e.g., not finding a sought-for item) or external causes (e.g., personal life events). Customers may also make use of verbal aggression to obtain some kind of tangible recompense (e.g., a discount; Sliter and Jones, 2016; see also Sommovigo et al., 2019). Customers may expect such rewards rather than risks (e.g., the risk of being accompanied away by security) as a result of their verbal aggression (Grandey et al., 2007) because they have internalized the concept of customer sovereignty, which is symbolized by phrases such as "the customer is king" (Yagil, 2017).

Related to customer sovereignty, several characteristics of the retail but also the service sector facilitate customer verbal aggression. According to Skarlicki et al. (2008), customers interact with workers episodically and can decide to never see the workers again (see also Ben-Zur and Yagil, 2005). As these episodic interactions primarily aim at fulfilling customers' short-term needs, they involve less trust and a potential for more deceptive acts (Duck, 1998; Skarlicki et al., 2008). Moreover, customers feel anonymous and have no obligations or particular norms that force them to be kind (Ben-Zur and Yagil, 2005; Grandey et al., 2007; Korczynski and Evans, 2013). While some customers may become aggressive because they perceive themselves as being sovereign, others may do so because they realize that they are less sovereign than expected and "just another case to be processed" (Bolton and Houlihan, 2005; Korczynski and Evans, 2013).

In line with the ideology of customer sovereignty, organizations focus on customer satisfaction, creating a power imbalance between customers and workers (Rafaeli et al., 2012; Sommovigo et al., 2019) and reducing the likelihood that organizations intervene in the event of customer verbal aggression (Sommovigo et al., 2020). Instead, organizations install display rules explicitly or implicitly (i.e., as part of the job description) to retain customers and stay competitive (Grandey, 2000; Grandey et al., 2015; Grandey and Gabriel, 2015; Hochschild, 2012). These display rules prevent workers' natural reactions to customer verbal aggression (e.g., leaving the shop floor; Yagil, 2017) as they instruct workers on which emotions to show and when and how to show them (e.g., "service with a smile"; Diefendorff and Gosserand, 2003; Ekman, 2006).

The effect of customer verbal aggression on workers' positive affect via emotional dissonance

According to control theory (Diefendorff and Gosserand, 2003), retail workers view display rules as performance goals they have to meet to evoke positive emotions in

customers and stimulate consumption. However, customer verbal aggression may arouse negative feelings which undermine the achievement of these goals. Thus, customer verbal aggression is likely to result in emotional dissonance in retail workers. To overcome large discrepancies between their emotional state and the positive emotions they are expected to express, retail workers have to apply more deliberate and effortful techniques than usual (e.g., by monitoring their emotional expression more closely). If workers conform with the display rules but still feel differently, they experience emotional dissonance (Diefendorff and Gosserand, 2003). Emotional dissonance, in turn, consumes psychological resources and puts workers in a state of tension (Grandey et al., 2012; Hülsheger and Schewe, 2011; Kenworthy et al., 2014). Thus, emotional dissonance is likely to reduce positive affect.

Six out of the 33 studies on customer verbal aggression included in the systematic review by Sommovigo et al. (2019) examined emotional dissonance as a mediator of the relationship between customer verbal aggression and a variety of outcomes. They found strong support for emotional dissonance as a mediator between customer verbal aggression and various wellbeing outcomes, such as affective discomfort (Molino et al., 2016), reduced job satisfaction (Dudenhöffer and Dormann, 2015), and emotional exhaustion (Dormann and Zapf, 2004; Sommovigo et al., 2019). Accordingly, we expect the following mediation also among our sample of retail workers:

> *Hypothesis 1*: Emotional dissonance mediates the negative relationship between customer verbal aggression and positive affect.

Supervisor support as a moderator

House (1981) defines supervisor support as care and support workers perceive and experience from their supervisors such as listening to personal problems or providing hands-on help with handling of work tasks. According to the conservation of social resources theory, social support (e.g., by supervisors) helps workers to respond to stress and expands their resource reservoirs beyond resources they already possess (e.g., based on traits; Hobfoll et al., 1990). A principle of the conservation of social resources theory is that resource gains become more salient in the context of a resource loss (Hobfoll et al., 1990), implying that they have a buffering effect. A recent meta-analysis provided evidence for the buffering effects of supervisor support, in particular in jobs that require emotional labor (Mathieu et al., 2019). Thus, following the conservation of social resources theory, supervisor support is a major resource which may buffer a resource loss initiated by customer verbal aggression.

Supervisor support might compensate a resource loss triggered by customer verbal aggression. By showing care for workers, supervisors may support workers emotionally, which enhances their self-esteem (Thoits, 2011) and, in turn, enables them to deal more easily with negative events, such as customer verbal aggression (Brown, 2010). Moreover, supervisors might tell customers who engage in verbal aggression to leave the shop. By reacting authentically to customer verbal aggression, supervisors might validate workers' feelings and reduce emotional dissonance (see also Brotheridge and Lee, 2002). Supervisors could also instruct workers when to set boundaries and not to

conform with display rules. They may also plan for more-experienced workers to support less-experienced workers in shifts with aggressive customers or give them access to conflict-management courses. Thus, supervisor support might address customer verbal aggression directly and through expanded resource reservoirs.

In summary, supervisor support is likely to reduce the positive relationship between customer verbal aggression and emotional dissonance and thus reduce the negative indirect relationship to positive affect. For example, supervisor support was found to mitigate the relationship between customer incivility and burnout among restaurant service workers (Han et al., 2016). Similarly, Shih et al. (2014) showed that organizational support buffers the relationship between customer-related social stressors and emotional dissonance. Therefore, we hypothesize the following moderated mediation:

> *Hypothesis 2*: Supervisor support moderates the indirect effect of customer verbal aggression on positive affect through emotional dissonance by buffering the positive relationship between customer verbal aggression and emotional dissonance.

Differential effects of customer verbal aggression and supervisor support

According to the stereotype content model (Fiske, 2012), society judges low-status groups, such as ethnic minority members, as less competent than high-status groups (Froehlich and Schulte, 2019). Related to these stereotypes, people develop meta-stereotypes, which are beliefs on the stereotypes that outgroup members hold about their own group (Vorauer et al., 1998). These cognitions may result in emotional reactions (e.g., anxiety) or behaviors (e.g., avoidance of outgroup members). Meta-stereotypes are activated in situations that involve evaluation (e.g., on the job) and outgroup contact (Gómez, 2002). Ethnic minority workers in retail might be in such situations as they work in an environment where they are often surrounded by ethnic majority members (e.g., customers and coworkers). In these situations, customer verbal aggression may not only trigger negative emotions (e.g., Dudenhöffer and Dormann, 2013; Sommovigo et al., 2019) but also activate negative meta-stereotypes. Thus, ethnic minority workers have more reason to adapt their emotional expression, implying that customer verbal aggression has a more pronounced effect on emotional dissonance among these workers.

At the same time, customers may include discriminating content in verbal aggression based on these stereotypes. A qualitative study showed that racial or sexist biases were among the main reasons why customers engaged in customer incivility (a subliminal form of discrimination; Cortina et al., 2013; Sliter and Jones, 2016). In another qualitative study with South Asian shopkeepers in Glasgow, 64% of shopkeepers reported racist encounters – primarily of a verbal nature (Ishaq et al., 2010). Other studies did not support these findings. For example, Kern and Grandey (2009) did not find higher levels of customer incivility in ethnic minority workers. However, they showed that the centrality of ethnic minority workers' ethnic identity strengthened the relationship between customer incivility and emotional exhaustion (Kern and Grandey, 2009). This finding is in line with the group identity lens model, which suggests that people with a strong ethnic group identity are more likely to perceive ambiguous social situations as a threat to their racial identity (Major et al., 2003).

Taken together, stereotypes present in society may inform meta-stereotypes in ethnic minority workers and discrimination from customers. Consequently, customer verbal aggression might go beyond triggering negative emotions in ethnic minority workers, which might strengthen the relationship between customer verbal aggression and emotional dissonance among them (i.e., ethnic minority workers may have a stronger need to adapt emotional expressions in response to customer verbal aggression; Diefendorff and Gosserand, 2003). Therefore, we hypothesize:

> *Hypothesis 3*: The relationship between customer verbal aggression and positive affect through emotional dissonance is stronger among ethnic minority workers than ethnic majority workers.

Ethnic minority workers face several obstacles and discrimination in their daily life (Choi et al., 2017; e.g., Goreis et al., 2020). Especially migrating from one country to another involves a loss of resources (e.g., Henry et al., 2005; Li et al., 2014), which is often passed on to immigrants' children (i.e., the second generation; Hartmann, 2016). In line with the conservation of social resources theory, social support may buffer the effects of these obstacles and discrimination (e.g., Goreis et al., 2020) and serve as a key resource for ethnic minority members (Mirsky et al., 2002). Two studies empirically demonstrated stronger positive effects of supervisor support on wellbeing in ethnic minority workers compared to ethnic majority workers (Hoppe, 2011a; Hoppe et al., 2010). In these studies, which were conducted on warehouse workers in the United States (Hoppe et al., 2010) and postal workers in Germany (Hoppe, 2011a), supervisor support had stronger buffering effects on the stressor-strain relationships of ethnic minority workers than those of ethnic majority workers. However, these stronger buffering effects of supervisor support were found for general stressor-strain relationships in cross-sectional studies.

Regarding the specific indirect relationship between customer verbal aggression and positive affect via emotional dissonance, supervisor support may be a resource passageway for ethnic minority workers, as their supervisors may support them in interpreting the content of customer verbal aggression and dealing with customer verbal aggression. Supervisors might also provide ethnic minority workers with supportive social relationships with others. For instance, they may promote a common group identity, so workers also receive support from coworkers (Kunst et al., 2015). Building on these theoretical delineations and previous empirical studies, we hypothesize:

> *Hypothesis 4*: The moderating effect of supervisor support is stronger for ethnic minority workers than ethnic majority workers; that is, supervisor support buffers the positive effect of customer verbal aggression on emotional dissonance and thereby its indirect effect on positive affect more strongly among ethnic minority workers.

Method

Research context

We collected data in a retail chain in a major city in Germany. The retail chain provided various products, such as food items, office supplies, and hygiene products. Before data

collection, we observed the typical workflow and interviewed workers about their daily work in two stores.[1] We observed that workers executed standardized tasks such as performing store maintenance, stocking shelves, replenishing the warehouse, decorating the store, providing customer service, and operating the cash register. Workers interacted with customers either when workers operated the cash register or when customers approached workers who were working on other tasks. In this case, customers would, for example, ask for the location of a sought-for item, complain about problems with purchased items, or ask for information about discount campaigns. The supervisors or their deputies allocated these tasks to workers in each shift. The supervisors also communicated orders from management and planned shifts. The store's staff worked in a team which had little contact with other stores. Compared to workers in other customer contact jobs in Germany, retail workers and their supervisors are less likely to have a higher education or on-the-job training (Schäfer and Schmidt, 2016).

Similar to the overall share of ethnic minority workers in the German workforce, approximately 20% of retail workers belonged to an ethnic minority in 2015 (Schäfer and Schmidt, 2016; Statistisches Bundesamt, 2018). Regarding ethnic minority status, two aspects are crucial for this study. First, ethnic minority members in Germany have diverse ethnic backgrounds due to waves of immigration from various countries (e.g., from the former USSR in the 1990s or from Mediterranean countries and Turkey in the 1960s). These backgrounds are apparent to customers and other workers due to the workers' names, language skills, or outer appearance. Second, children of immigrants face similar prejudices and socioeconomic problems as their parents (Hartmann, 2016); this can be explained by taking a closer look at the immigration wave of the 1960s. Assuming that immigrants would ultimately return home, the government introduced guest-worker programs that attracted people to work in Germany but made little effort to integrate them and their families (Hansen, 2003). Thus, ethnic minority workers are from various ethnic backgrounds and immigrants of both the first and second generations.

Procedure

We collected data by distributing paper-pencil surveys at two measurement points with a time lag of 1 month (September and October 2017). The inclusion of two measurement points allowed us to use positive affect from T2 to reduce strong associations among the study variables resulting from extraordinary events or a temporary mood on 1 day (Podsakoff et al., 2003). By conducting the study before the holiday season, we ensured that the workers in our sample had a stable workload.

We distributed the surveys in person during team meetings or on regular workdays and provided linguistic support if necessary. Workers who missed a meeting returned the surveys by mailing them to us or putting them in a ballot box, which we picked up 2 weeks later. Survey completion took approximately 20 minutes.

Management credited the time for completing the survey to the workers' time accounts to encourage participation. Additionally, we offered small edible gifts. In exchange for the organization's willingness to host the study, we wrote a report on workers' work-related wellbeing for management. The workers gave their informed consent to participation and

publication. For that purpose, we debriefed all workers about the study and informed them about their rights to withdraw from it afterward. The works council of the retail chain and an academic ethical committee approved the study.

Participation rate, dropout analysis, and missing values

We invited 704 workers to participate in our study. A share of 86% participated in at least one of the measurement points.[2] Of these 606 respondents, 428 (71%) provided data at T1 and T2; 135 (22%) provided data only at T1, and 43 (7%) provided data only at T2. Thus, 43 workers had missing data for customer verbal aggression, emotional dissonance, and supervisor support measured at T1, and 135 workers had missing data for positive affect measured at T2. Our dropout analysis showed only one significant difference. The workers who completed the survey at both measurement points ($M=3.3$, $SD=0.7$) reported more supervisor support at T1 than the workers who dropped out after T1 ($M=3.1$, $SD=0.7$; $t(215.2)=-2.05$, $p=.042$).

To account for missing data in our analysis, we used a full information maximum likelihood estimator. Three workers did not provide enough information for this estimation; therefore, the final sample included 603 workers.

Sample

The participants worked in 50 teams of a retail chain in a major German city. The sample consisted of 91% women. Most participants were younger than 41 years (56%). The average team tenure was 5 years ($SD=4.9$). Workers worked part-time (63%), full-time (28%), or on a mini job (9%); part-time workers worked on average 24.5 hours per week ($SD=4.5$).

We categorized our participants as ethnic minority and ethnic majority workers by asking them about the birthplaces of their parents. If one or both parents were born outside of Germany, we categorized the worker as an ethnic minority worker. If both parents were born in Germany, we assigned the worker to the ethnic majority group (see Constant et al., 2012). If the birthplace of one ($n=7$) or both parents ($n=15$) was missing, we had the opportunity to determine the worker's ethnic background using administrative data provided by management. Thus, we did not have to exclude these people or rely on less informed techniques.[3] According to these procedures, 16% of the workers were categorized as ethnic minority workers. These 95 ethnic minority workers had 21 different ethnic backgrounds. More specifically, 24% had Russian, 21% Turkish, 16% Polish, 11% Kazakh, 4% Lebanese, 3% Bulgarian, and 3% Hungarian backgrounds. Half of the ethnic minority workers were born in Germany (i.e., second-generation migrants; 52%).

A comparison of the ethnic minority and ethnic majority workers regarding work-related and sociodemographic variables showed that ethnic minority workers were less likely to have completed on-the-job training ($X^2(1, 587)=26.16$, $p<0.001$). Related to this, ethnic minority workers more often held positions with lower responsibility ($Z=-3.48$, $p<0.001$) and had contracts with fewer working hours (e.g., part-time or mini job; $X^2(2, 582)=6.67$, $p=0.036$).[4]

Measures

The surveys were in German which was the working language. We measured customer verbal aggression with the corresponding subscale of the customer-related social stressor scale (Dormann and Zapf, 2004) with an adapted version (Hoppe, 2011a). The participants rated three items (e.g., "Customers shout at me.") on a Likert scale ranging from *not at all true* (0) to *absolutely true* (4).

We measured emotional dissonance with a corresponding subscale of the Frankfurt emotion work scales (Zapf et al., 2000) with an adapted version (Hoppe, 2011a). The participants responded to two questions (e.g., "How often do you have to suppress your own feelings (e.g., anger, dislike) during work?") on a Likert scale ranging from *never* (0) to *many times* (4).

We measured supervisor support with the supervisor subscale of the German social support scales (Frese, 1989) with an adapted version (Hoppe, 2011a), which included questions on emotional supervisor support (i.e., listening to and showing concern for workers) and instrumental supervisor support (i.e., providing hands-on help with problems at work; House, 1981). The participants responded to three questions (e.g., "Is your supervisor willing to listen to your problems at work?") on a Likert scale ranging from *not at all* (0) to *absolutely* (3).

We measured positive affect with the positive affect scale by Diener et al. (2010) which we translated and re-translated. We also adapted the scale to the work context by specifying "at work" in the items. The participants responded to six questions (e.g., "In the last 4 weeks, how often has your mood been positive at work?") on a Likert scale ranging from *never* (0) to *many times* (4).

Statistical analysis

Path modeling. We tested our hypotheses by two path models using the *lavaan* package (Rosseel, 2012) in *R*Studio; one was a single-group path model (Hypotheses 1–2), and the other one was a multi-group path model in which we specified and estimated the hypothesized model simultaneously for ethnic minority and ethnic majority workers (Hypotheses 3–4; see also Figure 1). All models included paths between customer verbal aggression and emotional dissonance (a_1-path), emotional dissonance and positive affect (b-path), customer verbal aggression and positive affect (c'_1-path),[5] and between the customer verbal aggression-by-supervisor support interaction and emotional dissonance (a_3-path) and positive affect (c'_3-path), respectively. In the multi-group path model, we restricted the residual variance of the mediator and outcome to be equal between ethnic minority and ethnic majority workers (Ryu and Cheong, 2017); we allowed all paths to vary between ethnic minority and ethnic majority workers, except the b-path.[6]

All predictors were centered at the grand mean, which was based on the mean of the respective group in the multi-group model. As the ethnic minority sample was small ($n = 95$), we applied a Yuan-Bentler estimator (Bentler and Yuan, 1999). Both the single-group path model ($X^2 (2) = 8.58$, $p < 0.05$, CFI = 0.98, RMSEA = 0.074 [0.028, 0.128], SRMR = 0.032) and the multi-group path model fitted the data well ($X^2 (7) = 16.64$, $p < 0.05$, CFI = 0.97, RMSEA = 0.068 [0.025, 0.110], SRMR = 0.046).[7]

Testing mediation and moderation. To test mediations, we first inspected the path coefficients of the *a*- and *b*-paths and then the indirect effect. As recommended for evaluating indirect effects (Preacher and Selig, 2012), we derived asymmetric Monte Carlo confidence intervals (MC-CIs) from the products of the coefficients using the *semTools* package (Jorgensen et al., 2021).

To test the moderation effects of supervisor support, we inspected the a_3-paths. To test the moderation effects of ethnic minority status, we built a multi-group model and compared the single paths and indirect effects between ethnic minority and ethnic majority workers. To compare single paths, we compared the original model to a model in which the respective paths were constrained to equality between both groups (i.e., likelihood ratio test; Ryu and Cheong, 2017). To compare indirect effects, we derived MC-CIs from differences between both product coefficients ($a_{ethnic\ minority}*b - a_{ethnic\ majority}*b$), as recommended by Ryu and Cheong (2017) for analyzing moderated mediations with dichotomous moderators.

Probing. If a moderation effect was significant, we probed its interaction (Hayes, 2018; Preacher et al., 2007). To probe the moderation effect of supervisor support on an *a*-path, we calculated and plotted simple slopes for low ($-1\ SD$) and high levels of supervisor support ($+1\ SD$; Preacher et al., 2006). To probe the moderation effect of supervisor support on the indirect effect, we calculated indirect effects for low ($-1\ SD$) and high levels of supervisor support ($+1\ SD$). To probe the moderation effect of ethnic minority status, we inspected the coefficients of the *a*-paths and the MC-CIs of the indirect effects in each group, which is easier to do in multi-group models than in single-group models with a dichotomous moderator (Ryu and Cheong, 2017).

Results

Table 1 provides the descriptive statistics and intercorrelations of the study variables for ethnic minority and ethnic majority workers separately.

Mediation and moderated mediation

Hypothesis 1 suggested that emotional dissonance mediates the negative relationship between customer verbal aggression and work-related positive affect. As shown in Table 2, customer verbal aggression was significantly related to emotional dissonance which, in turn, was significantly related to positive affect. The product of the coefficients indicated a significant negative indirect effect of customer verbal aggression on positive affect through emotional dissonance ($B = -0.12$, 95% MC-CI [$-0.161, -0.079$]), thus supporting Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2 suggested that supervisor support buffers the relationship between customer verbal aggression and emotional dissonance and thereby the indirect effect of customer verbal aggression on positive affect. Supervisor support did not significantly moderate the relationship between customer verbal aggression and emotional dissonance (see Table 2). Consequently, supervisor support did not significantly moderate the indirect relationship between customer verbal aggression and positive affect through

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations for Ethnic Minority (above the diagonal) and Ethnic Majority Workers (below the diagonal).

Variable	Ethnic minority workers					Ethnic majority workers					1	2	3	4
	M	SD	α	Sk.	K	M	SD	α	Sk.	K				
1. Customer verbal aggression	2.1	0.9	0.77	1.0	1.1	2.1	0.8	0.87	1.1	1.4	—	0.41***	0.06	0.06
2. Emotional dissonance	2.8	1.2	0.86	0.3	−0.8	2.9	1.1	0.85	0.1	−0.7	0.31***	—	−0.36**	−.17
3. Positive affect	3.7	0.8	0.93	−0.6	−0.2	3.7	0.8	0.93	−0.4	−0.1	−0.17**	−0.51***	—	0.08
4. Supervisor support	3.3	0.7	0.86	−0.7	−0.4	3.2	0.7	0.89	−0.8	0.1	−0.11*	−0.37***	0.41***	—

Note. For further processing, we added 1 to each variable. The table shows Pearson correlation coefficients.
Sk. = skewness; K = kurtosis
*$p < 0.05$. **$p < 0.01$. ***$p < 0.001$.

Table 2. Unstandardized Regression Coefficients (*B*) and Standard Errors (*SE*) of the Path Model and the Multi-Group Path Model.

Variable	Emotional dissonance			Positive affect		
	B	*SE*	*p*	*B*	*SE*	*p*
Full sample						
Constant	2.89	0.04	<0.001	4.54	0.10	<0.001
Customer verbal aggression	0.41	0.05	<0.001	0.03	0.04	0.425
Supervisor support	−0.48	0.06	<0.001	0.22	0.05	<0.001
Customer verbal aggression × supervisor support	0.10	0.07	0.150	0.07	0.05	0.123
Emotional dissonance				−0.29	0.03	<0.001
R^2		0.20			0.28	
Ethnic minority workers						
Constant	2.80	0.11	<0.001	4.50	0.12	<0.001
Customer verbal aggression	0.52	0.14	<0.001	0.25	0.09	0.006
Supervisor support	−0.28	0.17	0.096	0.06	0.18	0.730
Customer verbal aggression × supervisor support	0.58	0.25	0.019	0.08	0.19	0.683
Emotional dissonance				−0.30	0.03	<0.001
R^2		0.28			0.20	
Ethnic majority workers						
Constant	2.90	0.05	<0.001	4.57	0.10	<0.001
Customer verbal aggression	0.37	0.06	<0.001	0.00	0.04	0.992
Supervisor support	−0.51	0.06	<0.001	0.23	0.05	<0.001
Customer verbal aggression × supervisor support	0.04	0.07	0.625	0.06	0.05	0.246
Emotional dissonance				−0.30	0.03	<0.001
R^2		0.19			0.30	

emotional dissonance either ($B=-0.03$, 95% MC-CI [-0.068, 0.010]), thus not supporting Hypothesis 2.

Differences between ethnic minority and ethnic majority workers

Differences regarding the mediation. Hypothesis 3 suggested that the relationship between customer verbal aggression and positive affect through emotional dissonance would be stronger in ethnic minority workers than ethnic majority workers. In both ethnic minority and ethnic majority workers, we found positive significant associations between customer verbal aggression and emotional dissonance and negative significant associations between emotional dissonance and positive affect (see Table 2).

The likelihood ratio test comparing the original multi-group path model to the multi-group model in which the a_1-paths were constrained to equality between ethnic minority and ethnic majority workers was not significant ($\Delta X^2 = 0.909$, $\Delta df = 1$, $p = 0.340$). Similarly, the MC-CIs of the difference between the product coefficients included zero ($B = -0.05$, 95% MC-CI (-0.135, 0.043)). Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was not supported.
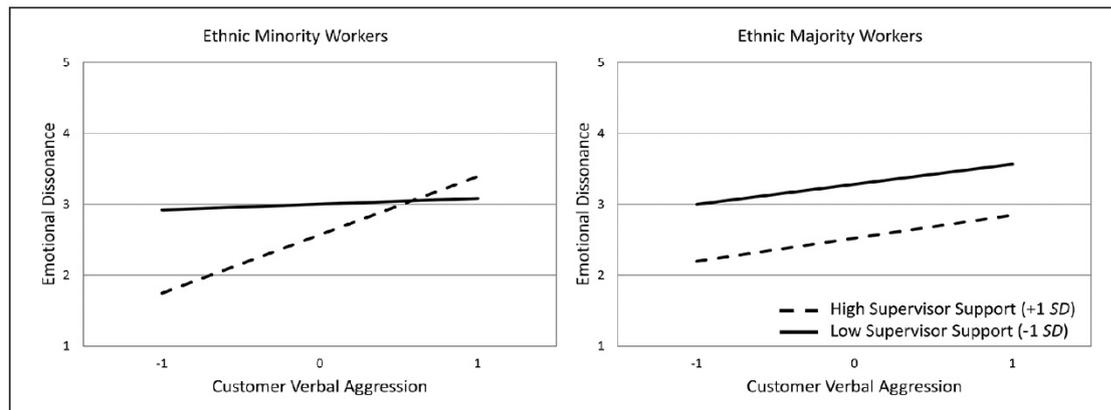
Figure 2. Interactions Between Customer Verbal Aggression and Supervisor Support Regarding Emotional Dissonance for Ethnic Minority and Ethnic Majority Workers. High Levels of Supervisor Support (+1 *SD*) Are in Dashed Lines and Low Levels of Supervisor Support (−1 *SD*) Are in Solid Lines.

Differences regarding the moderation and the moderated mediation. Hypothesis 4 suggested that the buffering effect of supervisor support on the indirect effect of customer verbal aggression on positive affect via emotional dissonance would be stronger for ethnic minority workers than for ethnic majority workers. As shown in Table 2, the customer verbal aggression-by-supervisor support interaction related significantly to emotional dissonance among ethnic minority workers only. Supervisor support taken alone was not significantly associated with emotional dissonance and positive affect among ethnic minority workers, but was among ethnic majority workers.

First, we tested the extent to which the relationship between the customer verbal aggression-by-supervisor support interaction and emotional dissonance varied between ethnic minority and majority workers (i.e., the *moderated moderation*). A likelihood ratio test in which we compared the original multi-group path model to a multi-group path model with a_3-paths restricted to be equal across groups showed a significant moderation effect of ethnic minority status on the interaction ($\Delta X^2 = 7.454$, $\Delta df = 1$, $p < 0.01$). The relationship between the customer verbal aggression-by-supervisor support interaction and emotional dissonance was significant among ethnic minority workers only. As shown in Figure 2, probing this significant interaction revealed a strong positive relationship between customer verbal aggression and emotional dissonance among *ethnic minority workers with high levels of supervisor support* ($B = 0.94$, $SE = 0.16$, $p < 0.001$). However, this relationship was not significant among *ethnic minority workers with low levels of supervisor support* ($B = 0.10$, $SE = 0.30$, $p = 0.747$).

Second, we tested the extent to which the indirect effect of customer verbal aggression-by-supervisor support interaction on positive affect varied between ethnic minority and ethnic majority workers (i.e. *moderated moderated mediation*). The MC-CIs derived from the difference between ethnic minority and ethnic majority workers' product coefficients indicated a significant moderated moderated mediation ($B = -0.16$, 95% MC-CI [−0.324, −0.011]). The indirect effect of customer verbal aggression-by-supervisor support on positive affect via emotional dissonance was significant only among ethnic

minority workers ($B=-0.17$, 95% MC-CI [-0.328, -0.027]). We probed the moderated moderation of this indirect effect. Among *ethnic minority workers with high levels of supervisor support*, we found a significant negative indirect effect ($B=-0.28$, 95% MC-CI [-0.401, -0.172]) and a significant positive direct effect ($B=0.31$, 95% MC-CI [0.041, 0.573]). However, among *ethnic minority workers with low levels of supervisor support*, neither the indirect effect ($B=-0.03$, 95% MC-CI [-0.193, 0.155]) nor the direct effect was significant ($B=0.20$, 95% MC-CI [-0.194, 0.570]).

Taken together, the moderated mediation was stronger among ethnic minority workers than ethnic majority workers. However, supervisor support strengthened the indirect effect. Thus, Hypothesis 4 was not supported.

Discussion

This study addressed two gaps in the literature on customer-related social stressors: The moderating role of supervisor support as a core social resource among retail workers and ethnic minority status as a central worker characteristic. We combined both boundary conditions and examined whether the buffering effect of supervisor support on the indirect relationship between customer verbal aggression and positive affect via emotional dissonance varied between ethnic minority and ethnic majority workers. Against expectations, taken alone, neither supervisor support nor ethnic minority status moderates the indirect effect (see also Kern and Grandey, 2009). However, the combination of both shows a moderation effect of supervisor support only in ethnic minority workers. Surprisingly, supervisor support *strengthens* the mediation effect among ethnic minority workers; the negative indirect effect of customer verbal aggression on positive affect is significant among ethnic minority workers with high levels of supervisor support. Thus, the paper points to the need of considering boundary conditions of the well-established relationship between customer verbal aggression and wellbeing outcomes such as positive affect.

The non-significant buffering effect of supervisor support

Our findings indicate that supervisor support does not moderate the relationship between customer verbal aggression and emotional dissonance. In contrast, other studies on relationships between customer-related social stressors and workers' wellbeing have indeed shown that supervisor and organizational support have buffering effects (Han et al., 2016; Shih et al., 2014).

As organizational support had stronger buffering effects in previous studies (Han et al., 2016), a potential explanation for our results may be the source of social support examined in the present study. Supervisor support *alone* may not be sufficient to mitigate the effect of customer verbal aggression on emotional dissonance. Similar to service organizations, management in retail makes most decisions regarding customer sovereignty and display rules (Yagil, 2017), which affect the emergence of emotional dissonance (Diefendorff and Gosserand, 2003). Similarly, Shanock and Eisenberger (2006) showed that the extent to which retail workers perceive supervisor support depends on how supportive their supervisors perceive the organization to be. This suggests that supervisors may not have enough power to intervene in the event of customer

verbal aggression because they cannot change the display rules made by management and might have to comply with these display rules themselves. Thus, organizational regulations and resources may more effectively support workers against customer verbal aggression than the direct supervisor. Alternatively, organizational support may enable supervisor support to mitigate the relationship between customer verbal aggression and emotional dissonance.

Potentially, coworkers can provide more effective support in mitigating the effects of customer verbal aggression because they are more likely to be present during customer verbal aggression. We chose supervisors as a source of support because we assumed them to have more control than coworkers (Thoits, 2011). Indeed, a meta-analysis showed supervisor support to be more strongly related to wellbeing outcomes than coworker support; however, this meta-analysis did not compare and contrast the buffering effects of supervisor support to coworker support (Mathieu et al., 2019). As we did not find a buffering effect of supervisor support on the relationship between customer verbal aggression and emotional dissonance, future studies might test the buffering effects of various sources of social support on this relationship.

Another explanation may be the measure of supervisor support used in our study, which consists of two items on available emotional support and one item on received instrumental support. Thus, it measured both types of social support—emotional and instrumental social support—and both scale types of social support—available and received social support. Despite this mixture of types and scale types of supervisor support, we chose this measure for the following reasons. First, our measure is a widely used and well-validated instrument for measuring supervisor support (Frese, 1989; for a validation with an ethnically diverse sample, see Hoppe, 2011b), as reflected by the Cronbach's α and confirmatory factor analysis (see Appendix) in our study. Second, a meta-analysis has shown emotional and instrumental support to be strongly correlated and most effective when combined (Mathieu et al., 2019). This is supported by a qualitative study demonstrating that instrumental support always has an emotional component (Semmer et al., 2008). Third, available social support, which was measured by two out of three items in our study, was shown to be more strongly related to wellbeing outcomes (Mathieu et al., 2019). However, future research might use other measures to investigate whether the buffering effects of different types and scale types of supervisor support vary.

A final explanation concerns the relationship between customer verbal aggression and emotional dissonance. It is possible that retail workers almost automatically adapt their emotional expression when they face customer verbal aggression (Diefendorff and Gosserand, 2003), so supervisors may rarely be able to intervene. Thus, instead, supervisors could support workers in dealing with emotional dissonance and buffer the effect *of* emotional dissonance on positive affect. For example, they could give workers space to share and reflect upon their experiences. Similarly, studies have found supervisor support to be helpful in mitigating the effects of emotional dissonance (Abraham, 1998) and cognitive sharing of customer incivility to reduce negative affect after work (Tremmel and Sonnentag, 2018).

In a nutshell, our results suggest several starting points for future research. First, future research should compare and contrast various sources of social support regarding their effectiveness as a buffer and their relationship with each other (e.g., does supervisor

support require organizational support to be effective?). Second, future research should examine the buffering effects of different types of available and received social support. Third, investigating the moderator effects of social support on other paths of the mediation (e.g., between emotional dissonance and positive affect) might contribute to our understanding of how social support works as a buffer.

The perspective of ethnic minority workers

In contrast to our expectation, the strength of the indirect relationship between customer verbal aggression and positive affect does not vary between ethnic minority workers and ethnic majority workers. This finding is consistent with Kern and Grandey (2009), but inconsistent with Hoppe (2011a).

There are two possible explanations for why the strength of the indirect relationships between customer verbal aggression and positive affect is similar for ethnic minority and ethnic majority workers. First, ethnic minority workers may get used to *de-facto* discrimination at work because they are repeatedly subjected to discrimination in social domains (Thau et al., 2008). Second, the social status of an occupation may be more important than ethnic minority status in customer interactions. In the work context, social status is commonly measured by occupational prestige, which is lower than the German average for retail workers (Ebner and Rohrbach-Schmidt, 2019). Occupational prestige predicts health beyond other status indicators (e.g., income), which may be because occupational prestige affects social interactions (Fujishiro et al., 2010). Our data suggest that ethnic minority status does not matter to customers. Instead, customers may perceive all retail workers—independent of the workers' characteristics—as a low-status group whose job is to satisfy their needs. As shown in a field experiment, customers' own status may also affect social interactions (Jerger and Wirtz, 2017). In organizations with a low level of service orientation, workers expressed more anger toward irate customers with a low social status than toward customers with a high social status (Jerger and Wirtz, 2017). Thus, future research should investigate the interplay between retail workers' and customers' social status.

Another unexpected finding is that supervisor support strengthens—instead of buffers—the indirect relationship between customer verbal aggression and emotional dissonance among ethnic minority workers; that is, the more supervisor support provided to ethnic minority workers, the stronger the relationship between customer verbal aggression and positive affect. Moreover, the direct effects of supervisor support on emotional dissonance and positive affect are not significant among ethnic minority workers but are significant among ethnic majority workers. These direct effects show that supervisor support indeed is a resource for ethnic majority workers but does not interact with customer verbal aggression. All of these unexpected findings are inconsistent with studies reporting that ethnic minority workers benefit more from supervisor support than ethnic majority workers (Hoppe, 2011a; Hoppe et al., 2010, 2017). However, they are consistent with public health studies based on large national surveys (e.g., Assari, 2017, 2018, 2019) which have shown that ethnic minority members benefit less from resources (e.g., income, optimism) in terms of health than ethnic majority members.

An explanation for diminished gains from resources, which is consistent with gain and loss spirals in the conservation of social resource theory (Hobfoll et al., 1990), is that initial disadvantages make it more difficult to benefit from a resource (cumulative disadvantages; Assari, 2018; Ceci and Papierno, 2005; Choi et al., 2017). A comparison of the sociodemographic data shows that the ethnic minority workers in our study were less likely to have job training, held lower positions, and worked fewer hours than ethnic majority workers. Due to these job-related disadvantages and other disadvantages outside of work, ethnic minority workers might have less access to resources and influence at work. While we initially argued that supervisor support possibly counteracts these disadvantages (e.g., by providing additional resources), our results suggest that this is not the case. Ethnic minority workers are potentially eager to reciprocate supervisor support because they want to maintain social support to protect resources and their identity (Hobfoll et al., 1990). They might do so through good performance, which implies following display rules (see also Yagil, 2017) and thus strengthens the relationship between customer verbal aggression and emotional dissonance (Beehr et al., 2010). Therefore, future research should explore the meaning and valence of supervisor support among ethnic minority workers in customer contact jobs.

Another explanation for our findings might be that supervisors support ethnic majority workers more actively than ethnic minority workers. This explanation is in line with the current literature on stereotypes and corresponding behaviors toward ethnic minority members in Germany (Froehlich and Schulte, 2019). As this study was not concerned with the content of supervisor support, we leave this subject to future research.

Strengths, limitations, and future research

In addition to the study's high response rate (86% provided data at one measurement point at least), one strength of the study is that occupational and organizational differences do not affect the findings because the sample consists of retail workers holding the same job in the same organization. Possibly, our results would have been different if we had investigated workers holding more prestigious occupations or occupations in which customer interactions are less anonymous and take place repeatedly (e.g., teachers). Similarly, our findings are limited to the German context, which might influence the amount of control retail workers have over their emotional expressions and thus moderate the relationship between faking of emotional expressions and wellbeing (Grandey et al., 2005). Thus, future research on similar questions might show whether our findings are due to the specific occupational and national context of our sample.

Another limitation is that we focused only on ethnic minority status without considering additional workers' characteristics such as social class, gender, or religion. We decided against the inclusion of additional characteristics because we wanted to maintain a clear focus on ethnic minority status. Moreover, we would have faced practical problems if we had included additional characteristics. First, the group of ethnic minority workers was small. Second, our sample was homogeneous regarding social class, because all participants worked as employees in the same job, and gender (91% female; see also Wright, 1980). However, future research would benefit from taking an intersectional perspective and investigating how other characteristics interact with ethnic minority status.

On a similar note, we did not examine the interplay between customers' and workers' characteristics. That is unfortunate as previous research showed that people expect stronger anger expressions from high-status individuals (Tiedens et al., 2000), which could affect workers' perception of customer verbal aggression. In practice, however, assessing customers' characteristics might be difficult, especially when they want to protect their privacy after an aggressive incident. However, conducting field experiments (Jerger and Wirtz, 2017) or including neighborhood demographics (e.g., Koopmans and Veit, 2014) might allow future research to investigate interactions between customers' and workers' characteristics.

An important limitation is that we do not know the content of customer verbal aggression. While we did not ask respondents to describe the content to reduce the complexity of our research questions, future studies may investigate the helpfulness of supervisor support as a buffer for customer verbal aggression using qualitative interviews or mixed methods.

As already mentioned, we focused only on supervisors as a source of social support and did not differentiate between different types and scale types of social support. Hence, future research might compare and contrast support provided by supervisors to other sources of social support. Likewise, researchers interested in whether only certain types and scale types of supervisor support effectively buffer the effects of customer verbal aggression might compare them using more refined measures.

To compare ethnic minority and ethnic majority workers, we applied multi-group path modeling. However, the valuable insights drawn from this approach came with two limitations. First, we could not apply multilevel modeling because ethnic minority status varied within teams and not between teams, which would have been necessary for combining multilevel and multi-group path modeling. Therefore, we could not examine team-level effects or differences between the team and individual levels. For instance, it is possible that supervisors create supportive team climates (Mathieu et al., 2019), which foster positive feelings in team members and thus buffer the adverse effects of customer verbal aggression (Grandey, 2000). To ensure that nesting did not affect our results, we performed a robustness check accounting for the nested nature of the data, which did not indicate any changes in our results (see Footnote 7). Similar hypotheses should be investigated in future multilevel studies on customer verbal aggression (Grandey and Gabriel, 2015). Second, because we compared only two groups (ethnic minority and ethnic majority workers), we were not able to capture differences within the group of ethnic minority workers (Gillborn et al., 2018). However, the sample size and large heterogeneity among countries of origins did not allow differentiation. A final limitation is the cross-sectional nature of the study. Although two measurement points do not allow causality claims, this study gives first insights into relationships between the examined variables, which may inspire future studies with longitudinal designs.

Practical implications

Our findings underline the need for effective measures to reduce the effects of customer verbal aggression. The stronger buffering effects of organizational support reported in a previous study (Han et al., 2016) and the non-significant buffering effect of supervisor support found

in our study suggest that organizations should equip workers with the skills and resources they need to cope with customer verbal aggression and reduce emotional dissonance. For example, retail workers might learn in trainings how to deal with aggressive customers.

Similarly, supervisors might receive training on how to support their subordinates with the effects of customer verbal aggression. Despite lacking buffering effects, supervisor support is a resource for the ethnic majority workers in our study (e.g., due to the positive relationship to positive affect). In contrast, ethnic minority workers do not benefit from supervisor support at all. The differences between ethnic minority and ethnic majority workers in terms of job training, positions, and working hours suggest that equality practices (e.g., installing a task force concerned with equality) might provide workers with the resources they need to benefit from supervisor support. Works councils, as representatives of workers' interests, should be involved in the development and implementation of these equality practices (Ortlieb et al., 2014).

Our findings suggest that practitioners and researchers should develop recommendations saying when workers have to follow display rules and when they do not. Our findings reflect the destructive potential of display rules. However, applying display rules can also be related positively to workers' wellbeing. For example, workers might be proud if they manage a challenging situation using display rules (Cropanzano et al., 2003). Therefore, a critical reflection on display rules may be a first step toward promoting wellbeing among retail workers.

Conclusion

As this study shows, customer verbal aggression and emotional dissonance are severe stressors for retail workers in general. This study examined separate and joint moderation effects of supervisor support and ethnic minority status on the indirect relationship between customer verbal aggression and positive affect via emotional dissonance. Contrary to our expectations, neither supervisor support nor ethnic minority status moderate this relationship on their own. In combination, however, they have an unexpected moderated moderated mediation effect; the negative indirect relationship between customer verbal aggression and positive affect via emotional dissonance is stronger for ethnic minority workers with high levels of supervisor support. Therefore, these findings call for studies to identify and implement resources for ethnic minority workers.

ORCID iD

Franziska J. Kößler 🅓 https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9949-3500

Supplemental material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. In these stores, we also pretested our items in cognitive interviews ($n=7$; Willis, 2004) to ensure that the survey was comprehensible. These stores were excluded from the final data collection.
2. We do not know the reason why all 98 non-responding workers did not respond; 43 of them were sick or on maternity leave, and 12 were on vacation.
3. The administrative data included information about the workers' birthplaces only. Thus, we repeated our analysis without the workers for whom we used the administrative data (4%); this did not alter the results.
4. We did not find significant differences regarding gender, age, children, relationship status, and team tenure.
5. We could not completely rule out other mediators (e.g., rumination; Wang et al., 2013) and found empirical examples that primarily suggested emotional dissonance to be a partial mediator (e.g., Molino et al., 2016; Sommovigo et al., 2019). Thus, following Holland et al. (2017), we specified direct effects (i.e., c'-paths). To test whether these c'-paths were necessary, we compared this model to the same model without c'-paths (i.e., without direct effects of customer verbal aggression, supervisor support, and the interaction term on work-related positive affect). Our comparison showed that the model without the c'-paths fitted the data significantly worse than the model with c'-paths ($\Delta X^2 = 27.6$, $\Delta df = 3$, $p < 0.001$).
6. We constrained the b-path to be equal in ethnic minority and ethnic majority workers because we expected differential effects at the first stage. Allowing intergroup variation did not alter the results substantially.
7. As a robustness check, we repeated both path analyses including the cluster command (i.e., controlling for nonindependence). Our results did not change. Detailed figures are available from the first author.

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Confirmatory factor analysis and measurement invariance

Confirmatory factor analysis for the single-group path model

We compared a single-factor model (X^2 (77) = 2068.02, p <.001, CFI = 0.57,

RMSEA = 0.207 [0.199, 0.215], SRMR = 0.155) to the final four-factor model. The four-

factor model had a satisfactory fit (X^2 (71) = 184.79, p <.001, CFI = 0.98, RMSEA =

0.052 [0.043, 0.061], SRMR = 0.032; Hu and Bentler, 1999), which was better than the fit

of the single-factor model (ΔX^2 = 1000.9, Δdf = 6, p < .001). Its factor loadings are shown

in Table A1.

Table A1

Unstandardized Loadings (B) and Standard Errors (S.E.) for the Four-Factor Model of

the Confirmatory Factor Analysis

	B	S.E.	
Customer verbal aggression			
Customer verbal aggression item 1	1.00	(--)	
Customer verbal aggression item 2	1.20	0.08	***
Customer verbal aggression item 3	0.97	0.07	***
Emotional dissonance			
Emotional dissonance item 1	1.00	(--)	
Emotional dissonance item 2	1.05	0.07	***
Supervisor support			
Supervisor support item 1	1.00	(--)	
Supervisor support item 2	0.91	0.04	***
Supervisor support item 3	0.97	0.04	***
Positive affect			
Positive affect item 1	1.00	(--)	
Positive affect item 2	0.88	0.03	***
Positive affect item 3	0.92	0.04	***
Positive affect item 4	1.13	0.04	***
Positive affect item 5	0.98	0.04	***
Positive affect item 6	0.97	0.04	***

Note. *** p < .001

Confirmatory factor analysis and measurement invariance for the multi-group path model

We repeated this analysis for the multi-group model. As before, the four-factor model (X^2 (142) = 285.75, p <.001, CFI = 0.97, RMSEA = 0.058 0.048, 0.068, SRMR = 0.037, X^2_{diff} = 981.99, p < .001; see also Table A2) than the single-factor model (X^2 (154) = 2177.64, p <.001, CFI = 0.57, RMSEA = 0.209 0.201, 0.217, SRMR = 0.159).

Table A2

Unstandardized Loadings (B) and Standard Errors (S.E.) for the Four-Factor Model

(Baseline Model)

	Ethnic minority workers			Ethnic majority workers		
	B	S.E.		B	S.E.	
Customer verbal aggression						
Customer verbal aggression item 1	1.00	(--)		1.00	(--)	
Customer verbal aggression item 2	1.60	0.53	**	1.13	0.05	***
Customer verbal aggression item 3	0.99	0.31	**	0.96	0.05	***
Emotional dissonance						
Emotional dissonance item 1	1.00	(--)		1.00	(--)	
Emotional dissonance item 2	1.03	0.15	***	1.06	0.07	***
Supervisor support						
Supervisor support item 1	1.00	(--)		1.00	(--)	
Supervisor support item 2	0.95	0.14	***	0.90	0.04	***
Supervisor support item 3	0.99	0.08	***	0.96	0.04	***
Positive affect						
Positive affect item 1	1.00	(--)		1.00	(--)	
Positive affect item 2	0.89	0.07	***	0.87	0.04	***
Positive affect item 3	1.02	0.09	***	0.90	0.04	***
Positive affect item 4	1.14	0.12	***	1.13	0.05	***
Positive affect item 5	1.12	0.07	***	0.96	0.05	***
Positive affect item 6	1.06	0.09	***	0.95	0.05	***

Note. ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Additionally, we tested the invariance of the measurement model. As a first step, we constrained the factor loadings to be equal across groups (weak invariance model). As a second step, we constrained both factor loadings and intercepts to be equal in both

groups (strong invariance model). As shown in Table A3, neither the difference between

the baseline model (the original four-factor model without equality constraints) and the

weak invariance model nor the difference between the weak invariance model and the

strong invariance model were significant, which indicates a strong measurement

invariance.

Table A3

Goodness-of-Fit Indicators and Model Comparison for Testing Measurement Invariance

	X^2	df	X^2_{diff}	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR
Baseline model	285.75	142		0.97	0.058	0.037
Weak invariance	295.15	152	8.15	0.97	0.056	0.039
Strong invariance	306.74	166	11.87	0.97	0.053	0.039

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Appendix B: Paper 2

Kößler, F. J., Fujishiro, K., Veit, S., & Hoppe, A. (2022). Ethnic differences in context: Does emotional conflict mediate the effects of both team- and individual-level ethnic diversity on emotional strain? *Occupational Health Science*, *6*(1), 27–49. https://doi.org/10.1007/s41542-021-00105-5

ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

Ethnic Differences in Context: Does Emotional Conflict Mediate the Effects of Both Team- and Individual-Level Ethnic Diversity on Emotional Strain?

Franziska J. Kößler[1,2] · **Kaori Fujishiro**[3] · **Susanne Veit**[4,5] · **Annekatrin Hoppe**[1]

Abstract

Work teams are becoming increasingly heterogeneous with respect to their team members' ethnic backgrounds. Two lines of research examine ethnic diversity in work teams: The compositional approach views team-level ethnic heterogeneity as a team characteristic, and relational demography views individual-level ethnic dissimilarity as an individual member's relation to their team. This study compares and contrasts team-level ethnic heterogeneity and individual-level ethnic dissimilarity regarding their effects on impaired well-being (i.e., emotional strain) via team- and individual-level emotional conflict. Fifty teams of retail chain salespeople ($n = 602$) participated in our survey at two points of measurement. Based on the ethnic background of team members, we calculated team-level ethnic heterogeneity that applied to all members, and individual-level ethnic dissimilarity within the team that varied according to each member's ethnic background. Multilevel path modeling showed that high levels of team-level ethnic heterogeneity were related to high levels of emotional strain via team-level emotional conflict. However, the opposite was found for individual-level ethnic dissimilarity. We discussed this difference by contextualizing individual-level ethnic dissimilarity in the team-level heterogeneity and social status of ethnic groups in society at large. Our findings suggest that the social status of the ethnic group to which team members belong may impact how ethnic diversity relates to team processes and well-being.

Keywords Ethnic heterogeneity · Ethnic dissimilarity · Well-being · Status · Relational demography · Social processes

✉ Franziska J. Kößler
    koesslfr@hu-berlin.de

Extended author information available on the last page of the article

Occupational Health Psychology has become increasingly important for individuals, organizations, and society in the last decades as we observe a worldwide rise in work-related mental illnesses (Harvey et al., 2017). Because workplaces reflect changes in society at large, resulting shifts in work environments may be contributing to this rise in poor mental health. One major societal change in recent decades is global migration. As the volume of migration increases, societies have become more ethnically diverse (United Nations, Department of Economic, & Social Affairs, Populations Division, 2018). Workplaces in receiving countries have also become ethnically diverse (International Labour Organization, 2017), which highlights the importance of investigating the effects of working with others with different ethnic backgrounds, especially on employee well-being.

Two lines of research have addressed ethnic diversity in organizations. The compositional approach has considered team-level ethnic heterogeneity as a team characteristic (i.e., a team's ethnic composition; Harrison & Klein, 2007) and mostly focuses on team-level outcomes such as team performance (Joshi et al., 2011). Individual-level effects of ethnic diversity have been addressed in the literature of relational demography (Meyer, 2017). The focus is on how team members experience individual-level ethnic dissimilarity within their team (i.e., how similar or different a team member is from the rest of the team; Riordan, 2000) and how this, in turn, affects health and well-being. With these different levels of foci, the two lines of research have remained largely separate, with Brodbeck et al. (2011), Chatman and Flynn (2001), and Leonard and Levine (2006) being exceptions to this. These three studies provide first insights into how the team- and individual-level manifestations of ethnic diversity interact. However, they all focused on performance outcomes. Thus, it is not well understood how the combined effects of team-level ethnic heterogeneity and individual-level ethnic dissimilarity impact employee well-being.

In this study, we explore the effects of the two levels of ethnic diversity on individual employees' emotional strain—a state of impaired well-being (Mohr et al., 2006)—with emotional conflict as a mediator at both levels. This study contributes to the literature on ethnic diversity in the following ways. First, by investigating team-level ethnic heterogeneity and individual-level ethnic dissimilarity together in real work teams, we explore potentially different effects of ethnic diversity at the team and individual levels. Second, by investigating the effects of individual-level ethnic dissimilarity in the context of team-level ethnic heterogeneity, we shed light on differences in the experience of emotional conflict between ethnic majority and minority workers. We discuss these differences in relation to ingroup/outgroup processes and status differences (Chattopadhyay et al., 2004; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Finally, we focus on impaired well-being (i.e., emotional strain) as an individual-level outcome, which has not yet received much attention as an outcome of team-level ethnic heterogeneity. This recognition has important implications for creating work teams that support well-being of their members with diverse ethnic backgrounds. Because team processes in these ethnically heterogeneous work teams could be shaped by management practices and supervisor training, this study contributes to promoting employee well-being in today's diverse workplaces.

Ethnic Diversity in Organizations—Two Levels of Manifestation

The separate lines of research—one focusing on team-level ethnic heterogeneity, the other focusing on individual-level ethnic dissimilarity—limit our understanding of ethnic diversity in organizations. The team's ethnic heterogeneity and each member's ethnic dissimilarity with others are related but different constructs. Yet, both shape individuals' experience of ethnic diversity simultaneously; that is, the team's heterogeneity gives a dynamic context in which individual dissimilarity impacts well-being (Hoppe et al., 2014). Consider two five-person teams: a highly heterogeneous team with five ethnicities represented by one member each, and a more homogeneous team with four members of one ethnicity and one member of another. The ethnic minority member in the latter team and all members of the former team have the exact same level of individual ethnic dissimilarity, but the team contexts are vastly different. This contextual information could be crucial in understanding why some studies on individual-level ethnic dissimilarity have produced null results (e.g., Jehn et al., 1997). Focusing on one without considering the other leaves unanswered questions (Riordan & Shore, 1997; Riordan & Wayne, 2008).

Another reason to consider team-level ethnic heterogeneity and individual-level ethnic dissimilarity together is the potential to uncover cross-level effects (i.e., team-level ethnic heterogeneity on individual team members' well-being). This is a logical extension of the literature because the same theories underpin both the team-level and individual-level consequences of ethnic diversity. According to the similarity/ attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1971) and the social identity approach (combining the social identity theory by Tajfel & Turner, 1986 and the self-categorization theory by Turner et al., 1987), working with people who are dissimilar to oneself is emotionally taxing. Both theories assume that people categorize themselves and others as ingroup or outgroup members (i.e., social/self-categorization) based on salient characteristics (e.g., demographics; Turner et al., 1987). The social identity approach suggests that people categorize themselves and others to gain a stable identity but also that they view members of their ingroup as superior to others (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), which might result in ingroup favoritism as well as derogation towards the outgroup (i.e., intergroup bias; Brewer, 1979). Relational demography has applied these theories to explain the negative impacts of individual-level ethnic dissimilarity on well-being. Because these theories can also explain the adverse effects of team-level ethnic heterogeneity on group dynamics, an association with impaired well-being can also be expected. However, to the best of our knowledge, studies on team-level ethnic heterogeneity have not yet explored its relation to impaired well-being or health (Meyer, 2017).

Taken together, we argue that effects of high individual-level ethnic dissimilarity on impaired well-being must be understood in the context of team-level ethnic heterogeneity. To date, three studies examined team-level ethnic heterogeneity together with individual-level ethnic dissimilarity (Brodbeck et al., 2011; Chatman & Flynn, 2001; Leonard & Levine, 2006). However, these studies tested effects of ethnic diversity on job satisfaction and performance (e.g., learning, turnover, and team effectiveness) that are of interest mainly for organizations but not directly relevant

to employee health and well-being. Nevertheless, we can draw on these studies as they showed that effects of ethnic diversity exist simultaneously at both levels and that they can be in opposite directions (Brodbeck et al., 2011; Leonard & Levine, 2006). For example, team-level ethnic heterogeneity was positively related to learning performance, and individual-level ethnic dissimilarity was negatively related to learning performance for ethnic minority students (Brodbeck et al., 2011). These findings underline that ethnic diversity is a multilevel phenomenon with complex cross-level effects. Another reason to draw on these studies is that they showed that social processes mediate the relationships between ethnic diversity and performance at both levels. For example, Chatman and Flynn (2001) showed that cooperation at both levels mediated the effect of ethnic diversity on performance outcomes.

Emotional Conflict as Mediating Mechanism

Because the same theories underpin both lines of research, studies on team composition and relational demography have assumed that social processes such as emotional conflict mediate between ethnic diversity and outcomes. Emotional conflict in teams is defined as the perception of interpersonal discrepancies, mutual dislike, tensions, and negative feelings among team members (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Jehn & Mannix, 2001). Individual-level emotional conflict can be informed by a team member's own experiences (i.e., being directly involved in emotional conflicts) or by second-hand experiences (i.e., witnessing or hearing about disagreements among other members). Team-level emotional conflict, a shared perception among team members (Klein & Kozlowski, 2000), is informed by individual team members' perceptions but does not imply that *all* members have direct experiences (Tjosvold, 2008). Emotional conflict can be measured using a referent-shift consensus model, that is, individual team members report the extent to which they perceive emotional conflict in reference to their team. This measurement approach distinguishes team-level and individual-level portions of the phenomenon and allows the investigation of emotional conflict as a potential mediator of ethnic diversity at multiple levels (Chan, 1998).

Emotional Conflict and Impaired Well-Being

Individual-level emotional conflict is a social stressor that is likely to cause impaired well-being (Spector & Bruk-Lee, 2008). Although evidence is scarce, team-level emotional conflict can also be associated with team members' impaired well-being. Social contagion, that is, the transmission of emotions or moods from one person to another through social interactions and processes, might explain this cross-level relationship (Hatfield et al., 1994). Empirical support for this mechanism comes from a study of 55 work teams showing that team-level emotional conflict was positively associated with staff burnout (Leon-Perez et al., 2016)—a construct related to emotional strain.
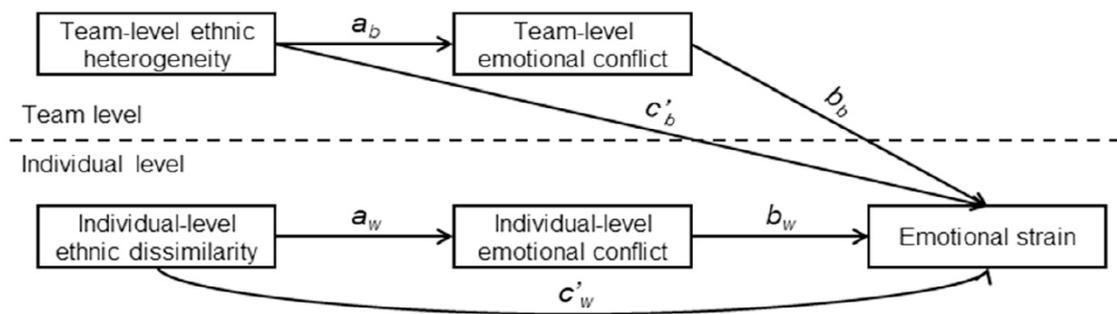
Fig. 1 Conceptual Model. *Note.* The subscript $_b$ indicates a path at the between-team level (i.e., team level); the subscript $_w$ indicates a path at the within-team level (i.e., individual level)

We examined team- and individual-level emotional conflict as mediating mechanisms to better understand the relationship between ethnic diversity and impaired well-being. We chose emotional strain, which refers to the state of being easily irritated and quickly upset (Mohr et al., 2006), as the individual-level outcome. Although emotional strain is not sufficiently severe to be categorized as an illness, a longitudinal study has shown that emotional strain mediates between conflict and depressive symptoms (Dormann & Zapf, 2002). Taken together, we propose that emotional conflict mediates between ethnic diversity and emotional strain at two levels (see Fig. 1).

Hypotheses

The theoretical rationale based on the social identity approach and the similarity/attraction paradigm has suggested that ethnically homogeneous work teams perceive less team-level emotional conflict than ethnically heterogeneous teams (e.g., Meyer, 2017; van Knippenberg et al., 2004). Studies conducted with different kinds of teams have provided empirical support for this relationship (e.g., Drach-Zahavy & Trogan, 2013; Pelled et al., 1999). Team-level emotional conflict as a social stressor has been suggested and shown to impair well-being at the team level (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; de Wit et al., 2012). Combining the literature on team-level ethnic heterogeneity with the theoretical and empirical evidence that team-level emotional conflict impairs well-being, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 1: The relationship between team-level ethnic heterogeneity and emotional strain will be mediated by team-level emotional conflict, such that higher levels of team-level heterogeneity are associated with higher levels of team-level emotional conflict, which, in turn, are associated with higher levels of emotional strain.

Based on a similar theoretical rationale, relational demography has suggested that ethnically dissimilar team members perceive higher levels of individual-level

emotional conflict and have poorer social relationships with their team than ethnically similar members (Riordan, 2000). Guillaume et al. (2012) summarized empirical support for this suggestion in a meta-analysis. A broad range of theoretical and empirical literature has shown that individual-level emotional conflict at work is a social stressor that impairs well-being and health (e.g., De Dreu & Beersma, 2005; Dormann & Zapf, 2002; Spector & Jex, 1998). Based on relational demography and the association of individual-level emotional conflict with individual-level impaired well-being, we hypothesize the following:

> *Hypothesis 2: The relationship between individual-level ethnic dissimilarity and emotional strain will be mediated by individual-level emotional conflict, such that higher levels of individual-level ethnic dissimilarity are associated with higher levels of individual-level emotional conflict, which, in turn, are associated with higher levels of emotional strain.*

Methods

Study Background

We gathered data from 50 work teams in a German retail chain in one major city. This specific study setting offered many advantages but also introduced some complications. In the following section, we provide some relevant details on the German context and work in a retail chain.

Studying Ethnic Differences in Germany

Ethnic minority members[1] who live in Germany are highly diverse. The first large-scale immigration in the 1960s primarily originated in Turkey and Mediterranean countries; later, immigrants from other European countries, the former USSR, and African and Middle Eastern countries came to Germany (Hansen, 2003). These waves of immigration have contributed to a highly diverse group of ethnic minorities now representing approximately 21% of the German workforce (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2018).

Despite the diversity in the ethnic minority population, collecting information about race in Germany is not feasible because of the racist crimes that occurred during the Third Reich and the use of the term "race" in that period (Berg et al., 2014). Instead of asking about racial identity from our study participants, we focused on ethnic background. Differences in ethnic background may entail differences in cultural knowledge, language skills, outer appearance, and names. Because manifestations of ethnic background vary widely, in this study we captured it in a broad way

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[1] By ethnic minority members, we refer to people with an ethnic background that is not German, and by ethnic majority members, we refer to people with a German ethnic background.

by asking about the ethnic origin of workers' families, operationalized as birth country of workers and that of the parents (see also Measures section).

In Germany, children of immigrants face similar socioeconomic problems and prejudices to their parents (Hartmann, 2016). The history of migration in Germany sheds light on reasons for this situation: In the 1960s, people migrated to Germany through guest-worker programs, which tacitly assumed that these groups would ultimately return home. This assumption manifested in limited governmental efforts to properly integrate these workers and their families (Hansen, 2003). This governmental attitude is reflected in linguistic terms: Even today, immigrants and their German-born children are labeled "foreigners" (e.g., in labor-market statistics) or "people with a migration background/history" (Ohliger, 2008). Thus, in this study, we categorized both immigrants and their children as ethnic minority members (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2018).

Retail Industry

Many ethnic minority members in Germany work in service jobs. In 2015, approximately 18% of the retail workforce consisted of ethnic minorities (Schäfer & Schmidt, 2016), a figure similar to the overall presence of ethnic minorities in the German workforce (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2018).

In retail stores, workers belong to clearly defined, physically separated, real work teams. In this study, the entire staff at each store location is defined as a team. To explore the working conditions in retail stores, the first author interned with two teams[2] for two weeks and interviewed their members. The team members worked with all of their coworkers because the shift composition changed weekly. As expected, the contact between teams (i.e., across stores) was low because each team worked in a separate store. Therefore, the team was the most salient work unit.

All team members performed similar tasks, such as customer service, store maintenance, and working at the cash register. These tasks were highly standardized, which rendered task-related disagreements unlikely and helped us focus on emotional conflict. Team members worked on most of these tasks on their own, but when working next to each other, they talked to each other. Task distribution required coordination. In each team, a supervisor and an assistant coordinated shifts.

Procedure

Data were collected from August to November 2017 through a self-administered questionnaire. The retail chain's management encouraged the team members to participate in the study by crediting their participation time to their time accounts and allowing participation during regular work time. We provided the team members with small gifts. In exchange for supporting the study, management received a report on team members' well-being in an aggregated form.

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[2] We excluded teams that were involved in this pre-exploration from the final sample.

We informed team members about the purpose of the study and answered questions as we distributed the questionnaire in person during team meetings. Team members who were absent that day received an informational flyer and the questionnaire. Completed questionnaires were sent by post or put into a ballot box, which we retrieved after two weeks. Completing the questionnaire required 15 to 20 min.

We asked the team members to complete the survey at two time points with a time lag of one month. Both instances of the surveys included all study variables. We did not expect meaningful changes to occur during such a short period and thus did not consider this a longitudinal study. Rather, using self-reported data from different time points helped us minimize inflated associations among the study variables, which may be caused by transient moods or idiosyncratic events during the day (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The teams' compositions remained relatively stable, and all team members worked with all others at least once over one month. Because we avoided the holiday season, the workload was also stable during this time.

An academic ethical committee and the retail chain's works council approved the study. Participation in the survey was voluntary, and team members could contact us to withdraw from the study at any time using the contact details that we provided to them during survey distribution. To assure team members' anonymity, we matched the first and second surveys of each team member using a personal code created by the team members themselves. Additionally, we assigned a code to each team, which was necessary for calculating ethnic diversity, but kept these code assignments separate from the surveys.

Recruitment

We invited 50 teams to participate, all of which took part in the study. The team size, including the supervisor, ranged from 8 to 34 ($M = 15.6$, $SD = 5.7$). In the two data collection sessions held one month apart (T1 and T2), a total of 704 members had the opportunity to complete the questionnaire at least once, and 606 (86%) did so. Of the 98 nonparticipants, at least 43 were sick or on maternity leave and 12 were on vacation; for the rest the reasons were unknown. Of the 50 teams, 40 had a participation rate of 80% or higher, including 15 teams with a 100% participation rate. The team-level ethnic heterogeneity was not associated with the team's participation rate (Kendall's $\tau = .10$, $p = .34$).

Of the 606 respondents, 428 (71%) provided data at both T1 and T2, 135 (22%) provided data only at T1, and 43 (7%) provided data only at T2. Because we used emotional conflict data from T1 and the emotional strain data from T2, 43 members had missing data for the mediator measure, and 135 had missing data for the outcome measure. Full-information maximum likelihood estimation was used to account for the missing data. Four respondents were excluded from the analysis because they answered only the demographic questions and neither the mediator nor the outcome questions.

Sample

Among all team members, 37% were 30 years old or younger, 37% were between 31 and 50 years old, and 16% were 51 years old or older. Most team members were women (91%). On average, team tenure was approximately five years ($SD = 4.9$). Twenty-four different ethnic backgrounds were represented in our sample, and 17% of the members had an ethnic background other than German. This proportion of ethnic minorities is similar to that in the overall German retail workforce (Schäfer & Schmidt, 2016).

Half of the ethnic minority team members were born outside of Germany, and the other half were born in Germany to immigrant parents. The major ethnic backgrounds represented in our sample were Turkish (24%), Russian (23%), and Polish (13%). Regarding languages, more than half of the ethnic minority team members spoke a language other than German as their first language (62%), 30% spoke German as their first language, and 8% were raised in a bilingual household with German and another language.

Ethnic majority and minority team members were demographically similar, with two exceptions: Compared to ethnic majority team members, the ethnic minority members were less likely to have a vocational degree (86% vs. 62%), $X^2(1) = 28.92$, $p < .001$, and to hold managerial positions (49% vs. 35%), $Z = -3.40$, $p < .001$. Because of the differences in responsibilities, ethnic majority team members worked more hours per week ($M = 27.53$, $SD = 8.38$) than ethnic minority team members ($M = 24.86$, $SD = 9.09$), $t(576) = 2.76$, $p = .006$.

Measures

During the preparation phase of the study, we conducted cognitive interviews (Prüfer & Rexroth, 2010) to ensure that all team members understood the survey questions. As most customer contact and all written communication from management were in German, we assumed that the team members had sufficient German language skills. Thus, the survey was offered only in German, but we provided assistance during survey completion if necessary. We adapted the wording and the question order based on observations and interviews with team members of different ages, gender, and ethnic backgrounds. For means, standard deviations, Cronbach's α, and test-retest reliability (r_{tt}) see Table 1.

Ethnic Background, Team-Level Ethnic Heterogeneity, and Individual-Level Ethnic Dissimilarity

Ethnic Background To determine each team member's ethnic background, we asked about the birthplace of their parents. If both parents were born in the same country (91%), this country was selected as the team member's ethnic background. If one parent was born in Germany and the other parent was born abroad (4%), we

Table 1 Means (M), Standard Deviations (SD), Cronbach's Alphas (α), Test-Retest Reliabilities (r_{tt}), Intraclass Correlations 1 (ICC), and Intercorrelations for Study Variables

	M	SD	r_{tt}	α	ICC	1	2	3	4	5
1. Team-level ethnic heterogeneity	0.29	0.20								
2. Team-level emotional conflict	2.09	0.46	.77			.30*				
3. Emotional strain [a]	2.06	0.38	.35			−.16	.26			
4. Individual-level ethnic dissimilarity	0.29	0.32								
5. Individual-level emotional conflict	2.13	0.92	.74	.86	.20				.03	
6. Emotional strain [a]	2.13	0.90	.71	.88	.04				−.08	.35***

Note. Team-level intercorrelations are in the upper half of the Table ($N=50$). Individual-level intercorrelations are in the lower half of the table ($n=602$). The information for both team- and individual-level emotional conflict stems from measurement point 1; the information for emotional strain stems from measurement point 2

[a] Because the main analysis decomposes the variance and uses team variance in relationships with team-level variables, we show emotional strain in line 3 as team-level aggregate and line 6 as individual-level variable without aggregation

* $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$

assigned the ethnic background of the foreign-born parent. If both parents were from different foreign countries (1%), the mother's birthplace was assigned (Constant et al., 2012).[3]

Team-Level Ethnic Heterogeneity To operationalize team-level ethnic heterogeneity, we followed Harrison and Klein (2007) and calculated Blau's index (*BI*; Blau, 1977) for each team. In $BI = 1 - \sum p_k^2$, p refers to the proportion of team members with a particular ethnic background, and k refers to the number of ethnicities in the team. For example, calculating *BI* for a team of five Turkish members, ten Germans, and one Russian results in $BI = 1 - [(5/16)^2 + (10/16)^2 + (1/16)^2] = 51$. If all team members had the same ethnic background, *BI* was zero. The value of *BI* increases asymptotically—depending on the team size, the number of ethnic groups in the team, and the ethnic groups' proportions in the team—to the theoretical maximum of one (Agresti & Agresti, 1978). In our sample, *BI* ranged from .00 to .73.

Individual-Level Ethnic Dissimilarity To operationalize individual-level ethnic dissimilarity, we calculated the proportional dissimilarity (*PD*) for each team member as the proportion of team members whose ethnicity differed from the focal team member's ethnicity (Williams and Meân, 2004), that is, $PD = n_{dis}/(n_{team} - 1)$, where n_{dis} is the number of ethnically dissimilar coworkers, and $n_{team} - 1$ is the total number of coworkers. In a team with five Turkish members, ten German members, and one Russian member, the Turkish members' $PD = (10+1)/(16 - 1) = .73$, the German members' $PD = (5+1)/(16 - 1) = .40$, and the Russian member's $PD = (5+10)/$

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[3] As 4% of the team members did not provide complete information on parents' ethnic background, we had to derive this information from administrative data as described on p.16.

(16 - 1) = 1.00. The resulting continuous variable can range from zero (i.e., all coworkers share the focal team member's ethnic background) to one (i.e., no coworkers share the focal member's ethnic background). In our study, *PD* ranged from zero ($n = 108$) to one ($n = 80$).

Calculating team-level ethnic heterogeneity and individual-level ethnic dissimilarity required information on all team members' ethnic backgrounds regardless of their study participation (Allen et al., 2007; Riordan, 2000). If the information was missing for some team members either because they did not disclose this information in the survey or because they did not participate at all, we used administrative data provided by management. We were thus able to calculate team-level ethnic heterogeneity of all 50 teams and individual-level ethnic dissimilarity of all team members.

Emotional Conflict

We translated and back-translated an English emotional conflict scale (Jehn, 1994; Pelled et al., 1999) into German.[4] The team members answered to four items (e.g., "Personal problems exist in our team.") on a Likert scale ranging from 0 (*I disagree*) to 4 (*I fully agree*). Previous studies have shown that this scale can be aggregated to measure team-level emotional conflict, i.e., shared perceptions of emotional conflict in the team (Pelled et al., 1999), or to capture individual-level emotional conflict, i.e., individual perceptions (Jehn, 1994). Thus, we used this measure to operationalize emotional conflict at both levels. As shown in Table 1, team- and individual-level emotional conflict are stable over one month.

Emotional Strain

We measured emotional strain with the emotional subscale of the irritation scale by Mohr et al. (2006). Team members replied to three items such as "I react irritated although I do not intend to do so" using a Likert scale ranging from 0 (*I disagree*) to 4 (*I fully agree*; see also Hoppe, 2011). We excluded two items from the original five-item subscale of emotional irritation. In a cross-cultural validation by Mohr et al. (2006), these two items were shown to be culturally sensitive, and excluding them improved the factorial validity of the irritation scale and did not affect its good reliability. In our sample, emotional strain is stable (Table 1).

Socio- and Occupational Demographics

We asked the team members about their ages (in 10-year steps), gender (*male/female*), team tenure in years, their current position within the team (e.g., supervisor), their weekly working hours, and whether they had a vocational degree

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[4] We deviated slightly from the original scale by using statements instead of questions in order to offer the same response options as for emotional strain.

(*yes/no*). In addition to their parents' birthplaces, we asked all team members about their own birthplace, first language, citizenship, and the number of years they had lived in Germany.

Statistical Analysis

To examine the indirect effects at two levels, we applied a multilevel path analysis in *Mplus* version 8.3. Data preparation was performed in *RStudio* version 1.1.456. As our data were hierarchically structured with individual team members nested in teams, we tested our hypotheses in a model with a random intercept. Additionally, the intraclass correlations (ICCs) of emotional conflict and emotional strain supported this decision because they lay within or close to the range that Bliese (2000) considered to be typical for team research (see Table 1). We selected a maximum likelihood estimator with robust Huber-White standard errors to address nonnormality.

We tested both hypotheses in one model and specified similar models with team-level ethnic heterogeneity and individual-level ethnic dissimilarity as predictors, team- and individual-level emotional conflict as mediators, and emotional strain as an individual-level outcome.[5] Thus, we tested similar *a*-, *b*-, and *c'*- paths at both levels and calculated the indirect effects. Furthermore, we followed the recommendations by Preacher et al. (2010) on multilevel mediation analysis and decomposed the variance of emotional conflict and emotional strain, which were measured by individual-level self-reports, into latent between- and within-team variance. For testing indirect effects, we applied a Monte Carlo approach (Preacher & Selig, 2012) and derived asymmetric Monte Carlo-confidence intervals (MC-CIs) from an online calculator (Selig & Preacher, 2008).

According to Hypothesis 1, high team-level ethnic heterogeneity is related to high team-level emotional conflict (a_b-path), which is related to high emotional strain (b_b-path). The direct effect of team-level ethnic heterogeneity on emotional strain was included in the model (c'_b-path, see Fig. 1). Together, these paths represent a 2-2-1 mediation (Preacher et al., 2010). We specified all of these effects at the team level using the latent between-team variance components of emotional conflict and emotional strain. We measured emotional strain for the individual. However, it is not possible to predict individual-level variance using a team-level predictor (Preacher et al., 2010; Zhang et al., 2009), so relationships between Level-2 predictors and Level-1 outcomes must be modeled as Level-2 relationships.

According to Hypothesis 2, high individual-level ethnic dissimilarity is related to high individual-level emotional conflict (a_w-path), which is related to high emotional strain (b_w-path). The direct effect of individual-level ethnic dissimilarity on emotional strain was also included in the model (c'_w-path). Together, these paths represent a 1-1-1 mediation (Preacher et al., 2010).

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[5] Both predictors were assumed to be stable over the one-month assessment time. We used the measure of emotional conflict from the first measurement point and emotional strain from the second.

Table 2 Unstandardized Estimates (*B*), Including Standard Errors (*SE B*), and Standardized Estimates (γ) of the Multilevel Path Analysis

	B	*SE B*	γ
Team level			
a_b-path: ethnic heterogeneity → emotional conflict	1.01**	0.35	.48
b_b-path: emotional conflict → emotional strain	0.33*	0.14	.83
c'_b-path: ethnic heterogeneity → emotional strain	−0.40	0.33	−.48
Intercept emotional conflict	1.89***	0.12	
Intercept emotional strain	1.56***	0.27	
Residual variance emotional conflict	0.13***	0.03	
Residual variance emotional strain	0.01	0.01	
Individual level			
a_w-path: ethnic dissimilarity → emotional conflict	−0.29*	0.12	−.11
b_w-path: emotional conflict → emotional strain	0.36***	0.04	.34
c'_w-path: ethnic dissimilarity → emotional strain	−0.08	0.21	−.03
Residual variance emotional conflict	0.70***	0.06	
Residual variance emotional strain	0.69***	0.05	

Note. These models are a 2-2-1 and a 1-1-1 mediation model with random intercepts. All paths are fixed

The subscript $_b$ indicates a path at the between-team level; the subscript $_w$ indicates a path at the within-team level

$^*p < .05.$ $^{**}p < .01.$ $^{***}p < .001$

Results

The Relationship Between Team-Level Ethnic Heterogeneity and Individual-Level Ethnic Dissimilarity

As expected, team-level ethnic heterogeneity does not correspond to individual-level ethnic dissimilarity unless the team is completely homogeneous, which was true for eight teams that only consisted of ethnic majority members with a *BI* and *PD* of zero. Moreover, a positive correlation between team-level ethnic heterogeneity and individual-level ethnic dissimilarity is observed only among the ethnic majority, estimate = 0.11, $SE = 0.03$, $p < .001$. For ethnic minority team members, the correlation is negative and non-significant, estimate = −0.08, $SE = 0.06$, $p = .149$. Finally, individual-level ethnic dissimilarity cannot be completely separated from being an ethnic majority or minority or member, $t(271) = −89.51$, $p < .001$, that is, individual-level ethnic dissimilarity is lower for ethnic majority team members ($M = 0.17$, $SD = 0.13$; range = .00 to .58) than for ethnic minority team members ($M = 0.96$, $SD = 0.06$; range = .78 to 1.00) . These are important observations as they show that these variables are not independent of one another.

Hypothesis Testing

To test our hypotheses, we specified a 2-2-1 mediation and a 1-1-1 mediation in the same multilevel path model (Preacher et al., 2010). Table 2 shows the direct relationships of the multilevel path analyses with random intercepts.

Hypothesis 1 predicted an indirect relationship between high levels of team-level ethnic heterogeneity and high levels of emotional strain via high levels of team-level emotional conflict (2-2-1). Indeed, team-level ethnic heterogeneity predicted high levels of team-level emotional conflict (a_b-path). Team-level emotional conflict predicted high levels of emotional strain (b_b-path; see Table 2). The mediation explained 54% of the variance in emotional strain, $R^2 = .54$. In line with these relationships, the indirect relationship between team-level ethnic heterogeneity and emotional strain via team-level emotional conflict was positive and significant, estimate $= 0.33$, $SE = 0.17$, $p < .05$; 95% MC-CI [0.036, 0.709]. Thus, our results supported Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2 predicted an indirect relationship between high levels of individual-level ethnic dissimilarity and high levels of emotional strain via high levels of individual-level emotional conflict (1-1-1). Contrary to our expectations, individual-level ethnic dissimilarity was associated with *low* levels of individual-level emotional conflict (a_w-path). Individual-level emotional conflict was positively related to emotional strain (b_w-path; see Table 2). The mediation explained 12% of the variance in emotional strain, $R^2 = .12$. Analyzing the indirect effect showed a significant *negative* relationship between individual-level ethnic dissimilarity and emotional strain via individual-level emotional conflict, estimate $= -0.11$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < .01$; 95% MC-CI [−0.179, −0.024]. Because we found a negative indirect effect, Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

Robustness Checks

To ensure that our results were not affected by using data from two different measurement points, we tested the hypothesized indirect effects using only variables measured at the first measurement point. These relationships did not differ from the main analysis. Detailed numbers and figures for this robustness check are available on request.

Discussion

As proposed in our hypotheses, we found that team-level emotional conflict mediated between team-level ethnic heterogeneity and emotional strain, such that high team-level ethnic heterogeneity related to higher levels of emotional strain via high levels of team-level emotional conflict. When team-level ethnic heterogeneity and its impacts on team-level emotional conflict were accounted for, we found that individual-level ethnic dissimilarity was associated with individual-level emotional conflict in a direction opposite of what would be expected: The higher the individual-level

ethnic dissimilarity was, the *lower* individual-level emotional conflict (i.e., the individual perception of emotional conflict within the team) was. These findings demonstrate the complexities of ethnic diversity as experienced by individual team members and the importance of considering individual-level ethnic dissimilarity in the context of their team-level ethnic heterogeneity when investigating effects on employee well-being.

The Effect of Ethnic Dissimilarity on Emotional Conflict in Context

To explore possible explanations for our unexpected finding—high individual-level ethnic dissimilarity accompanied by low individual-level emotional conflict—we consider ethnic majority and minority groups separately in the context of team-level ethnic heterogeneity. Doing so is necessary because group differences are seldom neutral, different reactions to ethnic diversity between ethnic majority and minority group members can be better understood if we recognize social status as an important factor.

Dynamics in Relatively Homogeneous Teams

Groups with high power and status strive to maintain their status when faced with outgroups, which corresponds with the need to maintain a positively valued distinct social identity through ingroup favoritism and solidarity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). This need, however, may not be too strong if the group has a clear, dominant majority, as in relatively homogeneous teams dominated by high-status ethnic majority members. The members of the ethnic majority group—in our study, those with German backgrounds for more than two generations—had lower ethnic dissimilarity in general, yet our analysis suggested that they might perceive a *higher* level of emotional conflict within the team. In mostly ethnic majority teams, these ethnic majority members may not need to maintain solidarity among themselves because of their unquestionably dominant presence. As a result, in relatively homogeneous teams, the ethnic majority members may engage in emotional conflict more frequently and perceive them more strongly. Correspondingly, at the individual level, the low ethnic dissimilarity (of the ethnic majority) may be associated with high emotional conflict.

In the same ethnic majority-dominated teams, the few ethnic minority members (i.e., those with very high ethnic dissimilarity) may be more motivated to keep peace with the large ethnic majority group as well as the very small group of people with the same ethnic background (see also Chattopadhyay et al., 2004, 2016). As for perceptions of team-level conflicts, there may be emotional conflict among the ethnic majority members in the team, but the small number of ethnic minority members may not be aware of them. This might be because high-status groups (i.e., the ethnic majority) might perceive disclosing negative personal information to be threatening their status distance (Phillips et al., 2009) and therefore do not communicate about emotional conflict. Also, ethnic minorities are possibly isolated from the rest of the team if they comprise a small share of the overall team (Kanter, 1977). Thus, in teams with low ethnic heterogeneity

(i.e., ethnic majority-dominated teams), very high ethnic dissimilarity of ethnic minority members may be associated with low levels of emotional conflict both at the individual and team levels.

Dynamics in Relatively Heterogeneous Teams

In teams with more heterogeneous ethnic compositions, the dynamics likely differ. Because Germans without migration backgrounds are the numerical majority in general, they have relatively low ethnic dissimilarity even in these teams. They may, however, feel a stronger need to distinguish themselves from the low-status members than their counterparts in more homogeneous, ethnic majority-dominated teams do. They may engage in more emotional conflict with members of lower-status groups. Thus, in more heterogeneous teams, the relatively low ethnic dissimilarity of the ethnic majority may have been associated with more emotional conflict.

As for the ethnic minority members in heterogeneous teams, who had lower ethnic dissimilarity than their colleagues in more homogenous teams but still had high ethnic dissimilarity, their experiences of social processes can be explored from the social mobility perspective. Chattopadhyay et al. (2004) propose that minority group members' interaction with majority members depends on the perceived permeability of the boundary that separates the groups. If ethnic minority members believe that they can be accepted by the ethnic majority group and therefore enjoy some of the benefits of majority status, they will maintain positive interactions with ethnic majority members and keep their distance from their own or other ethnic minority groups. If they do not believe that the boundary is permeable, they identify more strongly with their own groups and may engage in emotional conflict with ethnic majority members. In our study, these additional dimensions were not measured and thus could not be investigated. However, the explicit focus on ethnic minority members' perspectives about social boundaries is a promising direction for future research.

In summary, experience with individual-level ethnic dissimilarity needs to be examined within the context of team-level ethnic heterogeneity, the social standing of the group to which each person belongs, and the beliefs and desires team members have about changing their status. This expands the traditional understanding of ethnic diversity from the similarity/attraction paradigm. Investigating ethnic dissimilarity as embedded in a team's ethnic compositions may also shed light on the asymmetry hypothesis—ethnic minority members may not experience the effects of ethnic diversity the same way that ethnic majority members do (Chattopadhyay, 1999; Hoppe et al., 2014; Riordan, 2000; Tsui et al., 1992)—which has been acknowledged in the relational demography literature. The relationship between the ethnic majority and minority, not only within the workplace but also in society at large, is likely to be reflected in team processes and, ultimately, to influence emotional strain. Future studies with larger samples should also test the asymmetry hypothesis along with both levels of ethnic diversity.

Practical Implications

As teams and workplaces are becoming more diverse, management and supervisors will need to react to challenges that may arise in ethnically diverse teams such as social conflicts within and across ethnic groups with different social standing. Guillaume et al. (2012) suggest that specifically in ethnically diverse teams, establishing team interdependence is crucial to improve social relationships, for example, by implementing common group tasks or rewards for the team. Furthermore, Liebermann et al. (2013) suggest that ethnic stereotyping within work teams can be reduced by emphasizing similarities between different ethnic groups and creating an atmosphere that enables team members to get to know each other. Diversity and cultural awareness training may help in this regard (see also Brodbeck et al., 2011). Organizations should strive for effective diversity policies that involve an inclusive and diversity-friendly climate (Drach-Zahavy & Trogan, 2013; van Dick et al., 2008).

Our findings showed that among all team members—irrespective of their ethnic background—emotional conflict was related to emotional strain. Interventions at the team and individual level on conflict resolution are likely to be beneficial for health and well-being in all teams (Hyde et al., 2006) but may be even more important in ethnically diverse teams. Finally, enhancing existing social ties or developing new ones in the workplace facilitates social support among colleagues and, in turn, their health and well-being (Heaney, 2017).

Strengths and Limitations

We studied ethnic diversity effects in real work teams, which provided us with high external validity. These teams were part of a single organization and all members had the same job (i.e., retail store clerks); therefore, the effects of ethnic diversity we found were not blurred by occupational or organizational differences. While this is a strength, a specific sample always limits the generalizability of our findings. As task complexity and team interdependence influence whether ethnic diversity becomes an asset or a liability (e.g., van Knippenberg et al., 2004), our results may be generalizable to teams working with similar levels of interdependence in other pink- or blue-collar jobs (i.e., simple service and manual labor). Findings from studies with nurses and warehouse workers (e.g., Drach-Zahavy & Trogan, 2013; Hoppe et al., 2014) point to similar directions as our findings, but more research across occupations and organizations is needed to generalize these results.

As with most studies on ethnic diversity, the share of ethnic minority members was low in this sample. While the ethnic composition of our sample was roughly proportional to the German workforce, we were able to examine only a limited range of team-level ethnic heterogeneity and unequal ranges of individual-level ethnic dissimilarity between ethnic majority and minority members. Consequently, we could not test the differential effects within the ethnic minority

groups. Nonetheless, studying ethnic diversity in less diverse teams is important because this is the reality in many workplaces.

A strength of the paper is the high response rate of 86%. In addition, we had the unique opportunity to use administrative data on the workers' birthplace and their nationality for missing self-report information on ethnic background (14%). This administrative data enabled us to compute more accurate scores for team-level ethnic heterogeneity and individual-level ethnic dissimilarity based on the ethnic background of all members, regardless of their participation in the study. This is a major improvement from previous studies that used only the data available from self-reports (e.g., Tsui et al., 1992). The administrative data we used, however, identified only the first-generation ethnic minorities but not the second generation. Potentially, we may have underestimated the percentage of ethnic minority workers. However, when comparing the number of ethnic minority workers when using administrative data for missing information versus self-report information only, we do not see differences in the percentage of ethnic minority workers. Finally, our cross-sectional design does not allow causality claims. However, using self-reports from two measurement points enabled us to reduce common method variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Conclusion

Investigating effects of ethnic diversity on well-being at both the team and individual levels provided us with the insight that ethnic diversity effects may not be the same between the two levels. Our findings suggested intricate dynamics within teams, which may be different for the ethnic majority and minority members of society. In most studies in the diversity literature, ethnic majority members account for the greatest proportion in study samples; therefore, the current findings are, unwittingly, about the ethnic majority's reactions to the presence of ethnic minorities and overlook ethnic minority members' reactions to ethnic diversity. Team members' reactions to others who are in some way different from themselves are complex and need to be explored more carefully in contexts, both in the workplace and society at large. A first step to creating a more complete picture is to study individual-level ethnic dissimilarity in the context of team-level ethnic heterogeneity with an explicit focus on power and status dynamics among groups.

Authors' Contributions Franziska J. Kößler: Conceptualization; funding acquisition; data curation; formal analysis; investigation; methodology; project administration; software; visualization; writing – original draft; writing – review & editing.

Kaori Fujishiro: Conceptualization; supervision; writing – original draft; writing – review & editing.

Susanne Veit: Conceptualization; funding acquisition; methodology; supervision; writing – review & editing.

Annekatrin Hoppe: Conceptualization; project administration; resources; software; supervision; writing – review & editing.

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Data Availability The works council of the participating company voted against data sharing to protect their workers' privacy.

Code Availability The code is available on request.

Declarations

Conflicts of Interest/Competing Interests The authors have no known conflict of interest to disclose.

Ethics Approval The work was authorized by the ethics committee of the WZB Berlin Social Science Center (protocol number 2017/3/17).

Consent to Participate The company, its works council, and the workers themselves gave their consent to participate.

Consent for Publication The company, its works council, and the workers themselves gave their consent for publication. The workers could contact the first author to withdraw from the study after participation.

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Authors and Affiliations

Franziska J. Kößler[1,2] (ID) · **Kaori Fujishiro[3]** (ID) · **Susanne Veit[4,5]** (ID) ·
Annekatrin Hoppe[1] (ID)

[1]   Department of Psychology, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Rudower Chaussee 18,
      12489 Berlin, Germany

[2]   Graduate Program 'Good Work', WZB Berlin Social Science Center, Berlin, Germany

[3]   Division of Field Studies and Engineering, National Institute for Occupational Safety
      and Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Cincinnati, Ohio, USA

[4]   German Center for Integration and Migration Research (DeZIM-Institut), Berlin, Germany

[5]   Research Unit 'Migration, Integration, Transnationalization', WZB Berlin Social Science
      Center, Berlin, Germany

Appendix C: Selbständigkeitserklärung

Hiermit erkläre ich, Franziska J. Kößler, dass

- keine Zusammenarbeit mit gewerblichen Promotionsberater:innen stattfand,

- ich die dem angestrebten Verfahren zugrunde liegende Promotionsordnung (Promotionsordnung der Lebenswissenschaftlichen Fakultät der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin vom März 2015) zur Kenntnis genommen habe,

- die Dissertation oder Teile davon nicht bereits bei einer anderen wissenschaftlichen Einrichtung eingereicht, angenommen oder abgelehnt wurden,

- ich mich nicht anderwärts um einen Doktorgrad beworben habe bzw. einen entsprechenden Doktorgrad besitze,

- die Dissertation auf der Grundlage der angegebenen Hilfsmittel und Hilfen selbstständig angefertigt worden ist gemäß § 6 (3),

- die Grundsätze der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin zur Sicherung guter wissenschaftlicher Praxis eingehalten wurden.

Berlin, den 10.2.2023