

The Irony of Choice in Recruitment: When Similarity Turns Recruiters to Other Candidates

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Abstract. Across two experimental studies, we examine the influence of similarity perceptions on recruiters' job fit perceptions of job applicants. In addition, a robustness study extends the effect of similarity by introducing work-related sources of similarity and tests the relationship between work-related similarities on similarity perceptions. Moreover, we explore the emotional and cognitive mechanisms behind the effects of similarity perceptions on job fit. We also propose and test a boundary condition, such that, when job desirability is low, the effect of demographic similarity on perceived similarity is reversed. The sample for the three studies consist of specialized master's students with work experience in human resources management who acted as recruiters in a resume screening situation. The results show that the effects of similarity are not always positive for job fit perceptions. The studies provide evidence that when recruiters perceive applicants as similar to themselves, biased evaluations occur. Finally, we provide results that show the effects of mediation and moderation analysis whereby liking mediates the relationship between similarity perceptions and job fit perceptions through emotional, cognitive and motivational sequential mediators. Additionally, job desirability moderates the relationship between demographic similarity and similarity perceptions so that when job desirability is low, the effect of demographic similarity on perceived similarity is reversed.

Keywords: biases, similarity perceptions, recruitment, liking, personnel selection

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INTRODUCTION

Organizations invest resources in selecting the best possible candidates. The first stage in that process – and probably the most common practice in personnel selection – is resume screening (Dipboye & Jackson, 1999). Recruiters' appraisal of the resume is the first filter that applicants must overcome to potentially get a job. Based on the resume, recruiters make decisions about which applicants will continue through the process and which applicants will be rejected. Therefore, resume screening is central to the whole selection process (Cable & Judge, 1997; Higgins & Judge, 2004).

Personnel selection is essentially based on procedures that require human decisions, and those decisions are influenced by biases and errors (Lee, Pitesa, Pillutla & Thau, 2015). The possible biases of recruiters are of interest to academics, organizations and the international press. For

instance, *The Economist* published a paper focused on the influence of physical attractiveness in selection (Don't hate me because I'm beautiful (*The Economist*, 2012)), which is in line with prior research by Luxen and Van De Vijver (2006).

Research has focused on recruiters' hiring decisions for several decades (Chen & Lin, 2014; Rand & Wexley, 1975; Wade & Kinicki, 1997). A topic that has attracted particular attention is the existence of the "similar-to-me" effect, in which recruiters select candidates who are similar to themselves in some respect. This effect has been confirmed for similarity of race (e.g. Derous, Ryan & Nguyen, 2012; Lee, Pitesa, Thau & Pillutla, 2015; Millman, 2016; O'Leary, Durham, Weathington, Cothran & Cunningham, 2009), age (e.g. Jiang, Hoegg, Dahl & Chattopadhyay, 2010) and gender (Antonovics, Arcidiacono & Walsh, 2005; Bagues & Esteve-Volart, 2010; Kaplan, Berkley & Fisher, 2016; Reis, Young & Jury, 1999). "Demographic similarity" (Turban & Jones, 1988) refers to the actual similarity between individuals along dimensions such as educational level, race, age, and so on. In the context of recruitment, what is the effect of demographic similarity on the recruiter's perception? Moreover, what are the boundary conditions for this effect?

We designed two experimental studies to address these research questions. The first study tests the effects of demographic similarity on similarity perceptions and liking. The second explores a boundary condition for the effect of similarity perceptions; this is the moderating effect of job desirability. In addition, a robustness study extends the effect of similarity and tests the relationship between work-related similarities on similarity perceptions.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

We conducted a systematic review of 12 studies (see Appendix A) analyzing the effects of similarity on job fit and other organizational variables. This review revealed three main inconsistencies across studies. First, the operationalization of similarity varies across studies; second, the effects of similarity on organizational variables are direct in some studies and indirect in other studies; and third, most studies focus on selection interviews despite the fact that other sources of similarity may also be present. We explain our findings in detail in the following paragraphs.

Across studies, authors measure similarity using self-reports of similarity scales, self-reports of a checklist of categories, or the judgment of third parties with similar expertise (e.g. between candidates and committees (Bagues & Perez-Villadoniga, 2012)). Self-report studies also measure similarity perceptions using items from different authors (e.g. Byrne, 1971; Howard & Ferris, 1996; Kristof-Brown, Barrick & Franke, 2002; Turban & Jones, 1988).

Second, across studies, authors have found different relationships between key variables. For example, several studies show a positive direct relationship between similarity perceptions and job fit perceptions (e.g. Bagues & Perez-Villadoniga, 2012; Frank & Hackman, 1975; Rand & Wexley, 1975). However, this direct effect is mostly found in an interview context in which people face multiple sources of similarity, as well as interaction-related variables that cannot be controlled and may affect interviewers' judgments. The resume screening situation usually does not involve any interaction with the candidate, thus reducing the sources of similarity to the information presented in the candidate's resume. Another set of studies reports that the relationship between similarity perceptions and job fit perceptions is indirect and positive, through, for example,

emotional factors (Cotton, O'Neill & Griffin, 2008; Howard & Ferris, 1996), performance expectations (García, Posthuma & Colella, 2008) and person–organization fit or person–job fit (Cable & Judge, 1997; Chen, Lee & Yeh, 2008; Chen & Lin, 2014; Tsai, Chi, Huang & Hsu, 2011). Moreover, Goldberg (2005) found no relationship between similarity perceptions and selection outcomes. A possible explanation for this finding is that the author used only one item to measure recruiters' assessment of applicants' resumes.

Third, prior research has widely examined the relationship between similarity perceptions and job fit perceptions in the selection interview process (Bagues & Perez-Villadoniga, 2012; Frank & Hackman, 1975; García et al., 2008; Tsai et al., 2011) but not in the recruitment phase (Burns, Christiansen, Morris, Periard & Coaster, 2014; Cole, Rubin, Feild & Giles, 2007).

In light of the inconsistencies found in our systematic review, this study makes three main contributions to the literature. First, our study proposes a distinction between demographic similarity and similarity perceptions, and we use an experimental design to control for other sources of similarity that can be present in job interviews. Second, our study tests the quality of the relationship (direct or indirect) between similarity perceptions and job fit perceptions and systematically addresses the psychological mechanisms that influence job fit perception. Third, our study proposes a boundary condition under which demographic similarity has a negative effect on similarity perceptions: job desirability.

SIMILARITY AND LIKING

Relational demographic theory indicates that individuals tend to evaluate others more favorably if they have similar demographic characteristics (Goldberg, Riordan & Zhang, 2008; Tsui & Barry, 1986; Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989; Turban & Jones, 1988; Walton, Cohen, Cwir & Spencer, 2012). Byrne's (1971) study was one of the first to test the effect of similarity perceptions between individuals. He proposed the "attraction paradigm", which postulates that the more similar characteristics a person shares with another, the more attracted he or she will be to this other person. This paradigm suggests a direct relationship between shared personal characteristics and the perceived attraction between individuals.

Extensive empirical evidence supports the effect of the attraction paradigm; for example, individuals expect that the more similar they are to others, the more they will be liked by them (Condon & Crano, 1988). Moreover, when people share characteristics such as sex, birthdate, name or initials, they are more willing to trust and work with those with whom they share these characteristics (Burger, Messian, Patel, del Prado & Anderson, 2004; Jiang et al., 2010; Miller, Downs & Prentice 1998; Polman, Pollmann & Poehlman, 2013).

Specifically, in an interview situation, when job applicants have demographic similarity to the interviewer, interviewers perceive similar candidates as higher in job fit, intelligence and attraction compared to dissimilar candidates (Bakar & McCann, 2014; Cardy & Dobbins, 1986; Rand & Wexley, 1975; Tsui, Porter & Egan, 2002). In addition, demographic similarity between the recruiter and applicant leads to similarity perceptions in attitudes and values, which in turn leads to liking, which then leads to a positive bias in the recruiter's interview conduct (Graves & Powell, 1995). "Similarity perception" refers to an individual assessment of how similar the person is to the perceiver (Turban & Jones,

1988). In this specific study, it represents the recruiter's perception of how similar the candidate is to him or her.

This effect was also found in a resume screening situation. Shared first names facilitate similarity perceptions between candidate and recruiter. For example, Howard and Kerin (2011) showed participants, who acted as recruiters, two resumes, one of which included a candidate with the same name as their own. The participants assessed the resume of the candidate with the shared name more positively than the other resume. Moreover, Cotton et al. (2008) found that candidates with unusual names or names that generate low similarity perceptions with recruiters have a lower likelihood of being hired.

We hypothesize that similarity perceptions generate liking, which drive the similar-to-me effect in a resume screening context. Liden, Wayne and Stilwell (1993: 664) defined "liking" as a "form of affect that refers to the degree of interpersonal attraction in a relationship". We expect similarity perceptions to increase the extent to which the recruiter likes a certain candidate, and therefore we expect demographic similarity to indirectly increase the liking through similarity perceptions. We hypothesize that demographic similarity has an influence on liking through similarity perceptions.

Hypothesis 1: Demographic similarity has a positive indirect effect on liking through similarity perceptions.

JOB DESIRABILITY

In a resume screening context, there are two main sources of information for the recruiter: the resume of the candidate and the job position itself.

We propose that recruiters take into account not only demographic similarity but also the job position to evaluate candidates. The job position moderates the relationship between recruiter inferences of applicant personality traits and recruiter judgments of applicant employability (Cole, Field, Giles & Harris, 2004). Therefore, we expect different job positions to influence the recruiter's perceptions of the candidate. Specifically, job position will influence job desirability (Pounder & Merrill, 2001), the extent to which recruiters like the job they are selecting for. We expect recruiters to perceive themselves as similar to the candidate, unless they do not like the job for which they are evaluating that candidate.

Previous research has shown that job position has an effect on the relationship between similarity perceptions and job fit perceptions (Chen et al., 2008; Goldberg, 2005; Tsai et al., 2011). Therefore, we expect different job positions to influence the recruiter's perceptions of the candidate such that recruiters will not perceive demographically similar candidates as similar to themselves when they do not like the job they are evaluating for.

Hypothesis 2: Demographic similarity generates similarity perceptions only when job desirability is high.

EFFECTS OF LIKING ON RECRUITERS' EVALUATION

As we mentioned previously, evidence shows a direct relationship between similarity perceptions and liking. Thus, we do not develop a specific hypothesis for this (Frank & Hackman, 1975; García et al., 2008) but rather propose a new relationship. In particular, we test whether liking

leads the recruiter to make more positive cognitive assessments of the candidate.

Liking has been identified as a robust predictor of performance ratings (Bates, 2002). In a similar study, García et al. (2008) examine two mechanisms behind the relationship between similarity and job fit perceptions of candidates: liking and performance expectations. In their study, they created different profiles of employees who were evaluated by participants in terms of degree of similarity, kindness and employability. The results showed that only performance expectations mediated the effect of similarity perceptions on job fit. Contrary to what we would expect, liking was not directly related to job fit perceptions. We argue that the liking measure used in that study did not evaluate the candidate in the work context. We propose that the liking measure should refer to the candidate as a potential employee for it to mediate the relationship between similarity perceptions and the candidate's evaluation.

The second mechanism García et al. (2008) evaluate is performance expectations; however, they do not identify the specific aspects that influence job fit. The performance expectations measure used consisted of five items, while the original scale consists of 25 (Welbourne, Johnson & Erez, 1998). We propose that similarity perceptions influence not only job fit perceptions but also the attributions the recruiters make about the candidate. Specifically, we expect recruiters to perceive similar candidates as more able, more motivated and more trustworthy. In addition, we propose that these perceptions, although not causal, are related to the higher job fit perceptions of the recruiter about the similar candidate. We test three other specific dimensions of performance expectations: "cognitive ability", "motivation" and "trust". We sequentially test the effects of these two variables together, where liking would lead first to performance expectations instead of directly to job fit perceptions. This effect was shown by Shelly (2001), who showed that respondents evaluated liked individuals more positively than disliked individuals and expected them to perform more competently.

In addition, recruiters are trained to select the most qualified candidates according to the candidates' "cognitive ability" (Hunter & Hunter, 1984; Schmidt & Hunter, 2004). Indeed, cognition is likely an attribute that recruiters explicitly search for when selecting candidates. High cognitive ability has a positive influence on performance in a wide range of jobs (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998). Moreover, evidence suggests that recruiters use candidates' biographical information to make inferences about the candidates' motivation (Brown & Campion, 1994). In addition, the sharing of demographic or biographical data with others generates interpersonal "trust", which leads recruiters to favor and select candidates with whom they share these characteristics rather than those with whom they do not (Jiang, Chua, Kotabe & Murray, 2011). This discussion leads to the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3: Higher similarity perceptions indirectly lead recruiters to infer (a) higher cognitive ability, (b) higher motivation, and (c) higher trust of the candidates through liking.

Hypothesis 4: Higher similarity perceptions indirectly lead recruiters to infer higher job fit perceptions through both liking and (a) cognitive ability, (b) motivation and (c) trust.

Figure 1 illustrates our full research model.

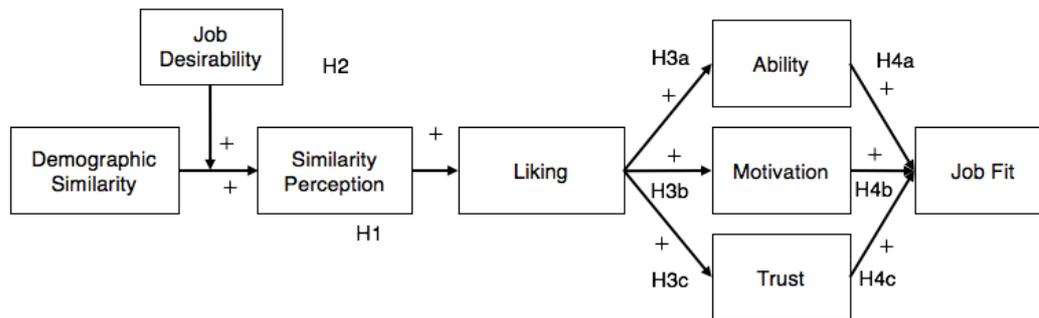


Figure 1. Research Model

EXPERIMENT 1

We designed Experiment 1 to test the influence of demographic characteristics on the similarity perception and the mediation effect of similarity perceptions for the relationship between demographic similarity and liking (H1).

METHOD

Participants. Forty-two master's students in human resources (HR) management participated in this experiment (10 men, 32 women). The average age of participants was 24.3 years ($SD = 3.45$), and the average experience in HR was 3.65 years ($SD = 8.34$). All participants received course credit for their participation. The experiment was a 2 (job position: telephone operator vs. computer programmer) \times 2 (demographic similarity: birthdate vs. last name) between-subjects design. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions.

Procedure. All of the participants acted as recruiters for the study. After the participants arrived at the lab, they received instructions on a computer screen. First, participants responded to some demographic questions. Second, they saw two different candidates' resumes and responded to questions after each of them. To control for order effects, the resumes were randomly presented. Third, after reading each resume, participants evaluated several characteristics of the two candidates, including liking and similarity perceptions. Finally, participants were debriefed and thanked for their participation.

Independent Variable: We manipulated "demographic similarity" based on prior work (Burger et al., 2004; Cotton et al., 2008; Miller et al., 1998). All participants had the role of recruiter and evaluated the resumes of two potential candidates; one candidate's resume was the control and the other candidate's resume was experimentally manipulated depending on the condition. We kept the information contained in both resumes constant in terms of the candidates' qualifications, experience and training. The only difference between resumes was that the experimental resume contained the recruiter's birthdate or last name (depending on the condition), and the control did not. Appendix B contains one example.

Dependent Variables. For "similarity perceptions", we adapted the measures used by García et al. (2008) to a resume screening situation. Therefore, our five items measured the similarity perceptions between recruiters and applicants (e.g. "I think I am similar to this person") ($\alpha = 0.95$). For "liking", we used three items based on Wayne and Ferris's

(1990) scale, which measured the recruiters' feelings about the applicants (e.g. "I'd feel good working with this person") ($\alpha = 0.83$). Items of every scale were measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

Results

Manipulation Checks. To ensure that participants identified the demographic similarity, we asked whether they shared any demographic characteristics with any of the candidates. Four participants in the birthdate condition and two participants in the last name condition responded incorrectly. They did not perceive any demographic similarity and were subsequently removed from all analyses. The final sample consisted of 36 participants.

Data Analysis. Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations and correlations between our main dependent variables. We used analysis of variance (ANOVA) to test mean differences between conditions and the Process macro (Hayes, 2012) to evaluate indirect effects. For every dependent variable used in the analysis, we controlled for the same variable of the control candidate.

Variable	Sim. Perceptions		Liking		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Correlation
1. CP_LN	4.37	0.73	5	0.76	.38
2. CP_BD	2.48	1.08	4.60	0.83	.38
3. CP_Control	2.80	1.28	4.21	0.43	.52
4. TO_LN	4.06	1.28	4.87	0.71	.60**
5. TO_BD	3.96	0.90	4.44	0.57	.60**
6. TO_Control	3.25	1.24	4.22	0.63	.61**

Note. $N = 42$. CP = Computer Programmer; LN = Last Name; BD = Birthdate; TO = Telephone Operator. The correlation corresponds to similarity perceptions and liking for the control and experimental candidates.

** $p < .01$.

Table 1 - Means, standard deviations and correlation between the main dependent variables

Results. We tested our assumption that demographic similarity between the recruiter and the candidate would generate higher similarity perceptions. The results of an analysis of variance with two factors show a main effect of demographic similarity on similarity perceptions ($F(3, 36) = 6.06, p = .015; d = .42$), as well as an interaction effect ($F(3, 36) = 5.41, p = .037$). The main effect of job type was not significant ($p > .14$). Means showed that last name generated higher similarity perceptions ($M = 4.16, SD = 1.12$) than birthdate ($M = 3.53, SD = 1.16$). Further, Cohen's effect size value ($d = .42$) suggested moderate to high practical significance.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that demographic similarity would have a positive indirect effect on liking through similarity perceptions. To test this indirect effect, we used Model 4 of the Process macro (Hayes, 2012). The results show that demographic similarity is positively related to liking

through similarity perceptions (indirect effect = .083, bootstrap 95% confidence interval [CI] = .001 to .227). The direct effects were not significant. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 is supported.

EXPERIMENT 2

The results of Experiment 1 indicated that demographic similarity influences similarity perceptions. In Experiment 2, we measure specifically how desirable the job position was for the recruiter. We selected less-desirable jobs (i.e. a telephone operator, a sewer inspector and a garbage collector) and measured how desirable these job positions were for the recruiter to test the effects of job desirability on the relationships between demographic similarity and similarity perceptions (H2). Moreover, we included several mechanisms that account for the relationship among similarity perceptions, liking and job fit. Specifically, we included emotional, cognitive and motivational expectations to understand how job fit perceptions were derived (H3 and H4).

METHOD

Participants. A total sample of 142 master's students in HR management participated in this study (53 men, 89 women). The average age was 22.67 years ($SD = 5.13$), and the average experience in HR was 1.78 years ($SD = 3.49$). All received course credit for their participation. The experiment was a 3 (job position: telephone operator, sewer inspector, garbage collector) \times 2 (demographic similarity: birthdate vs. last name) between-subjects design. Participants were randomly assigned to each condition.

Procedure. The procedure was the same as in Experiment 1, but now three undesirable jobs were presented depending on condition: telephone operator, sewer inspector and garbage collector.

Independent Variable. We manipulated "demographic similarity" as we did in Experiment 1; the experimental resume contained the recruiter's birthdate or last name (depending on the condition), and the control did not.

Dependent Variables. We used the same scale as in the previous study for "similarity perception" ($\alpha = 0.94$) and "liking" ($\alpha = 0.89$).

For "job fit", we adapted the scale of Kristof-Brown (2000) to a resume screening situation. We used three items to measure the recruiter's perceptions of the applicant's job fit (e.g. "This person fits the job") ($\alpha = 0.90$). We developed four items to assess "job desirability" as perceived by the recruiters (e.g. "Would you like to work as a [job position]?") ($\alpha = 0.91$). In addition, we developed four items to assess the degree of "cognitive ability" of the applicants (e.g. "This person has the ability to perform this job") ($\alpha = 0.90$). Next, we developed four items to assess the degree of "motivation" of the applicants (e.g. "This person will be motivated for this job") ($\alpha = 0.93$). Finally, we developed four items to assess the recruiter's "trust" in the applicants (e.g. "Do you trust this person's performance?") ($\alpha = 0.86$). Items on all scales were measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

RESULTS

Manipulation Checks. Participants were asked whether they remembered the job position for the recruitment. We removed 19 participants who responded incorrectly and thus failed to understand the

manipulations. Thus, the final sample for analysis consisted of 123 participants. Table 2 shows the means, standard deviations and correlations between our main dependent variables.

Variable	Sim. Perceptions		Liking		J.F. Perceptions			
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Correlation 1	Correlation 2
1. TO_LN	3.63	1.81	4.90	0.85	5.27	0.69	.33	.36**
2. TO_BD	3.03	1.31	4.49	0.79	5.28	0.80	.33	.36**
3. TO_Control	2.49	1.17	4.60	0.72	5.32	0.83	.19**	.23**
4. SI_LN	4.12	1.21	4.69	1.07	5.46	0.84	.29	.34**
5. SI_BD	2.98	1.40	4.61	0.80	5.36	0.83	.29	.34**
6. SI_Control	2.53	1.18	4.76	1.02	5.37	0.76	.17**	.20**
7. GC_LN	3.46	1.79	4.86	1.01	5.81	0.82	.32	.30**
8. GC_BD	3.68	1.25	4.87	0.94	5.39	1.01	.32	.30**
9. GC_Control	2.76	1.21	4.98	0.91	5.80	0.77	.20**	.19**

Note. *N* = 142. TO = Telephone Operator; LN = Last Name; BD = Birthdate; SI = Sewer Inspector; GC = Garbage Collector.

Correlation 1 corresponds to similarity perceptions and liking for the control and experimental candidates.

Correlation 2 corresponds to liking and job fit perceptions for the control and experimental candidates.

***p* < .01.

Table 2 - Means, standard deviations and correlations between the main dependent variables

Consistent with Experiment 1, demographic similarity had a positive effect on similarity perceptions ($F(1, 123) = 8.516, p = .004; d = .35$). Means showed that last name again generated higher similarity perceptions ($M = 3.72, SD = 1.64$) than birthdate ($M = 3.19, SD = 1.34$). Further, Cohen's effect size value ($d = .35$) suggested low to moderate practical significance. In addition, demographic similarity had a positive indirect effect on liking through similarity perceptions, using Model 4 (Hayes, 2012) (indirect effect = .050, bootstrap 95% CI = .002 to .125). The direct effect was not significant. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 is again supported.

In Experiment 2, we measured the desirability of each job for recruiters. Consistent with our prediction, the results show a moderation effect of job desirability on similarity perceptions ($F(1, 117) = 4.05, p < .05$). Specifically, demographic similarity led to higher similarity perceptions when job desirability was evaluated with values at the mean (conditional effect = .259, bootstrap 95% CI = .011 to .518) and above the mean

(conditional effect = .529, bootstrap 95% CI = .164 to .894); in contrast, when the values of job desirability were below the mean, this relationship was not significant (conditional effect = $-.001$, *n.s.*; see Figure 2). These results provide support for Hypothesis 2.

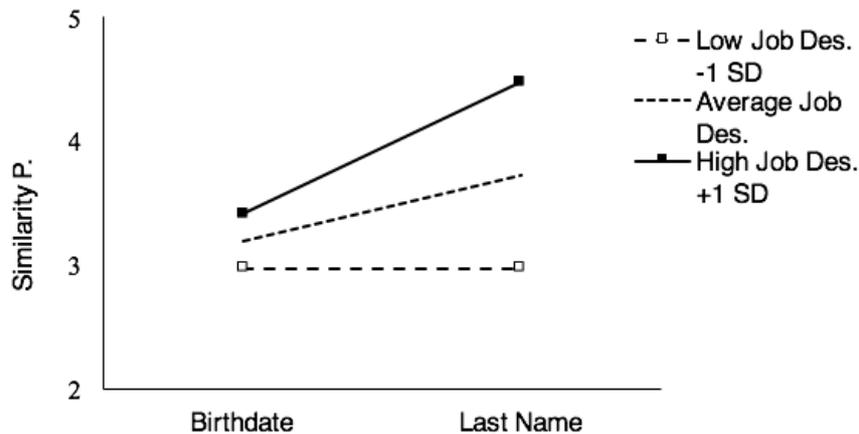
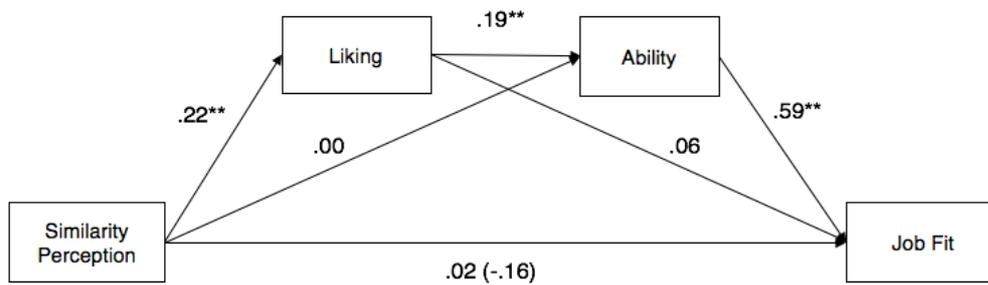


Figure 2. Interaction effect of demographic similarities by job desirability on similarity perception

Hypothesis 3 predicted that liking would mediate the relationship between similarity perceptions and recruiters' inference of the candidate's cognitive ability (Hypothesis 3a), motivation (Hypothesis 3b), and trust (Hypothesis 3c). To measure these three indirect effects, we again used Model 4 in the Process macro (Hayes, 2012). For every model, we controlled for the effects of liking and (in each case, depending on the model) the cognitive ability, motivation and trust inferences regarding the control candidate. The results show that liking mediated the relationship between recruiters' similarity perceptions and cognitive ability inference (indirect effect = .058, bootstrap 95% CI = .014 to .126) and trust inference (indirect effect = .044, bootstrap 95% CI = .008 to .120) of the candidate. In contrast, liking did not mediate the relationship between similarity perceptions and motivation inferences (indirect effect = .029, bootstrap 95% CI = $-.030$ to .108). None of the direct effects was significant. Therefore, Hypotheses 3a and 3c are supported, but Hypothesis 3b is not supported.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that similarity perceptions would generate higher job fit perceptions through liking and the recruiters' inference of the candidate's cognitive ability (Hypothesis 4a), motivation (Hypothesis 4b) and trust (Hypothesis 4c). For every model, we controlled for the effects of liking, job fit perceptions and (in each case, depending on the model) the cognitive ability, motivation and trust inferences regarding the control candidate. The results of a sequential mediation model (Model 6 of the Process macro; Hayes (2012)) show that liking and cognitive ability inferences (indirect effect = .038, bootstrap 95% CI = .010 to .094; see Figure 3) and liking and trust inferences (indirect effect = .024, bootstrap 95% CI = .004 to .071) sequentially mediated the relationship between similarity perceptions and job fit perceptions.



** $p < .01$

Figure 3. Standardized regression coefficients for the relationship between similarity perception and job fit perceptions as mediated by liking and ability perceptions. Mediation model (Study 2)

In contrast, liking and motivation inferences did not mediate this relationship (indirect effect = .006, bootstrap 95% CI = -.004 to .042). None of the direct effects was significant. These results provide partial support for Hypothesis 4.

We also test the three sequential models in reverse, with cognitive ability, motivation and trust perceptions as first mediators and liking as second mediator. All models include job fit as the independent variable. The results show that the models for cognitive ability (indirect effect = .188, bootstrap 95% CI = .044 to .465) and trust (indirect effect = .107, bootstrap 95% CI = .010 to .323) are significant. We cannot argue for causality in any of the three models given that the measures were taken at the same time. The model, however, shows the relationships across variables.

Additionally, we analyzed liking, cognitive ability, motivation and trust as independent mediators in the relationship between similarity perceptions and job fit. And these models were not significant (indirect effect = .016, bootstrap 95% CI = -.008 to .055), (indirect effect = .014, bootstrap 95% CI = -.011 to .065), (indirect effect = .000, bootstrap 95% CI = -.011 to .024), (indirect effect = .009, bootstrap 95% CI = -.003 to .058) respectively. Finally, we examined the effect of the participants' experience in Hypotheses 3 and 4, and the results show no differences for any of the analyses.

SOURCES OF SIMILARITY IN THE SELECTION PROCESS

We tested the robustness of the similarity perceptions by considering other possible sources of similarity that might be related to the selection process. Whereas Experiments 1 and 2 test whether the same last name or birthdate influences similarity perceptions, this study focuses on other possible sources of similarity relevant to the selection process.

METHOD

Participants. A total sample of 300 master's students in HR management participated in this study (109 men, 191 women). The average age of participants was 25.2 years ($SD = 9.45$), and the average experience in HR was 3.72 years ($SD = 9.56$). All participants received course credit for their participation. The experiment was a 3 (job position: telephone operator, computer programmer, welder) \times 3 (source of

similarity: work-related attributes, cover letter, cover letter with work-related attributes) between-subjects design. Participants were randomly assigned to each condition.

Procedure. The procedure was the same as in Experiments 1 and 2, but three job positions were presented depending on condition: telephone operator, computer programmer or welder.

Independent Variable. For the work-related attributes manipulation, we asked participants to select (before running the experiment) three skills describing themselves. One of the resumes contained the skills the participant selected as describing him- or herself, while the other resume contained skills the participant did not select (depending on condition). For the cover letter manipulation, one resume contained a cover letter focused on the organization, while the cover letter of the other resume focused on the applicant (depending on condition). For the cover letter plus attributes, we used a combination of both manipulations, such that one resume contained a cover letter focused on the organization plus the three skills selected by the participant, while the other resume contained a letter focused on the applicant plus three skills not selected by the participant. We expect the cover letter to influence similarity perceptions in two ways: first, by activating group membership (in the similarity condition, the letter is focused on the organization and not on the candidate), and second, by activating work-related similarity with the recruiter (in the cover letter plus attributes condition, the letter contained three work skills that the recruiter reported having him- or herself). The full description of the manipulations and all descriptive statistics are available from the authors.

Dependent Variables. We used the same items and scales as in Experiment 1: "similarity perceptions" ($\alpha = 0.96$) and "liking" ($\alpha = 0.88$).

RESULTS

Manipulation Checks. Participants were asked to remember the job position they evaluated. We removed 59 participants who responded incorrectly and thus failed to understand the manipulations. The final sample for analysis thus consisted of 241 participants.

Consistent with Experiments 1 and 2, other sources of similarity had a positive effect on similarity perceptions ($F(2, 240) = 4.26, p = .01; d = .29$). Means showed that the cover letter plus attributes generated higher similarity perceptions ($M = 3.89, SD = 1.31$) than the cover letter ($M = 3.36, SD = 1.29$) or attributes ($M = 3.59, SD = 1.49$) separately. Post hoc tests using the Bonferroni correction revealed that these differences were statistically significant when comparing cover letter plus attributes with cover letter ($p = .012$). Further, Cohen's effect size value ($d = .29$) suggested low practical significance. This result generalizes the effect of similarity to work-related attributes. We go beyond demographics and use work-related attributes to generate similarity perceptions.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Our two experiments provide evidence of the effect of similarity on recruitment evaluations. Experiment 1 shows that demographic similarity between the candidate and the recruiter has an effect on the recruiter's liking through similarity perceptions. Our second study shows that job desirability moderates the effect of similarity on the recruiter's perceptions. Our results are consistent with past studies focused on demographics to influence similarity perceptions (Cotton et al., 2008; Graves & Powell, 1995). In both experiments, we replicate this effect and distinguish

demographic similarity and similarity perceptions. Our research introduced a boundary condition: job desirability. The results show that the demographically similar candidate was favored only when the job position was desirable to the recruiter. Our results also provide evidence of liking and cognitive ability perceptions as mediators of the effect of perceived similarity on the recruiter's perception of job fit. Finally, we provide evidence of the robustness of the similarity effect by showing that work-related attributes generate similarity perceptions.

The contribution of this research to the literature is threefold. First, we suggest a model that takes into account previous findings in the relationship between similarity and job fit perceptions and tries to integrate the different findings. Second, our study proposes a boundary condition for the effect of demographic similarity on liking: job desirability. Third, our research extends the work of García et al. (2008), in that our design contains both cognitive and emotional mechanisms for the effect of liking on job fit perceptions.

Moreover, similarity perceptions mediate the relationship between demographic similarity and liking. Some studies support the direct effect of actual demographic similarity on liking (Byrne, 1971; Condon & Crano, 1988; Frank & Hackman, 1975; Rand & Wexley, 1975). However, other studies have found support for the indirect effect of demographic similarity on liking through similarity perceptions (Goldberg, 2005; Graves & Powell, 1988). Our research is consistent with the latter group of studies.

A possible explanation for the direct effect observed by some studies could be that these studies do not separate demographic similarity from similarity perceptions. We suggest that when demographic similarity is manipulated, it can also be a proxy for similarity perceptions. However, we understand these two concepts as different and complementary, and we believe a distinction must be made between them. Similarity perceptions include one's own evaluation of how similar one is to another, while actual demographic just highlights the other's information. Thus, our results partially support the attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1981) (demographic similarity did not have a direct effect on liking) and fully support the social identity theory by showing that people prefer other people who belong to the same social group as themselves (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

To test the robustness of the similarity perceptions, we go beyond demographics and use work-related attributes to generate similarity perceptions. For example, a cover letter that focuses on the organization and that includes similar work-related attributes leads to higher levels of similarity perceptions compared to a cover letter or attributes on the resume separately. This extends the effects to other sources of similarity (beyond last name and birthdate). However, across studies, our results show that demographic similarity is a stronger source of similarity compared to organizational variables such as the cover letter or work-related attributes. To our knowledge, our study is the first to find that work-related attributes influence similarity perceptions.

One of our main contributions is that job desirability acts as a moderator in the relationship between demographic similarity and similarity perceptions (Experiment 2). Jobs with low desirability prevented recruiters from perceiving similarity with the candidate. If recruiters like the job, demographic similarity will lead them to higher similarity perceptions with the similar candidate; on the other hand, if they find the job undesirable, demographic similarity did not affect similarity perceptions. We refer to this effect as the irony of choice, in which recruiters tend to favor similar candidates, but only when the job is desirable. If the job is undesirable, they tend to favor the dissimilar candidate. Moreover, Experiment 2

addresses the cognitive and emotional mechanisms behind the relationship between similarity perceptions and job fit perceptions. We found that higher similarity perceptions lead recruiters to infer cognitive ability and trust of the candidate through liking. Liking acts as a mediator for the inference process, as it is not possible to infer high cognitive ability or trust of the candidate directly through similarity perceptions. Contrary to our expectations, liking does not lead to inferences about the candidate's motivation. Finally, we show that liking and cognitive ability, and liking and trust of the candidate, sequentially mediate the relationship between similarity perception and job fit perceptions.

Consistent with the studies by Bagues and Perez-Villadoniga (2012) and Frank and Hackman (1975), our study supports the idea that recruiters' perceptions of candidates influence their decisions about the recruitment process. We specifically show that the perception of job fit is more favorable for similar candidates unless recruiters do not find the particular vacant post desirable. This has managerial implication for managers, as well as for minorities and non-conventional candidates who are less likely to generate similarity perceptions with the recruiter. These non-conventional candidates will be more likely to be perceived as fit for jobs that are undesirable to the recruiter. Another managerial implication of the results of this study is that organizations need to be careful about recruiting too many similar people. This could have negative effects such as groupthink, which occurs when a group makes faulty decisions because group pressures lead to a deterioration of "mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgment" (Janis, 1982).

Our data show that experience in human resource management did not enable participants to avoid these biased perceptions. Our research calls for further investigation that focuses on limiting the effects of bias perceptions in selection processes. Evidence suggest that training might not be enough (Wilson & Brekke, 1994), and therefore more research is needed on the essential elements included in resumes as they go through online recruitment platforms.

Future research could also expand this topic to other types of organizations and cultural contexts or replicate the findings with data from consulting organizations focused on resume screening situations. Future research should also seek to determine whether structuring the resume evaluation process (e.g. employing a structured resume rating form and training recruiters on how to evaluate applicants' resumes) has any effect on the reliability and validity of recruiters' inference making.

The most serious limitation is that we are assessing perceptions in a laboratory context. Although we tried to make it as real as possible, participants' judgements were influenced by sharing the same last name or birthdate with a candidate in a recruiting process. We do not know how much this may affect actual behavior in the field. Further research is still needed in the recruitment process. Another limitation concerns the sample itself, as the participants of the three experimental studies were master's students in HR management with limited working experience. However, previous research has argued that students may provide insights into processes that organizations use to reach decisions (Greenberg, 1987) and that students may yield valuable information in a well-designed study (Demerouti & Rispens, 2014; Eder & Buckley, 1988; Wheeler, Shanine, Leon & Whitman, 2014). As a result, the use of students is appropriate when examining HR processes such as the hiring process.

Another limitation concerns the selection process. Previous studies have demonstrated that depending on the nature of the selection process (e.g. face-to-face, telephone interview), recruiters may behave differently

(Raza & Carpenter, 1987; Silvester, Anderson, Haddleton, Cunningham-Snell & Gibb, 2000). Our research focuses on a context in which recruiters have to make decisions between equally qualified applicants. Demographic similarities, cover letters and other sources of similarity might be less relevant and have less influence when some applicants are more qualified than others. Finally, we acknowledge a common method bias, as all respondents were asked all the questions in a single survey.

In conclusion, this work shows that job fit perceptions are influenced by cognitive biases, which have a detrimental effect on the selection process because of the potential disregarding of valid candidates. Organizations interested in promoting ethical behavior and a positive diversity climate should therefore undertake efforts to minimize such biases and facilitate more thoughtful decision making.

APPENDICES

Appendix A - Review of the main studies testing the relationship between similarity perceptions and job fit perceptions

STUDY	Context	Quality of the relationship (similar perceptions -> Job fit perceptions)	How is the "similarity" variable operationalized?	How is the "similar-to-me" variable measured?	Dependent variable(s)	Other measures
Bagues, M. & Perez-Villadoniga, M.J. (2012)	Interview	Direct	Objective	Matching similar expertise knowledge between candidates and committees	Success in the exam (likely to be hired)	N/A
Chen, C.C. & Lin, M.M. (2014)	Interview	Direct	Subjective – Similarity perception	Howard & Ferris (1996) 4 items	Hiring recommendation	Positive Mood; P–O fit (Person–Org.), P–J fit (Person–Job), P–R fit (Person–recruiter) perceptions
Cotton, J.L., O'Neill, B.S. & Griffin, A. (2008)	Recruitment	Indirect (through emotional factors)	Objective – Common and uncommon names	Manipulated	Hiring intention	Likeability; Uniqueness
Dalessio, A. & Imada, A.S. (1984).	Interview	Direct	Subjective – Similarity perception	Ratings of different characteristics	Hiring intention	N/A
Frank, L.L. & Hackman, J.R. (1975)	Interview	Direct	Objective – Similar characteristics	1-10 scale based on the 10 item category list	Bias toward (or against) the applicant (rating with overall assessment)	Liking for the applicant
García, M.F., Posthuma, R.A. & Colella, A. (2008)	Interview	Indirect (through performance expectations)	Subjective – Similarity perception	3 items adapted from Turban and Jones (1988) and 1 adapted from Kristof-Brown, Barrick, and Franke (2002).	Job fit perceptions; Hiring recommendation	Liking for the applicant; Performance expectations
Goldberg, C.B. (2005)	Interview	Indirect (through emotional factors) – No effects found	Objective and subjective – Demographic and Similarity perceptions	Byrne (1971) 4 items	Overall interview assessment; Offer decision	Interpersonal attraction
Graves, L.M. & Powell, G.N. (1995)	Interview	Indirect (through emotional factors)	Objective and Subjective – Gender similarity	Byrne (1971) 4 items	Interviewer's final evaluation (interview outcomes)	Interpersonal attraction; Subjective qualifications
Howard, J.L. & Ferris, G.R. (1996)	Interview	Indirect (through emotional and cognitive factors)	Subjective – Similarity perception	Howard & Ferris (1996) 4 items	Job suitability of the applicant	Affect toward the applicant; Perceived competence of the applicant
O'Leary, B.J., Durham, CR., Weathington, B.L., Cothran, D.L. & Cunningham, C.J. (2009).	Recruitment	Direct	Subjective – Similarity perception	Ranking the candidates according the perceived similarity measure (1-4)	Hiring recommendation; Overall qualifications	Perceived ability and performance
Rand T.M. & Wexley, K.N. (1975)	Interview	Direct	Objective but based on stereotypes	Manipulated	Hiring recommendation	Interpersonal attraction; Job fit perceptions; Likeability; Intelligence perceptions
Tsai, W.C., Chi, N.W., Huang, T.C. & Hsu, A.J. (2011)	Interview	Indirect (through PO fit and/or PJ fit)	Subjective – Similarity perception	Howard & Ferris (1996) 4 items	Hiring recommendation	Positive Mood; P–O fit (Person–Org.), P–J fit (Person–Job), P–P fit (Person–person) perceptions

These papers were identified by searching Web of Science for the terms "demographic similarity", "similarity perceptions", "selection decisions" and "recruiter's evaluations". Our inclusion criteria were: 1) use of similarity as the independent variable in a recruitment or interview context and 2) use of job fit, hiring intentions, or interview assessments as the dependent variables. We also included papers citing or cited in García, Posthuma and Colella (2008).

Appendix B - Resume example for the telephone operator with last name manipulated condition

RESUME TELEPHONE OPERATOR CONTROL CONDITION	RESUME TELEPHONE OPERATOR EXPERIMENTAL CONDITION
JOB: TELEPHONE OPERATOR	JOB: TELEPHONE OPERATOR
APPLICANT N°486	APPLICANT N°488
BIO:	BIO:
Name: C.	Name: D.
Last Name: García Sánchez.	Last Name: < Participant's Last Name >
Birthday: 25/07/1985	Birthday: 25/07/1985
Place of origin: Seville	Place of origin: Seville
ACADEMIC FORMATION:	ACADEMIC FORMATION:
- High School.	- High School.
JOB EXPERIENCE:	JOB EXPERIENCE:
- 2 years working at the Company "Answering".	- 2 years working at the Company "Speaking".
COMPLEMENTARY FORMATION:	COMPLEMENTARY FORMATION:
- Communication skills training (400hrs)	- Communication skills training (400hrs)

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