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## The effect of perceived overqualification on job satisfaction and career satisfaction among immigrants: Does host national identity matter?



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### ABSTRACT

Overqualification is a form of person-job misfit that is common among those who reside in a foreign country. It is associated with poor work-related well-being and can inhibit full adjustment to the host society. The goal of our study is to examine the impact of perceived overqualification on job satisfaction and career satisfaction among immigrants. Furthermore, we investigated immigrants' host national identity as a moderator of the impact of perceived overqualification on job satisfaction and career satisfaction. We analysed longitudinal online survey data from 124 Italian and Spanish immigrants who migrated to Germany between 2000 and 2014. Regression analyses show that perceived overqualification is negatively associated with job satisfaction six months later. Furthermore, host national identity moderates the association between perceived overqualification and job satisfaction: low overqualification is beneficial for job satisfaction whereas high overqualification is a threat for job satisfaction, especially for immigrants who identify strongly with the host society. We do not find corresponding direct and moderating effects on career satisfaction. We conclude that indicators of acculturation, such as host national identity, are worth considering in order to understand the impact of person-job misfit on work-related well-being among immigrants.

### Introduction

Employees who are overqualified possess more education, experience, knowledge or skills than required for their job. Consequently they are unable to put their full professional potential to use and are likely to perceive their job as a poor fit (Maynard, Joseph, & Maynard, 2006). Overqualification constitutes a form of underemployment, a broader concept that comprises various situations of having jobs that are inferior by some standards: such as insufficient pay or hours, employment outside of the person's training and expertise and limited options for utilizing professional skills (for a review, see McKee-Ryan & Harvey, 2011). The awareness of overqualification by an individual, referred to as perceived overqualification, has been widely used as an indicator of underemployment in social science and psychological research (for a review, see Liu & Wang, 2012). This research has shown a negative relationship between perceived overqualification and work-related well-being (e.g., Maynard et al., 2006; Wu, Luksyte, & Parker, 2015).

Overqualification is a common experience among immigrants (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Crollard, de Castro, & Tsai, 2012). Previous

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research has identified various barriers for immigrants to obtain positions commensurate with their qualifications. These include lack of language fluency, cultural knowledge and social contacts (Guerrero & Rothstein, 2012; Johnston, Khattab, & Manley, 2015) as well as lack of recognition of foreign degrees and experiences (Hakak, Holzinger, & Zikic, 2010; Zikic, Bonache, & Cerdin, 2010). However, studies have shown that these barriers do not fully explain overqualification among immigrants and have concluded that also discrimination might play a role (Duvander, 2001; Støren & Wiers-Jenssen, 2010).

The prevalence of overqualification indicates that immigrants are not sufficiently integrated into the host-country economy (Aycan & Berry, 1996). Overqualified immigrants lack the opportunity to use all of their skills on the job and are unable to realize their full potential. This, in turn, restricts their possibility of meeting their basic needs, such as economic and career advancements and recognition within the host society (Adler, 1977; Nabi, 2003). Consequently, overqualification may further hinder immigrants' overall adjustment to the host society and can be a serious stressor for them (e.g., Chen, Smith, & Mustard, 2010; Dean & Wilson, 2009).

Even though overqualification is a potentially stressful experience for all immigrants, individuals differ in the way they appraise and react to stressors (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Thus, researchers have called for the investigation of factors that moderate the effect of perceived overqualification (e.g., Erdogan, Bauer, Peiró, & Truxillo, 2011; McKee-Ryan & Harvey, 2011). In our study we focus on identification with the host nation (hereinafter: host national identity; Fuller-Rowell, Ong, & Phinney, 2013) as a potential moderator of the impact of perceived overqualification on work-related well-being among immigrants.

We posit that the negative effect of overqualification on work-related well-being is stronger for immigrants with high levels of host national identity. We argue that these immigrants feel more attached to the host country (Fuller-Rowell et al., 2013) and therefore are likely to desire the status of a valued member of the host society (Hogg & Terry, 2000). Overqualification might threaten this goal as their job does not allow them to demonstrate their full professional potential.

The goal of our study is to examine the impact of perceived overqualification on work-related well-being among immigrants along with the moderating effect of host national identity. We contribute to the existing body of literature in three ways. First, we broaden knowledge on the effects of perceived overqualification in the context of migration and answer the call for more population-specific research on overqualification (Erdogan et al., 2011). In doing so, we focus on immigrants from Southern Europe (Italy and Spain) in Germany. Germany is the European country with the highest migration inflow in absolute numbers (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, 2016). In the years prior to this study, Germany faced a significant increase of migration, especially from Italy (+35% from 2012 to 2013) and Spain (+17% from 2012 to 2013, Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, 2015). These countries were particularly affected by the recent economic crisis (Matthijs, 2014).

Second, we contribute to the literature on perceived overqualification by addressing two different indicators of work-related well-being as potential outcomes using a longitudinal research design. By investigating the impact of perceived overqualification on job satisfaction and career satisfaction, we focus on both the current work-related effects (job satisfaction) and long-term work-related effects (career satisfaction) of perceived overqualification. By using longitudinal data, we are able to investigate the effects of perceived overqualification over time.

Third, we investigate host national identity as a potential moderator that increases the negative effect of perceived overqualification on work-related well-being. Previous research on overqualification identified various factors that interact with the effect of overqualification on work-related well-being (Erdogan & Bauer, 2009; Johnson & Johnson, 1997). However, this research did not focus on moderators that are specific to immigrants. Our study integrates theoretical considerations on host national identity as an indicator of acculturation (e.g., Berry, 1997, 2005; Phinney et al., 2001; Schwartz, Montgomery, & Briones, 2006; Schwartz et al., 2011) into research on overqualification, thus connecting two lines of research that are typically considered independently.

### *Perceived overqualification as a predictor of work-related well-being*

Education, experience, knowledge and skills that exceed job requirements are associated with low levels of work-related well-being (Wu et al., 2015). This negative effect is often explained by person-job fit theory (Edwards, Caplan, & Harrison, 1998; Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005): a fit between the characteristics of a person and his or her job enhances well-being, whereas a misfit impairs it. Overqualification is a misfit between the job requirements and abilities of an employee (e.g., Maynard et al., 2006). Likewise, overqualification can be considered as a misfit between the needs of an employee (e.g., to exercise valued skills) and the supply (e.g., challenging tasks) offered by the job (Liu, Luksyte, Zhou, Shi, & Wang, 2015; Luksyte, Spitzmueller, & Maynard, 2011).

The extent to which an individual perceives overqualification mainly depends on the objective mismatch between the person's educational attainments and the job's educational requirements. However, other influencing factors are the person's standards of comparison (e.g., his or her own prior job situation, the job situation of co-workers or of other immigrants), personality traits and contextual factors. As a result, objective and perceived overqualification are related but distinct constructs (Liu & Wang, 2012; Maltarich, Reilly, & Nyberg, 2011). Prior research suggests that perceived overqualification, compared to objective overqualification, is a more proximal and therefore stronger predictor of work-related well-being (Khan & Morrow, 1991; Liu & Wang, 2012).

This study focuses on job satisfaction and career satisfaction as indicators of work-related well-being. Job satisfaction is an employee's overall affective, cognitive and evaluative reaction towards his or her job (Greenberg & Baron, 1997). People assess various characteristics of their jobs, including the opportunity for skill utilization (Warr, 1999), and aspects such as task variety, opportunity for personal control, supervisor style, job security or salary (e.g., Lewis, Brazil, Krueger, Lohfeld, & Tjam, 2001; Skalli, Theodossiou, & Vasileiou, 2008; Warr, 1999).

Individuals who perceive overqualification can feel under-valued and consequently be dissatisfied with their job, because based on their qualification they feel entitled to a better job (Crosby, 1976; Wu et al., 2015). Research has widely investigated the impact of

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