Feel the Inequality: Group Disparity and Group Emotions

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INTRODUCTION

Group diversity is nowadays one of the most investigated aspects of group life in organizations. Whether diversity is depicted as beneficial (the value-in-diversity perspective) or as conflict-eliciting (the diversity-conflict-performance perspective), most studies focus though on the effect of diversity on team and organizational performance (van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007). Two critiques have been recently raised towards this current state of art.

The first critique comes from inside management literature and regards the overwhelming focus of group studies in general on the structure and performance of small groups, in the detriment of the emotional components of group life (Kelly & Barsade, 2001). Kulik (2004) particularizes this proposition to diversity studies (in relation to performance) and asserts that the current diversity paradigm needs expanding in order to qualify for a logical explanatory mechanism. Hence, he builds on the work of Kelly and Barsade (2001) and expands the group diversity-conflict-performance paradigm by explicitly inserting group emotion into the group dynamic process, as a mediator between conflict and performance (Kulik, 2004).

The second critique comes from fundamental research in sociology, and argues that management literature paid too little attention to the classical theories investigating the relationship between diversity and inequality (Di Tomaso, Post & Parks-Yancy, 2007). Di Tomaso et al. state that ‘workforce diversity is about the study of inequality and, as such, needs to be linked to the broad literatures on inequality in the disciplines of sociology and psychology’ (Di Tomaso, Post & Parks-Yancy, 2007: 491). Consequently, they advise for more interdisciplinary theory integration, instead of separation.

Building on these critiques, the current paper tackles the relationship between group disparity, group conflict and group emotions. Group disparity is defined as the vertical asymmetry in the distribution of socially valued resources between group members (Harrison & Klein, 2007), and is therefore by excellence the type of diversity addressing inequality issues. Accordingly, group disparity entails a high probability of leading to group conflict and thus impacting group emotions. Our aim is to propose an explanatory model that addresses the relations between group disparity and group emotions, mediated by group conflict.

Addressing the need to bridge fundamental theory and management literature (Di Tomaso et al., 2007), we proceed in two ways in our investigation. First, a bottom-up approach is reflected by a literature review of the antecedents of group emotions and of the consequences of group disparity. Second, we continue with a top-down integration, based on the concepts and models of fundamental theories in the study of group diversity as inequality. By combining these two we finally propose a model depicting the impact of group disparity on group emotions and the underlying mechanisms.
Literature Search

We used multiple search techniques to identify empirical papers that investigate group emotions and group disparity. In the first step, we searched in ABI/Inform Global and PsycINFO databases using relevant key-words for document title and abstract. Examples of key-words for group emotions are: emotion & group, emotion & team, affect & group, affect & team, emotion & organization, affect & organization, work group moods, team affective climate. Because the article of Harrison & Klein (2007) is the first to distinguish disparity from other types of diversity in group research area, we started by searching papers that quote it. We also used it to generate a pool of key-terms that triggers group disparity. Example of key-words are: disparity & group/team, inequality & team/group, group/team homogeneity/heterogeneity. We also searched for combinations of these key-words with the main attributes described as relevant for disparity by Harrison & Klein: power, status, pay, income. In the second step, we performed a manual search of table contents of relevant journals for group research. The journals relevance was established taking into account two criteria: research field and impact factor. Therefore, we searched in journals with the highest impact factor in the field of management and applied psychology relevant for group research. Examples of such journals are: Academy of Management Journal, Administrative Science Quarterly, Personnel Psychology. We started our search with the year when the first relevant article had been published in each of the two areas: George (1990) for group emotions and, Eisenhardt & Bourgeois (1988) for disparity. As suggested by Webster & Watson, conference proceedings known with a reputation for quality have also been examined. In this sense, Academy of Management Annual Meeting Proceedings have been searched for relevant empirical papers. In the third step, we used the backward and forward procedure to identify studies not captured by the previous steps. All the citations of the articles identified in the first two steps have been reviewed. After we established the final pool of key-articles, we used Web of Science engine to identify the articles citing the key-articles identified in the previous steps. The literature search ended when no new articles were identified.

Selection Criteria

We included the empirical papers that conceptualized and measured emotion and disparity at a group level. Relatively to group emotion, only the studies that used a team-level aggregation of individual emotions or other forms of group measurement of emotions have been included. The antecedents of individual emotions emerged inside a group as well as the consequences of group emotion were not addressed in the current review. For group disparity, two inclusion criteria have been used. First, the attribute dispersed among group members had to be socially valued or to represent a desired resource for the group. Only this type of attributes, triggering on inequalities, are appropriate for group disparity (Harrison & Klein, 2007). Second, the measurement of dispersion had to be made through the coefficient of variation CV = SD(D)/Dmean or Gini coefficient (the sum of all pairwise absolute difference between unit members on variable D, divided by [2 × Dmean × n2]). According to Harrison & Klein (2007) these two indices are appropriate for capturing the concept of disparity. In addition, studies using explicitly other indices of disparity (e.g. qualitative assessments) have been included. Using the mentioned criteria, 13 studies have been identified for group emotion antecedents and 8 studies for group disparity.
BUILDING THE MODEL

Step one: approaching from the study of group emotions

Group emotion is a concept that defines the emotion of the group as a whole at a particular moment. It emerges at a group level while individuals are interacting one with another (Barsade & Gibson, 2007).

George (1990) was the first to define group emotion as a consistent and homogeneous affective reaction within a group, distinct from individual emotions. However, he localizes at individual level the mechanisms explaining group emotion: since groups are usually composed of members with similar global personality orientation (the attraction-selection-attrition framework, Schneider, 1987), they will have similar behaviours and affective reactions and therefore, one affective tone. By focusing on what is shared, as a consequence of similar personalities, rather than what can be achieved through interaction, the emerging nature of group emotion is still not effectively captured.

An interaction perspective is taken by Barsade & Gibson (1998). The authors propose two complementary approaches to group emotions: top-down and bottom-up. The top-down approach states that during work group activities, group members interact and transmit their emotions to one another via processes like contagion or comparison. Group emotion is formed first at group level, being felt afterwards by each member of the group. Complementary to this approach, the bottom-up perspective captures the unique compositional effects of group members’ emotions on group emotion as an emergent state. For instance, one group member’s negative affect contrasting with the other group members’ positive affects can influence the valence and intensity of group emotion. If the member with a negative affect is situated in a power-position, he can influence the others’ positive affects and reactions of rejection or defensiveness to his own affect (Grawitch, Munz & Kramer, 2003). If the member exhibiting the negative affect does not detain an influential position in the group, he might increase his emotional concealment and therefore have a lesser impact on the group emotion (Ozcelik, 2009).

Whether group emotion is viewed as shared or emerging, the output can be characterized along several dimensions or facets. The circumplex model of affect (Bartel & Saavedra, 2000; Segura & Gonzalez-Roma, 2003; Weiss & Coprazzano, 1996) organizes the whole range of affects along two orthogonal primary dimensions: pleasantness (pleasant-unpleasant) and energy (low energetic-high energetic). In numerous studies, this model has proved valid and discriminant when having to differentiate various group emotions in relation to other variables (Bartel & Saavedra, 2000; Segura & Gonzales-Roma, 2003; Weiss & Coprazzano, 1996).

Group emotion antecedents

Some attempts of organizing group emotion antecedents and theorizing on possible relationships have been made in the input-process-output model (Kelly & Barsade, 2001). In this model, antecedents are clustered at an individual and an external/environment level, as well as in affective vs. non-affective categories. Briefly, individual emotions pertain to the individual affective level antecedents, while organizational and group norms, as well as group’s emotional history pertain to the contextual affective level. The non-affective antecedents considered are related to physical context (noise, physical layout of the environment), technological conditions (face-to-face interactions vs. virtual groups) and intergroup context.

The antecedents identified in the current review fall in all the categories identified by Kelly & Barsade. At an individual level, group members’ moods and happiness (Totterdell, 2000) or their
disposition towards positive/negative affectivity (George, 1990) and emotional contagion (Ilie, Wagner & Morgeson, 2007) have been found to relate to all types of group emotion. Contextual affective antecedents have been investigated as well. Group regulation norms and membership stability (Baartel & Saavedra, 2000) relate positively with group emotion contagion. Only one study investigated a non-affective contextual variable, mainly team obstacles (Pirola-Merlo, Hartel, Mann & Hirst, 2002), which relates negatively to group positive affect. In addition, several group processes have been studied as group emotion antecedents. Task and relationship conflict (Gamero, Gonzales-Roma & Peiro, 2008; Varela, Burke & Landis, 2008), as well as cohesion and coordination (Baartel & Saavedra, 2000) relate to various types of group affect.

Concerning group diversity, we only found one study referring to the impact of cognitive styles heterogeneity on group positive affect (Kurtzberg, 2005). None of the antecedents identified refer to group disparity. However, particular antecedents like dysfunctional behaviours (Cole Walter & Bruch 2008) or leadership style (Pirola-Merlo, Hartel, Mann & Hirst, 2002) might provide useful insights for analyzing through which behavioural means disparity might impact upon group emotion. For instance, a group member detaining less resources in a group might engage in behaviours intended to impair team functioning and this will generate further on a negative affect inside the group (Cole Walter & Bruch 2008).

The notion of leadership relates to disparity because it ultimately defines a situation in which one person (the leader) detains a large amount of power/resources compared with the others. Therefore, his style in managing the group directly impacts group affect. A style in which he/she facilitates positive relations and institutes a sense of a common vision in the team is associated with positive affects (Pirola-Merlo, Hartel, Mann & Hirst, 2002). Furthermore, in any situation of disparity, the person detaining the valued resources has the possibility of becoming the leader. This legitimization of the disparity situation can be the consequence of his/her ability to handle the situation from that privileged position and to use further a beneficial style, that will facilitate the emergence of a positive climate in the group.

Concluding, the literature on group emotion has incorporated various types of antecedents, from affective to non-affective, individual, contextual or team process level. Group disparity has not been investigated among these antecedents, the only approaches to the relation between this concept and group emotion being made through other related antecedents as dysfunctional behaviour and leadership style.

Step two: approaching from the study of group disparity

Disparity refers to ‘differences in concentration of valued social assets or resources such as pay and status among unit members – vertical differences that, at their extreme, privilege a few over many’ (Harrison & Klein, 2007: 2). Examples of such resources are pay, social power, status, knowledge.

As a result of the perceived inequalities, disparity increases competition (Bloom, 1999) and deviant behaviours (Homans, 1961; Pfeffer & Langton, 1993). Although all types of diversity have a potential for triggering emotional reactions, we argue this potential is particularly high in the case of disparity. During group interactions, disparity will generate affective reactions, based on the perceived inequality.

How and why disparity affects groups’ cognitions, emotions and behaviours are questions largely tackled both by sociological and psychological social psychology (Di Tomaso et al., 2007). Nevertheless, only two theories have entered the management research on workforce diversity, namely social identity theory (with a special emphasis on social categorization, Turner, 1987), and the similarity-attraction theory (Byrne, 1987). Other theories (e.g., social dominance
theory, status construction and expectations states theory, system justification theory, and the approach vs. inhibition perspective) have nonetheless brought important contributions to the field and their propositions can help explain the various (and sometimes apparently discrepant) consequences of group disparity.

According to these theories, two major cognitive and behavioural patterns can occur in a group characterized by high disparity. In the first pattern (Keltner, Gruenfeld & Anderson, 2003; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Ridgeway, 1991; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) group members would like to maintain the status-quo (both those having and not having the desired resource) while in the second (Brickson & Brewer, 2001; Hewstone, Martin, Hammer-Hewstone, Crisp & Voci, 2001) pattern group members would like to change the disparity situation (those without resources trying to change their position for the better). For each of these patterns, both behavioural and cognitive reactions are described. Furthermore, different affective reactions accompany each of these two situations. Therefore, we briefly present next the cognitive and behavioural mechanisms that lead to these patterns, as predicted in social psychological theories. We will then use these fundamental theories as building block assumptions for our explanatory model.

(1) Status-quo maintenance. At a behavioural level, social dominance theory (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) explains the perpetuation of status-quo by those having the power acting more dominantly and preferring more hierarchical social relationships. The approach vs. inhibition perspective (Keltner, Gruenfeld & Anderson, 2003) explains it by different types of behaviour exhibited by the ones holding the advantageous position (who enact presentations of self that are other-approaching) and the ones in disadvantageous positions (who inhibit their engagement with others). Both these perspectives imply that in systems/groups in which power disparity exists over a longer period of time, those in disadvantageous positions (i.e., having less resources) become more constrained and inhibited in their behaviour, whereas those in advantageous position increase their assertiveness, and often gain even more resources as a consequence of their attitude and behaviour (Di Tomaso et al., 2007). In brief, these two theories explain how systems perpetuate their status-quo in behavioural terms.

Two other theories take a different approach and look at the cognitions (from simple beliefs to ideology systems) backing up system reproduction. Status construction theory (a.k.a. expectations states theory) builds on the association between resources and assumptions about competence or worth of those detaining them (Ridgeway, 1991). This association implies that those having the resources act more confidently, and those not having them regard them with deference. System justification theory (Jost & Banaji, 1994) argues that those in disadvantageous positions do not challenge the system because it is generally too costly or risky for them to do so. Hence, it is easier for them to justify the system of inequality and build beliefs about people getting what they deserve. Both these theories in fact tackle the issue of legitimacy of the inequality, having this in common with social identity theory as well. In brief, what all these theories state is that an unequalitarian system will not be challenged if it is legitimized in any way (Ellemers, 2001; Ridgeway, 1991; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

However, accepting the inequality does not come without a price at affective level. Based on the propositions of these theories, one would expect that the emotion emerging at group level would be placed in the quadrant delineated by the low energetic and unpleasant ends of axes (according to the circumplex model of emotions – Bartel & Saavedra, 2000). In accord to the cognitive and behavioural mechanisms depicted, a low energetic level of emotions accompanies resignation in the face of inequality.

(2) Challenging the status-quo of inequality. Disparity is not accepted and perpetuated forever. Should the condition of legitimacy not be met, or the costs for accepting the status quo be too high, group members find various means of coping with the situation: they either change the
system, or their place in it, or reframe the situation. At behavioural level, social identity theory posits that groups will undertake strategies for social change under two conditions: if they find themselves at the lower end of a disadvantageous comparison, and if the implied inequality is perceived as illegitimate. If these two conditions are both met, groups become politicized and action is taken to change the existing inegalitarian situation. (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Disparity also triggers cognitive reactions: group members will not act to change the inequality, but will reframe it. Such strategies include disassociating resources from status value or breaking the association between resource advantages and the categorical group or person detaining them. In order to achieve this, processes of decategorization (individuating the identities of group members), recategorization (creating a superordinate goal that will unite group members) or subcategorization (creating a pluralistic system in which all members are equally valued) can intervene (Brickson & Brewer, 2001; Hewstone, Martin, Hammer-Hewstone, Crisp & Voci, 2001).

To summarize, the social-psychological theories addressing inequality in and between groups try to offer perspectives as to why group members maintain or challenge these inequalities and which are the processes to attain this. Having these two contrasting patterns, groups might also develop different types of group emotions, in accordance with group disparity acceptance or rejection.

Implicit in all these perspectives of social change is the momentum of the group. This momentum finds its roots in energetic and unpleasant group emotions. The energetic side of this type of emotion is the one that adds the vector to the action, while the unpleasant dimension is a reflection of the dissatisfaction with the status quo. To conclude, the emergent group emotion that accompanies cognitive and/or behavioural strategies of challenging an inegalitarian situation are positioned in the quadrant delineated by the energetic and unpleasant ends of the axes (according to the circumplex model of emotions – Bartel & Saavedra, 2000).

Group disparity consequences

The second line of our review was to explore the group-level consequences of group disparity, with a special focus on whether group emotion has been included among them. Considering the criteria we mentioned for the literature search, only eight articles appear to have studied the effects of group disparity at a group level. Within these, the most studied disparity attribute was pay/wage (Siegel & Hambrick, 2005; San & Jane, 2008; Frick & Prinz & Wikelman, 2003; Debrock, Hendricks & Koenker, 2004; Depken, 1999); two studies researched power disparity (Eisenhardt & Burgeois, 1988; Smith, Houghton, Hood & Ryman, 2005) and one cognitive disparity (Curşeu, Schrujer & Boros, 2007). Affective reactions of groups facing a disparity situation have not been studied as dependent variables in any of these studies. However, the behavioural reactions of group members open the possibility to further explore the relation between group disparity and group emotion.

The reviewed studies describe two possible behavioural patterns that can follow group disparity. The first pattern portrays group disparity impacting negatively on performance. Group members engage in politics and coalitions in an attempt to counterbalance the inequality, making communication and collaboration difficult (Eisenhardt & Burgeois, 1988), the powerful group member is likely to be rejected, the consensus among group members is reached in a longer period of time (Curşeu, Shrujer & Boros, 2007). As a result, the group decreases its performance, taking less creative, strategic or high-quality decisions (e.g. top-management teams, Smith, Houghton, Hood, Ryman, 2005; Smith et al. 1994). The second pattern envisions disparity as having positive behavioural consequences at group level. This idea points more on the group’s ability to transform the existing discrepancy into an advantage for the group. One manner is that the powerful member elicits a constructive
conflict to obtain high quality decisions, a climate for efficient decision-making (Roberto, 2005), whereas the less powerful members increase their efforts in order to compensate the discrepancy (Frick & Prinz, 2003). Another manner of turning disparity into a group advantage is by accepting and following the most knowledgeable member (Curşeu et al., 2007).

Mingled among these behavioural reactions are the affective ones, more vaguely described. Some references to lack of safety in expressing ideas in such groups (Dewett, 2004), low cohesion (Denis, Lamothe, and Langley, 2001; Peterson et al. 2003) or dissatisfaction (Curşeu et al., 2007) bring some insights regarding the affective climate of a group characterized by disparity. Nonetheless, the empirical studies generally do fall under Kulik’s (2004) critique of having ignored the emergent group affect in the relation between conflict and performance. In an analogy to this critique, the possible explanatory factor linking disparity and emotion, namely conflict, is also disregarded in these studies.

Therefore, to shed further light in the relation between group disparity and group emotion, we next capitalize on classical social psychological theories that explore the consequences of inequalities in groups. Our particular focus will be on the role of conflict as a possible mediator between group disparity and group emotion, as proposed by Kulik (2004).

**Step three: integrating the top-down and the bottom-up approach**

*Cognitive and emotional conflict in groups: what lies between disparity and emotion*

As Di Tomaso et al. pointed out in their review (2007), social-psychological theories exploring inequality in groups focus on two types of group member reactions: acceptance of the inequality or dissatisfaction with the inequality. Our review proved that these two perspectives are also reflected by the more specific studies on group disparity consequences. The natural question arising at this point is when does disparity lead to dissatisfaction and when to acceptance of inequality, and what does this further imply for the group dynamic?

A first key answer given by classical theories so far lies in the legitimacy of the status-quo. Inequality can be legitimized by the larger cultural context (for instance, in cultures in which there is a large distance from authority, in Hofstede’s (1980) terms) or by the system of beliefs of the group (as explained by system justification theory or status construction theory). Should this legitimacy be granted, group members find consonant the situation with their belief system, and therefore accept the status-quo.

If the disparity is not perceived as legitimate, the situation creates a cognitive dissonance for the group members. According to cognitive dissonance theory, two opinions, or beliefs, or items of knowledge are dissonant with each other if they do not fit together; that is, if they are inconsistent in a logical sense (Festinger, 1957). The existence of dissonance, being psychologically uncomfortable, motivates the person to reduce it and leads to the avoidance of information likely to increase it (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 1999). Festinger argued that there are three ways to deal with cognitive dissonance: by trying to change one or more of the beliefs, opinions, or behaviours involved in the dissonance; by trying to acquire new information or beliefs that will increase the existing consonance and thus cause the total dissonance to be reduced; or, by trying to forget or reduce the importance of those cognitions that are in a dissonant relationship (Festinger, 1957). These means of trying to solve the cognitive conflict (i.e. dissonance) generated by group disparity are reflected in practices such as decategorization, recategorization, subcategorization, or disassociating resources from status value (Brickson & Brewer, 2001; Hewstone et al., 2001). In the studies we have reviewed, we found that indeed the less powerful members increase their efforts in order to compensate the discrepancy (Frick & Prinz, 2003), hence adopting behavioural ways to try to reduce the dissonance.
It is important to note that in this context, cognitive dissonance is not an individual-level process. The social group is both a source of cognitive dissonance as well as a vehicle for reducing it. That is, disagreement from others in a group generates dissonance, and subsequent movement toward group consensus reduces this negative tension (Matz & Wood, 2005). In other words, the dissonance created by group disparity may lead (in the first stage) to cognitive conflict between group members. Cognitive conflict focuses on substantive, issue-related differences of opinion. This type of conflict fosters a deeper understanding of task issues and an exchange of information that facilitates problem-solving, decision-making and the generation of ideas (Pelled et al., 1999). This was proved in one of the reviewed studies by the powerful member eliciting a constructive conflict to obtain high quality decisions, a climate for efficient decision-making (Roberto, 2005). Hence, we propose that:

**P1. If group disparity is perceived as illegitimate by the group members, it leads to cognitive conflicts in the group.**

So far, studies on the consequences of cognitive conflict reported split results. While most of them focus on the positive consequences of cognitive conflict, such as better decisions, more commitment to the group decision and the group, higher satisfaction with the group itself (Amason, 1996; Korsgaard, Schweiger & Sapienza, 1995; Simons & Peterson, 2000), others report negative outcomes as well: tension, unhappiness, low satisfaction with the group (Baron, 1990; Jehn, 1995). Nevertheless, studies generally agree that cognitive conflict always brings along energetic and excited discussions (Jehn & Mannix, 2001). Therefore, reconceptualizing these findings in the terms of the circumplex model of emotions, we state that:

**P2. The intense interactions of the group aimed at solving a cognitive conflict lead to activated group emotions.**

If cognitive conflict endures too long or is too intense, it is misattributed as personal criticism and attack (Amason, 1996; Simons & Peterson, 2000), and hence can lead to affective conflict. In fact, over a number of studies, the two have been highly correlated (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). Furthermore, longitudinal studies (Gamero, Gonzales-Roma & Peiro, 2008) proved a causal relation going from cognitive to affective conflict. Affective conflict stems from person-related disagreements that include "tension, animosity, and annoyance among the team members" (Jehn, 1995: 258). Affective conflict arises because of personality clashes and continued cognitive disagreements that may trigger animosity among the members (Janssen et al., 1999). When affective conflict erupts, emotional clashes and tensions cloud the task-related effort, since members spend time on interpersonal aspects of the group rather than on technical details of tasks (Parayitam & Dooley, 2009). Hence:

**P3. If cognitive conflict develops into affective conflict, the (primary) emergent group emotion will be negative and activating.**

However, if the conflict becomes chronic and intensive, the initial emotional effervescence of affective conflict transforms into different types of outcomes, such as absenteeism and turnover (Van de Vliert, 1996). Both these reactions are at the opposite end of the arousal dimension of emotions (i.e., low activation). Therefore, we propose that:

**P4. If the affective conflict persists in time and/or escalates, the (secondary) emergent group emotion will be negative and non-activating.**

*From cognitive to affective conflict relation: the moderators*

Since the circumstances that transform a cognitive conflict into an affective one are not yet fully specified in the existing literature, it is important to consider the conditions that influence the
relationship between the two types of conflict (Gamero, Gonzales-Roma & Peiro, 2008). Simons and Peterson (2001) argued that contextual factors should play a moderating role in the relation between cognitive and affective conflict through their impact on the misattribution process. Recent studies have tried to decouple cognitive from affective conflict (Yang & Mossholder, 2004; Ayoko, Callan & Hartel, 2008), and several moderators that impact the relation between the two types of conflict emerged from these studies. A recurrent variable in these researches refers to a group of processes labelled together as group emotional intelligence (or team emotional intelligence climate). Group emotional intelligence (GEI) is defined as the ability of a group to generate a shared set of norms that shape how members interpret and respond to their own emotions and to those exhibited by other members and individuals outside of the group (Druskat & Druskat, 2006; Druskat & Wolff, 1999). It represents the group’s ability to create norms that encourage expression, awareness and regulation of the emotional process that lead to improving the ability of group members to work together effectively. George (2002) posited that group emotional intelligence enables groups to devise creative solutions to disagreements (i.e., cognitive conflicts) and avoid escalating these conflicts (i.e., giving way to their transformation into affective conflicts).

Emotional awareness refers to the ability to detect, decipher and identify emotions in oneself and the others, as well as understand their cause, how they evolve and the relationships between them (Salovey and Mayer, 1990). Appraising the various emotions and understanding their full meaning allows group members to channel cognitive conflict in constructive ways. Furthermore, emotional awareness permits group members to recognize in time the downward emotional spirals and act to prevent their potential damage (Yang & Mossholder, 2004). Empirical data supporting these statements come from the study of team empathic concern (Ayoko et al., 2008). Teams that foster an empathic climate report less conflict, increased cohesion and performance (Rapisarda, 2002). Furthermore, when conflict occurs, these teams are more successful in comprehending the emotions arising from it (Ayoko et al., 2008), and hence not giving way to the misattributions that lead to affective conflict (Simons & Peterson, 2001). Therefore, in line with these researches, we propose that:

**P5.** Group emotional awareness reduces the chances that cognitive conflict evolves into affective conflict.

Most evidence on the impact of group emotional intelligence on the transformation of conflicts and on the impact of conflicts on the emergent group emotions comes from the study of emotion regulation. Emotion regulation processes refer to ‘the ways individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience or express these emotions’ (Gross, 1999: 542). Successful regulation of emotions permits groups to refocus the attention on the task, to engage more in the task (Druskat & Wolff, 2001) and to have in the end a better performance (Jordan & Troth, 2004). There are several group emotion regulation strategies acknowledged in the literature: attention deployment (Gross, 1998), reappraisal (Glomb, Steel & Arvey, 2002; Gross, 1998), suppression (Gross, 1998; Vansina-Cobbaert & Vansina, 2008). These strategies can be clustered in antecedent- and response-focused response strategies. Antecedent-focused strategies are directed at altering the experienced feeling, whereas the response-focused target the modification of the overt response after the onset of an emotion. Both strategies though are acknowledged to improve interpersonal communication, and hence reduce the damages of group conflict (Walden & Smith, 1997). Hence, we can presume that:

**P6.** Group emotion regulation reduces the chances that cognitive conflict evolves into affective conflict.

Furthermore, when looking at the particular effects of the components of group emotional intelligence, the convergence of their impact, as well as the explanatory mechanisms leading to these give us reasons to propose the final two propositions:
The propositions posited so far in this paper are summed up in the integrative model presented in Figure 1.

CONCLUSIONS

The current paper set out to explore the relation between group disparity and group emotions, as a reaction to two gaps in the literature: (1) the extensive focus on the relation between group disparity and group performance, despite the critiques that the explanations existent so far for these relations are not consistent enough (Kulik, 2004), and (2) the scarce transfer of knowledge from fundamental social psychological research into the diversity management literature. Therefore, in our approach we combined a bottom-up (starting from a literature review on the antecedents of group emotions and on the consequences of group disparity) and a top-down (starting from an overview of social-psychological theories addressing the topic of diversity and inequality) strategy. We integrated the empirical findings within the larger frame of fundamental conceptualizations and proposed an integrative explanatory model of the relation between group disparity and group emotions. Namely, we consider that at the foundation of this relation lies the cognitive conflict provoked by the dissonance between inequality beliefs and the status quo of inequality inherent to group disparity. Due to misattributions, this cognitive conflict can degenerate, under certain circumstances of time and intensity, into affective conflict. The relation between the two types of conflict is moderated by the group’s emotional intelligence. Based on the defining
characteristics and on the empirical evidence regarding the consequences of cognitive and affective conflict, we posited that each of them will generate different kinds of group emotions. We have defined these emotions on the activation and pleasantness axes of the circumplex model of emotions. Hence, we proposed that cognitive conflict will lead to emotions firmly defined on the activating end, whereas affective conflict will lead to emotions defined by the unpleasantness end. The impact of group emotional intelligence was also considered in the relation between the two types of conflict and the subsequent emergent emotions.

REFERENCES


