Theoretical Contributions

Affective Reactions to Difference and their Impact on Discrimination and Self-Disclosure at Work: A Social Identity Perspective

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Abstract

Based on Social Identity Theory and related concepts, the present paper argues that a negative affective state is caused by dissimilarity at the workplace, which in turn influences discrimination and self-disclosure. Based on a review of the literature, it develops propositions about the positive effects of surface- and deep-level dissimilarity on this affective state and perceived interpersonal discrimination at work, as well as on the decision to self-disclose personal information to peers. Self-disclosure is further linked to perceptions of discrimination in two opposing ways. An individual's perceived degree of difference from others on demographic and underlying characteristics serve as moderators of the proposed relationships, strengthening the effects of actual dissimilarity on feelings. The paper concludes by examining implications and contributions of the proposed theoretical framework to the diversity literature.

Keywords: discrimination, affect, dissimilarity, self-disclosure, social identity

As workforces are becoming increasingly diverse and employees work side by side with dissimilar peers, issues of diversity, discrimination and self-disclosure at work have captured the attention of organizational researchers (e.g., Collins & Miller, 1994; Dipboye & Collela, 2005; Tsui & Gutek, 1999). These scholars used Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel and Turner, 1979) as their main explanatory theory, based on the idea that individual differences result in social categorizations into and out of groups that influence team member interactions (e.g., Tsui et al., 1992). This social categorization (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), in turn, is consistently shown to result in intergoup discrimination (Bourhis, Sachdev, & Gagnon, 1994; Diehl, 1990) with important organizational and personal effects (e.g., Sanchez & Brock, 1996), and is further related to an important employee decision – the decision to self-disclose personal information to peers.

We know little, however, about affect as an intervening variable between dissimilarity, perceived discrimination and self-disclosure. This omission is unexpected for two reasons. First, affect plays a key role in Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), the main theory for explaining such phenomena. According to this theory, dissimilarity appears to be a situation that causes a specific affective state, since different characteristics shape an individual's identity and are associated with the need to psychologically belong or feel close to social groups, in order to enhance self-esteem (Tajfel, 1982; Turner, 1982). According to Smith (1993), prejudice is a "social emotion experienced with respect to one's social identity as a group member, with an out-group as target" (p. 304). Thus, SIT assumes that an affective state is caused by individual differences and has an impact on judgment

and behavior. In spite of the importance of this assumption, however, we have a narrow understanding of the precise role of affect as an outcome of dissimilarity and a key intervening state between dissimilarity and perceived discrimination, as well as between dissimilarity and self-disclosure.

Second, research has shown that affect plays an important role in judgments and decisions (Schwarz, Bless and Bohner, 1991), serving as information, and that discrimination experiences at work are shaped by feelings (Sechrist, Swim, and Mark, 2003). However, past research has not extensively tied this literature to perceived discrimination and mostly focused on cognitions and prejudices at the workplace (e.g. Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000; Frazer & Wiersma, 2001; Trentham & Larwood, 1998). Moreover, despite studies indicating the importance of identity on perceptions of discrimination and self-disclosure, research and theorizing as to why this effect occurs has focused on increased sensitization to inequalities (Sellers & Shelton, 2003), which implies an affective component. Thus, the full affective experiences of the targets of discrimination or the affective variables influencing perceptions of discrimination and decisions to self-disclose at work need to be better understood.

The present paper attempts to address some the above theoretical gaps based on a review of relevant studies and contributes to the literature in the following ways. First, it furthers previous research on employee dissimilarity by integrating it with the literature on affect and proposes that an exact affective state is caused by dissimilarity. In doing so, it encourages researchers to precisely examine the way in which people feel when being different. Second, it examines this affective state as an important intervening variable between dissimilarity and two important outcomes – discrimination and self-disclosure, and shows how dissimilarity first causes feelings before having an effect on perceptions and decisions. In other words, it argues that this affective state is an important psychological variable that influences perceptions of discrimination and self-disclosure. Third, the current paper further proposes a relationship between self-disclosure and subtle discrimination at work. Fourth, it examines perceived dissimilarity as a moderator of the proposed relationships. In these ways, the article aims to enhance our understanding of the impact of employee difference on individual feelings, and two important outcomes: perceptions of discrimination and decisions to self-disclose personal information. The theoretical model that addresses the above issues was created based on a review of previous studies and is presented in Figure 1.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. It starts with the reasons why affect is important and relevant to dissimilarity, discrimination and self-disclosure. It then explains the first two stages of the model, and uses SIT and related concepts to analyze why actual dissimilarity may cause affect and develop propositions. The third stage of the model examines the outcomes of this affective state. Next, moderating effects of the relationships are proposed. Finally, it outlines its contributions and offers exciting directions for future research.

The Importance and Relevance of Affect

Although affect is a major area in Organizational Behavior with several similarities and possible conceptual links to diversity, discrimination, and self-disclosure, most research has considered these topics separately. This paper, however, adopts a different view and outlines three basic points that explain why affect is important and relevant to this research.

First, as suggested by Ashkanasy, Härtel, & Daus (2002), diversity and affect are two mutually interdependent topics that need to be theoretically and empirically integrated. Diversity can be seen as an antecedent of affect, and discrimination and self-disclosure as outcomes of affect, responding to calls for research on the causes and consequences of true affective experiences in work settings (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996). Further, according
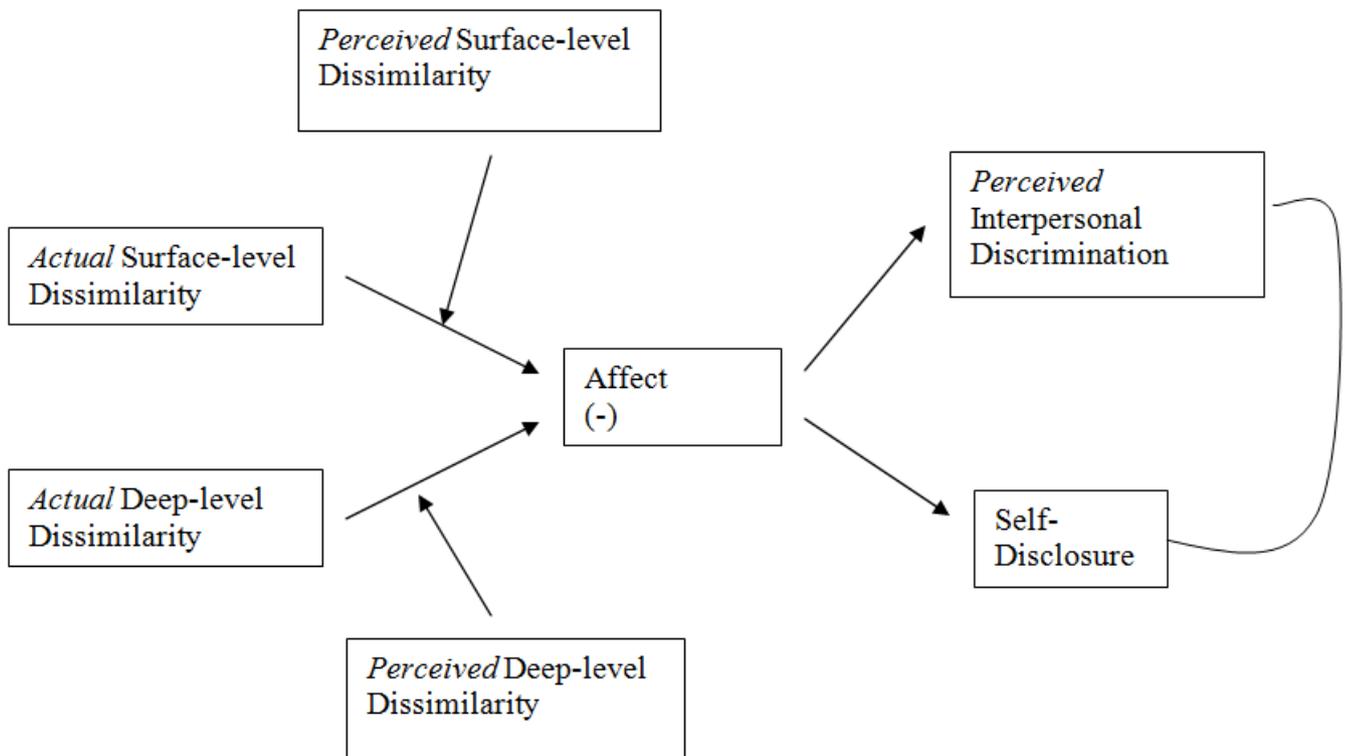
Figure 1. *Intervening and Interacting Mechanisms Translating Actual Surface- and Deep-level Employee Dissimilarity into Perceived Discrimination and Self-Disclosure.*

to Barsade and colleagues (2003), there is a new research paradigm in Organizational Behavior, which examines feelings not only as personal experiences, but also as experiences that are socially shaped. Affect can thus be an important variable socially influenced by individual differences in a work team context, resulting in perceptions of discrimination at the workplace and influencing employee self-disclosure.

A second point that explains why affect is relevant to diversity, discrimination and self-disclosure refers to Social Identity and its related Self-Categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987), employed to explain diversity and discrimination experiences. This framework suggests that people engage in social comparisons in terms of significant characteristics, in order to enhance their self-esteem; they categorize themselves in terms of a group membership, and this results in in-group bias and perceived discrimination (Kobrynowicz & Branscombe, 1997; Operario & Fiske, 2001). This approach, however, also implies an affective component (Tajfel, 1981; see also Ellemers, Kortekaas, & Ouwerkerk, 1999). The social identity was first defined by Tajfel (1972: 292) as "the individual's knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of this group membership". Therefore, diversity may be linked to the feeling of positive emotions as a consequence of belonging to the in-group (e.g., pride) and negative emotions towards the out-group. These negative emotions may also lead to perceptions of discrimination and influence employee self-disclosure. Thus, affect becomes a variable with special relevance to diversity, discrimination and self-disclosure research that needs to be explicitly considered.

Third, little empirical research is available on the above ideas, which further demonstrates the importance of incorporating affect into diversity and discrimination. With the exception of some diversity studies that examined negative emotions, such as anger and frustration, as a proxy of the negative team process of relational conflict (Jehn et al., 1999; Pelled, 1996; Pelled et al., 1999), the link between diversity and employee feelings has been severely under-explored. In addition, there has been limited progress in understanding the role of affect in discrimination and prejudice (see Mackie, Devos, & Smith, 2000; Mackie & Smith, 2002; Sechrist, Swim, and Mark, 2003), and these few research efforts have focused mostly on the perspective of the stigmatizer (e.g., Fichten, Robillard, Tagalakis, & Amsel, 1991).

This paper therefore aims to fill in the above-described gaps by theorizing directly on affect and showing that it constitutes a basic assumption in the extensive employee diversity and discrimination literatures that needs to be explicitly studied. Including such a variable appears necessary for researchers investigating diversity, discrimination and self-disclosure phenomena and thus future attention into this direction is encouraged.

Theory and Propositions

Before turning to the theoretical arguments and the propositions, this paper first defines and clarifies several terms. *Dissimilarity* is defined as the degree to which an employee differs from other team members on various characteristics (Jackson, Stone, & Alvarez, 1993). *Surface-level dissimilarity* refers to differences in terms of demographic attributes, such as race or gender, which are immediately observable as physical characteristics (Price, Harrison, Gavin, & Florey, 2002), as well as other surface-level characteristics such as education. Differences, however, may also exist in terms of underlying characteristics, and *deep-level dissimilarity* refers to these differences in attributes such as beliefs or values (Price et al., 2002).

The term *affective state* includes a range of feeling states i.e., both moods and emotions (Frijda, 1993). This paper also focuses on the more frequent from of *interpersonal discrimination,* which involves nonverbal behaviors such as avoidance of eye contact, lack of warmth, fewer expressions of friendliness etc. (Hebl et al., 2002; King, Shapiro, Hebl, Singletary, & Turner, 2006). *Self-disclosure* is defined as the "act of revealing personal information about oneself to another" (Collins & Miller, 1994; p. 457). This personal information includes deep-level attributes such a sexual orientation or political ideology (see Derlega, Metts, Petronio, & Margulis, 1993; Ludwig, Franco, & Malloy, 1986).

Another clarification needed refers to the rationale of the present paper, which focuses on *perceived discrimination* defined as an individual's perception that selective or differential treatment is occurring because of the individual's membership to a social group (Cardo, 1994). In addition, this paper theorizes at the individual and not the team-level, in order to gain a deeper understanding of an individual's experience of being different from others and allow for more insights.

The remainder of this paper outlines specific propositions with respect to the role of affect in relation to employee dissimilarity, perceived discrimination and self-disclosure.

Affect as a Consequence of Dissimilarity

The current article adopts a social psychological perspective (cf Williams and O'Reilly, 1998), and builds its arguments on the similarity attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1971), Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel and Turner, 1986), and Self-Categorization Theory (Turner et al., 1987). Specifically, one of the first basic concepts that

explained diversity experiences in teams is similarity-attraction (Byrne, 1971; Kanter, 1977; Pfeffer, 1983; Ziller, 1972). This paradigm suggests that individuals are attracted to similar others, thus viewing them favorably, and preferring to spend time with them (Ancona & Caldwell, 1992; O'Reilly et al., 1989; Smith et al., 1994), leading to difficulties in interaction within diverse work teams. Being attracted to similar others, both demographically and psychologically, can produce positive feelings for similar and negative feelings for dissimilar others. Therefore, affect appears an important mechanism based on the similarity-attraction perspective (Byrne, 1971) and a key outcome of dissimilarity at work.

Going beyond the similarity-attraction paradigm, Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) and Self-Categorization (Turner et al., 1987) offer richer explanations of individual behavior in diverse contexts, examining one's need to psychologically identify with a social group. As discussed above, social identity is defined by emotionally significant categorizations based on difference criteria and at different levels of aggregation (Hogg & Terry, 2001; Turner et al., 1987). These differences create the classification of others as in-group/similar or out-group/dissimilar (Brewer, 1979; Brewer & Brown, 1998; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). For example, the in-group of a woman is comprised of other women, while her out-group is comprised of men. The links with similar peers become part of the psychological self and are used to fulfill the following basic human needs: belonging to a group, simplifying reality, deriving a positive social identity and enhancing self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Wagner, Lampen, & Syllwasschy, 1986; Brockner, 1988). Identifying with the in-group implies that the group membership is linked to an individual's self-concept, either cognitively (e.g., internalizing cultural values), emotionally (e.g., pride in membership), or both. Being different on both surface- and deep-level characteristics may disrupt this process, as employees do not fulfill the above-mentioned psychological needs. This may result in negative feelings such as hostility towards the out-group (Allport, 1954) or a general negative affective state. Dissimilarity then appears to be an emotional situation that interferes with identity motives and that is eventually likely to produce negative affect.

Hence, based on social identity, self-categorization and similarity-attraction arguments, this paper proposes a negative relationship between actual dissimilarity and negative affect.

> *Proposition 1a: Higher levels of actual surface-level dissimilarity are associated with more negative affect.*

> *Proposition 1b: Higher levels of actual deep-level dissimilarity are associated with more negative affect.*

Affect as Mediator: Links to Discrimination and Self-Disclosure

This paper further examines the above-described affective state as an important mediating variable between dissimilarity and two employee responses. In particular, it suggests that dissimilarity influences affect, which in turn energizes perceptions of subtle discrimination and shapes self-disclosure.

More specifically, perceptions of subtle discrimination may also be a result of social identity and similarity attraction (Byrne, 1971) dynamics. As discussed above, perceived similarities create interpersonal attraction and positive affect towards similar others, which in turn may lead to positively biased judgments and evaluations of the in-group. On the other hand, homophily bias[i] (McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1987) and negative affect towards dissimilar others suggest prejudices towards the out-group and the likelihood of increased perceived discrimination. Social identity theory further explains prejudice and stereotype, since categorizations and identities result in in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination (Diehl, 1990; Tajfel, 1982). For example, older employees may favor peers in the same age range and discriminate against younger peers, and vice versa. The negative affective state caused by employee dissimilarity may additionally increase the biased comparisons documented in previous

research (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Kramer, 1991) and hence increase perceptions of discrimination at work. In other words, employees will be more likely to perceive that they are treated unfavorably because of dissimilarity in a social characteristic, and its resulting negative feelings and low self-esteem.

Moreover, much research indicates that emotions are connected with rationality and reasoning (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995; Damasio, 1994) and influence the processes through which information is processed — by becoming a basis for inferring reactions (e.g., Forgas, 1995, 2000; Isen, 2002). Accordingly, affect serves as a piece of information (Clore, Schwarz, & Conway, 1993; Martin & Stoner, 1996) and individuals examine their feelings when they make judgments. Research has further suggested that individuals who experience more negative affect tend to perceive their environment less favorably (e.g., Bower, 1991; Garcia-Marques, Mackie, Claypool, & Garcia-Marques, 2004). Employees that experience negative affect caused by surface- or deep-level dissimilarity are therefore more likely to perceive and evaluate their peers and work environment less favorably, and perceive themselves as targets of interpersonal discrimination. This negative affectively charged situation may also translate into perceptions of discrimination, in a subconscious effort to avoid cognitive dissonance or as a simple manifestation of the resulting negative feelings. Employees who experience negative affect caused by dissimilarity may also be more sensitive and likely to think that negative events at work are not a result of their own actions and attribute them to discrimination. In support of these ideas, Sechrist, Swim, and Mark, (2003) found that negative mood was associated with more perceived discrimination.

Hence, this paper proposes that dissimilar employees who experience negative affect because of dissimilarity may themselves become the holders of prejudice and perceive more interpersonal discrimination from their peers.

Proposition 2a: Negative affect mediates the positive impact of actual (surface- and deep-level) dissimilarity on perceived interpersonal discrimination.

In addition, this paper proposes that the negative affect caused by employee dissimilarity influences the amount and level of self-disclosure one may engage in at work. The latter is an emotionally charged topic, since employees often are uncomfortable to openly discuss a few personal issues at work, mainly because of uncertainty about reactions or fear of rejection (Roloff and Johnson, 2001). The negative affective state caused by dissimilarity may further strengthen these fears, because employees will perceive their environment and peers less favorably (e.g., Bower, 1991; Garcia-Marques, Mackie, Claypool, & Garcia-Marques, 2004) and hesitate to disclose their identities. They may also examine their feelings when they consider revealing their personal information (Clore, Schwarz, & Conway, 1993; Martin & Stoner, 1996) and decide not to self-disclose, consistent with their negative feelings. For instance, being a token homosexual may create negative feelings and hesitation to disclose this particular identity. Empirical support for these ideas comes from Phillips, Rothbard, and Dumas (2004), who found that even among employees who preferred integrating their work and personal lives, those who were in demographically diverse work groups were less likely to self-disclose to their peers.

Furthermore, based on SIT, dissimilar employees who do not maintain a positive self-concept, they will be more reluctant to disclose their personal information, consistent with their derived negative social identity. Since social identity derives from membership to an emotionally significant group and dissimilarity contributes to self-esteem negatively, the resulting negative affect may encourage employees to try to disassociate themselves psychologically from their social category (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Pratt, 1998) and thus avoid disclosing their identity. On the other hand, employees who are similar to their peers, experience more positive affect and avoid feelings of loneliness, may be more comfortable to disclose non-observable or deep-level personal information. Similarity may also be associated with a sense of protection or perceived peer support, which may further help self-disclosure.

Thus, this paper proposes that the negative affect that employees may experience when working in a diverse team shapes the willingness to disclose their identities, consistent with their derived negative social identity.

Proposition 2b: Negative affect mediates the negative impact of actual (surface- and deep-level) dissimilarity on self-disclosure.

The Impact of Self-Disclosure on Perceived Discrimination

Another interesting question that awaits research is weather revealing one's identity leads to lower or heightened perceived interpersonal discrimination at the workplace. This paper attempts to tackle this question by developing two contrasting propositions.

First, this article proposes that self-disclosure may lead to lower perceived discrimination. Based on psychological studies about the benefits of self-disclosure in other contexts (e.g., D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Ellis & Riggle, 1996; Garnets & Kimmel, 1993), this paper argues that disclosing one's identity at the workplace may increase confidence and feelings of acceptance and reduce negative thoughts. For instance, disclosing one's political ideology at work may increase confidence. In particular, classic studies of self-disclosure show that sharing personal information increases positive feelings and enhances interpersonal relationships (for a review see Collins & Miller, 1994), making people feel closer to each other (Jourard & Lasakow, 1958; Jourard, 1959; Worthy, Gary & Kahn, 1969). There is also evidence suggesting that self-disclosure increases liking for both the discloser and the recipient of information (Collins & Miller, 1994), as well as evidence showing that the disclosure of personal information reduces bias against out-groups (Brewer & Miller, 1984; Ensari & Miller, 2001, 2002; Urban & Miller, 1998; Miller, 2002). Based on this evidence, employees who reveal their social identities may like their co-workers more, relate to them in a more open way and perceive less discrimination.

In addition, employees who reveal their identity to the rest of their peers may create a situation where their peers are constrained by a kind of social/peer control, which may 'force' them to be more careful. For example, avoiding someone who is different may be more intense when only rumors exist, rather than when the whole work team knows about this difference and scrutinizes acts of subtle discrimination. Interestingly, empirical studies have shown that self-disclosure may represent an attempt to exercise control over the way in which another person learns of one's identity when such revelation is inevitable, to frame that information in a positive way or the desire of exercising some degree of control over others' perceptions (e.g., Davies, 1992; Miall, 1989; Schneider & Conrad, 1980). As a consequence, revealing individuals' membership in a work group may lead to fewer reports of perceived interpersonal discrimination.

Therefore, this paper proposes the following:

Proposition 3a: Higher levels of self-disclosure are associated with lower perceived interpersonal discrimination.

Nevertheless, the opposite effect may also result from disclosing an identity and increased perceived discrimination becomes another potential outcome. Research has shown that attributing negative situations to discrimination or labeling negative incidents as prejudice is self-protective (Crocker et al., 1991; Crocker & Major, 1989). A field study by Hebl, Foster, Mannix, and Dovidio (2002) found that job applicants perceived employer negativity and over-assumed that employers would not be interested in hiring them if they knew that they were gay. Self-disclosure at work may thus contribute to misperceptions or produce self-fulfilling perceptions, such as perceived interpersonal discrimination, because employees that disclose personal information may be more vigilant about potential signs of bias. For example, revealing one's sexual orientation may make the employee more vigilant about discrimination from peers. In addition, research has shown that disclosing personal information may actually increase the sense

of diversity and social distance in demographically diverse groups (Phillips et al., 2006), because it may reveal deep-level characteristics that coincide with surface-level diversity (Harrison, Price, & Bell, 1998; Price et al., 2002). In other words, such disclosure of information may actually underline differences instead of similarities, thus further widening the social distance between group members (Phillips et al., 2006). The result of this increased social distance may be more actual discrimination at the workplace. For instance, revealing one's belonging to a stigmatized group, such as the group of homosexuals, may increase social distance and actual discrimination towards the discloser. Accordingly, actual discrimination will inevitably be linked to reports of higher perceived discrimination.

Hence, this paper develops the following contrasting proposition:

> *Proposition 3b: Higher levels of self-disclosure are associated with higher perceived interpersonal discrimination.*

Moderating Effects of Perceived Dissimilarity

The current paper further proposes a moderating role for perceived dissimilarity in the relationship between actual dissimilarity and affect. Past research has shown that an individual may subjectively experience diversity differently, because he psychologically belongs to numerous social groups, based on categories that are more or less meaningful and important to his identity (Simon & Hamilton, 1994; Simon, Pantaleo, & Mummendey, 1995). This is operationalized by perceived dissimilarity, a subjective measure where employees rate how different they think they are from the rest of their peers, in terms of various characteristics (Price et al., 2002). Therefore, perceived dissimilarity provides a critical check on the social category salience and the strength of self-categorization (Turner et al., 1987; Brewer, 1979; Price et al., 2002). As Smith (1993) argues, when a social self-categorization becomes salient, individuals feel specific emotions as group members: "We should rather consider that when group membership is salient, the group functions as a part of the self, and therefore that situations appraised as self-relevant trigger emotions just as they always do" (Smith, 1993, p. 303). Hence, perceptions of dissimilarity on a specific characteristic indicate that this characteristic is used to determine the out-group, resulting in more competition and subsequent negative affect towards it (Wagner et al., 1986). Accordingly, the categories in which employees subjectively think they belong become very important and influence the effects of the categories in which they objectively fall.

Therefore, even though there are multiple social identities that can influence affect at work, this paper proposes that the category with the strongest impact on affect will depend on perceived dissimilarity.

> *Proposition 4: Perceived (surface- and deep-level) dissimilarity moderates the relationship between actual (surface- and deep-level) dissimilarity and negative affect: the relationship is stronger when perceived dissimilarity is higher rather than lower.*

The above propositions represent an intervening theory of dissimilarity, affect, discrimination, and self-disclosure at the workplace.

Conclusions and Research Implications

The main rationale of this paper has three parts. First, Social Identity Theory has been used to explain diversity, discrimination and self-disclosure. Second, affect is relevant to these topics, because SIT assumes that an affective factor is central in social categorizations. Third, affect may thus mediate the relationship between dissimilarity and perceived discrimination, as well as the relationship between dissimilarity and self-disclosure at the workplace.

Following this logic, the present article highlights a fascinating area for theoretical and empirical exploration and contributes to the literature in the following ways.

First, the proposed framework has implications for future research on diverse work teams - an area that has produced inconsistent results in the field. Since diverse teams have been mainly researched under the SIT, which implies that an affective state is caused by dissimilarity, incorporating affect in future research studies may help us better understand the way employees feel when they work in diverse teams. Another contribution of the present paper involves understanding the impact of dissimilarity and affect on discrimination and self-disclosure at work. The model makes a first step towards this direction by proposing that affect may act as an important mediator, responding to calls for research on incorporations of affect as an intervening construct in diversity research (Ashkanasy et al., 2002). Since feelings precede behavior and influence judgments, examining affect as a mediator may offer insights on the way in which employees experience diversity and perceive discrimination or decide to disclose personal information to their peers. Hence, this paper stimulates reflection and cross-topic research and calls for including affect in future investigations of these topics.

Second, the current paper offers two contrasting propositions for the relationship between self-disclosure and discrimination, thus encouraging research that addresses this link. In doing so, it highlights the importance of this relationship, and urges scholars to empirically answer the following interesting research question: does self-disclosure lead to higher or lower perceived discrimination at work? Systematic empirical research on the whole model in different contexts is another interesting avenue for future studies, using several validated scales of past research, and employing a longitudinal design. For example, depending on the context that elicits affect, the outcomes of the model may change: an organizational culture that values diversity, for instance, may increase willingness for self-disclosure, despite the negative affect caused by dissimilarity. The model may also be changed and studied at the team level, in order to examine how group diversity influences group affect/climate and actual group bias/discrimination. Results from such research can also be used to offer valuable insights to managers.

Moreover, even though individuals may have multiple identities, the effect of different characteristics or multiple identities simultaneously has been under-explored. Future studies may hence examine possible interactions of being the same on some dimensions/identities and being unique on others, e.g., same race but different gender, and their effects on perceived discrimination and self-disclosure. Interaction effects between surface- and deep-level characteristics is another interesting avenue for future research, for example being different in gender but similar in sexual orientation, e.g., a man and a woman who are both homosexual. Researchers conducting future studies may also want to consider whether surface or deep-level dissimilarity at work results in a stronger affective state and subsequent perceived discrimination and self-disclosure. Perceived discrimination may also be studied by comparing perceptions that are accurate versus those that are inaccurate, thus examining in a deeper way the mis-interpretations or misperceptions of discrimination. Investigating these complex patterns at the workplace may prove beneficial.

However, it should be clarified that the above discussion cannot be considered as complete, since the aim of this paper is to tackle one part of the potential links of dissimilarity, affect, perceived discrimination and self-disclosure. The effects of dissimilarity are complex and its impact may also be positive for employee perceptions and behavior, by resulting in positive affect, based on the need for distinctiveness. Positive affect may also mediate the relationship between self-disclosure and perceived interpersonal discrimination. Thus, this paper avoids simple conclusions and argues that dissimilarity does influence self-disclosure and perceived discrimination indirectly, through its

impact on negative affect. Accordingly, careful examination of both the negative and positive affect caused by dissimilarity may extend the literature by shedding light to potential affective ambivalence or curvilinear effects of dissimilarity, influencing reactions and perceptions in complex ways. Taken together, closer ties between affect, dissimilarity and discrimination research may help explain the full experience of the way employees feel and react to being different, and fully understand the phenomena of perceived discrimination and self-disclosure.

Notes

i) Homophily bias refers to the tendency to polarize and bond with similar others.

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