Diversity as Disagreement: The Role of Group Conflict

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Abstract

Conflict is critical for determining diversity’s influence on group effectiveness. A considerable amount of work has amassed on the relationships between team diversity, conflict, and team outcomes. This chapter will briefly review recent findings and developments in this area. Three specific complexities needing future research will then be highlighted, with special attention to how diversity may promote not only conflict but also asymmetric experiences of conflict in teams. The three areas for future research are (1) the role of different conceptualizations and operationalizations of diversity in predicting the emergence and asymmetric experience of conflict in teams; (2) the impact of new and understudied forms of diversity, such as lifestyle diversity or power diversity, on conflict and conflict asymmetries; and (3) the role of the perception of diversity in activating the relationship between diversity and conflict asymmetries.

Key Words: conflict, disagreement, contagion, placement, group effectiveness, asymmetry, perception

Many questions remain about how diversity influences workgroup outcomes (cf. Horwitz & Horwitz, 2007). Numerous typologies of diversity characteristics have been created in an attempt to explain the varying effects of diversity on workgroup outcomes (e.g., visible vs. invisible; task-related vs. non–task-related; Pelled, 1996; social category vs. informational, Jehn, Northcraft, & Neale, 1999; surface-vs. deep-level, Harrison, Price, & Bell, 1998; Harrison, Price, Gavin, & Florey, 2002). However, recent reviews and meta-analyses (Jackson, Joshi, & Erhardt, 2003; Joshi & Roh, 2009; Mannix & Neale, 2005) suggest that there are no consistent direct effects of diversity on organizational performance, even when the different types are considered. More nuanced and context-dependent views of diversity are therefore needed to better understand how diversity affects group outcomes (cf. Joshi & Roh, 2009), and special attention is needed to the underlying processes that may explain how diversity affects group outcomes.

Conflict has been identified as a primary mediating process that has the potential to explain the effects of diversity upon important group outcomes, such as performance (cf. Jehn, Greer & Rupert, 2008; King, Hebl, & Beal, 2009; Lau & Murnighan, 1998; Williams & O’Reilly, 1998). In this chapter on diversity as disagreement, we focus on the multiple ways in which conflict may explain how and when diversity produces effective or ineffective outcomes in groups. This chapter will briefly review recent findings and developments in this area. Three specific complexities needing future research in the study of diversity and conflict in groups will then be highlighted, with special attention to how diversity may promote not only conflict but also asymmetric experiences of conflict in teams by diverse members. Areas for future research are the role of
different conceptualizations and operationalizations of diversity in predicting the emergence and asymmetric experience of conflict in teams; the impact of new and understudied forms of diversity, such as lifestyle diversity or power diversity, on conflict asymmetries; and the role of the perception of diversity in activating the relationship between diversity and conflict asymmetries.

**Group conflict**

We begin by defining intragroup conflicts and discussing the different ways conflict can be conceptualized. Intragroup conflict has been defined as the process arising from perceived or real incompatibilities among group members (e.g., Boulding, 1962; De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Thomas, 1992; Wall & Callister, 1995). The most common way researchers have approached the study of conflict in groups (i.e., intragroup conflict) is to examine the general level of conflict in groups (i.e., “how much conflict is there in this team?”).

More recently, researchers have begun to examine the asymmetry of conflict within groups. Recent work (e.g., Coleman, Kugler, Mitchinson, Chung, & Musallam, 2010; Jehn, Rispens, & Thatcher, 2010; Jehn, Rupert, Nauta, & den Bosch, 2010; Thatcher & Phillips, 2010) has highlighted how members in a group may have different perceptions of the level, amount, and type of conflict in the group, and as a result may exhibit more or less conflict behaviors than their other group members (e.g., Jehn, Greer, Rispens, & Jonsen, 2012; Mannes, 2009). For example, in a study of 51 workgroups, Jehn and colleagues (2010) examined the consequences of asymmetric conflict perceptions on the effectiveness of individuals and groups. Group conflict asymmetry was defined as the degree to which members differed in their perceptions of the level of conflict in the group. They found that group conflict asymmetry decreased performance and creativity in the workgroups. They also examined individual conflict asymmetry, which was defined as one member perceiving more or less conflict than other group members. Whether a workgroup member was a high or low perceiver of conflict (compared to the other group members) determined his or her individual performance and satisfaction with the team. They suggested multiple mechanisms by which this could occur. Diversity between members in their perceptions of conflict in the team decreases their trust in and respect for one another; it also frustrates members and increases their cognitive load as they spend time and energy trying to make sense of their divergent perceptions of the conflict environment in the team.

We believe that this multilevel conceptualization and understanding of the process of intragroup conflict is important for diversity researchers to consider when examining the effects of workgroup diversity on individual and team effectiveness. Perhaps one of the reasons why the effects of diversity and conflict have been mixed is that past conceptualizations of these relationships have overlooked the ability of diversity to differentially affect certain members within the team and to feed conflict asymmetries. To facilitate this goal, following our review of the current state of the literatures on conflict and diversity, we will then discuss how different types and configurations of diversity in workgroups may influence the multilevel and potentially asymmetric process of intragroup conflict and how this in turn may help explain how diversity ultimately affects individual and team outcomes. We highlight new types of diversity categorizations (e.g., lifestyle diversity, power diversity), configurations (e.g., faultline placement), and perceptions that directly relate to our multilevel view of conflict in workgroups and may provide answers to how diversity affects individuals in groups via conflict and disagreement.

**Types of intragroup conflict**

Past research on intragroup conflict has primarily focused on conflicts arising from either task or relationship issues (Amason, 1996; Guetzkow & Gyr, 1954; Jehn, 1995). Task conflicts involve problems among group members about ideas and opinions relating to the job the group is performing (e.g., De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Jehn, 1995, 1997), such as the focus for a major advertising plan. Relationship conflicts are about non–work-related issues between members, such as differences about politics, religion, environmental issues, or commuting that are often important to people but not necessarily related to the task they are working on (e.g., De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Jehn, 1995, 1997). Process conflicts involve logistical issues within the group, such as disagreements about the delegation of resources and task responsibilities (Behfar, Mannix, Peterson, & Trochim, 2011; Greer & Jehn, 2007; Jehn, 1997).

**Conflict and group effectiveness**

When investigating the impact of diversity and conflict on group outcomes, the group outcomes typically studied fall into two general categories, those that are performance-related and those that
are morale-related. Indicators of team performance can include departmental production records or supervisor ratings (e.g., Jehn, 1997; Pelled et al., 1999). Measures of morale typically focus on satisfaction with the group or member turnover intentions (Jehn, 1997; Murnighan & Conlon, 1991; Pelled et al., 1999). These indicators of morale are thought to represent team viability and are as important for group functioning and success as actual performance (Balkundi & Harrison, 2006; Hackman, 1987; Hackman & Wageman, 2005).

Research has shown that task conflict can improve performance under certain conditions (e.g., nonroutine tasks, open conflict norms) through improved consideration of different alternatives and group problem solving (e.g., Amason, 1996; Corseu & Schruiger, 2010; Greer et al., 2006; Jehn, 1997; Matsuo, 2006; Olson et al., 2007; Pelled, Eisenhardt, & Xin, 1999). Other research suggests that conflict interferes with the cognitive processing of group members (e.g., Carnevale & Probst, 1998). Task conflicts may impede a group member’s ability to adequately process information. While the cognitive processing perspective has received support (see the meta-analysis by De Dreu & Weingart, 2003), De Dreu and Weingart do suggest, consistent with Jehn (1995, 1997), that under certain conditions task conflicts may still be able to increase group performance. Specifically, De Dreu and Weingart suggest that task conflict in groups performing nonroutine tasks in a trusting and psychologically safe environment can result in improved group performance.

The effects of task conflict on team viability (e.g., satisfaction, commitment, or willingness to work together again) are consistently negative (cf. De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Jehn & Bendersky, 2003). In general, frustration and dissatisfaction are common reactions to any sort of disagreement or conflict among individuals (Ross, 1989). Therefore, relationship conflicts, as well as task conflicts, cause problems for team viability. If members are fighting, they are often unsatisfied and likely not to want to continue in the group, thus decreasing group morale. Relationship conflicts also interfere with successful group performance because of the misspent time and effort (Jehn & Bendersky, 2003) wasted on petty fighting over non–task-related issues or resolving the non–task-related issues, rather than on completing the task (e.g., Amason, 1996; Evan, 1965; Jehn, 1995; Li & Hambrick, 2005; Matsuo, 2006; Nibler & Harris, 2003; Pelled, 1997; Rau, 2005).

Regarding process conflict, some research has proposed that these disagreements in a team may improve group functioning as members’ ability are fit to the task requirements (e.g., Goncalo, Polman, & Maslach, 2010; Jehn, Northcraft, & Neale, 1999). Other research shows that process conflict decreases members’ cognitive abilities and distracts them from more important goal-related issues (e.g., Behfar et al., 2011; Greer & Jehn, 2007; Greer et al., 2006; Jehn & Mannix, 2001; Vodosek, 2007). Process conflict, as with the other types of conflict, is consistently found to decrease morale and satisfaction in the group due to the personal challenging and discomfort of individuals with conflict-filled interactions.

**Past empirical findings on diversity and conflict**

**Social category heterogeneity and conflict**

Social category heterogeneity has been shown to increase relationship conflicts in groups (e.g., Ayub & Jehn, 2010; Jehn et al., 1999; Mohammed & Angel, 2004; O’Reilly, Williams, & Barsade; 1997; Pelled et al., 1999). This is thought to be because social identity and social categorization processes in diverse groups lead to discomfort, hostility, and tension (e.g., Jehn et al., 1999; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and dislike between members of different demographic categories (Byrne, 1971). Social category heterogeneity also influences task conflict in groups (Ayub & Jehn, 2010; Corseu & Schruiger, 2010; cf. Jehn, Bezrukova, & Thatcher, 2006): when group members have different social category characteristics, they are likely to have different experiences or values (Dougherty, 1992). These different “thought worlds” can cause task conflicts and can also lead to process conflicts regarding how best to coordinate the task at hand (Behfar et al., 2011; Jehn et al., 1999). In support of these ideas, Vodosek (2007) found all three forms of conflict to mediate the negative impact of cultural diversity on team outcomes. However, a recent meta-analysis by Stahl, Maznefski, Voigt, and Jonsen (2010) found that cultural diversity is positively related to task conflict, but is not significantly related to either relationship or process conflict.

**Functional heterogeneity and conflict**

Functional differences, just like social category differences, elicit in-group/out-group comparisons that result in tensions within groups that can escalate to relationship conflicts due to increased communication problems and resentment across
different areas (Strauss, 1962). Functional heterogeneity also increases task conflict. Members of different functional backgrounds, by definition, bring different education, training, and experience to the group (e.g., Lovelace, Shapiro, & Weingart, 2001). These different perspectives, or “representational gaps” (Cronin & Weingart, 2007), lead to debates and disagreements about the group task (Pelled et al., 1999). Jehn, Northcraft, and Neale (1999) found that functional diversity increased improved performance when mediated by task conflict. Knight and colleagues (1999), in their study of 76 top management teams, showed that functional diversity’s effects on goal consensus were mediated by relationship conflict and agreement seeking. Olson, Parayitam, and Bao (2007) showed that task conflict mediated the effect of cognitive diversity on team performance. In addition, members of different functional backgrounds rely on different working methods (Bantel & Jackson, 1989; Gruenfeld et al., 1996) and different views of how to coordinate a task (cf. Cronin & Weingart, 2007; Jehn et al., 1999) that can lead to process conflicts (Behfar et al., 2011; Jehn et al., 1999). Recent research by Klein, Knight, Ziegert, Lim, and Saltz (2011) contributed to this line of work by showing that the effects of functional diversity (operationalized as differences in work values) on team conflict depend on the style of the team leader. Work-value diversity was associated with team conflict only when leaders were person-focused rather than task-oriented.

Diversity faultlines and conflict

The concept of demographic faultlines (Lau & Murnighan, 1998) has arisen in response to critiques of the traditional conceptualization of diversity (see Chapter 4 in this book for a review). Demographic faultlines have been hypothesized to lead to increased levels of relationship conflict (e.g., Lau & Murnighan, 1998; 2005; Li & Hambrick, 2005; Thatcher et al., 2003). When faultlines occur in groups, the resulting subgroups, or coalitions, may increase the salience of in-group/out-group memberships, resulting in strain and polarization, and inter-subgroup competition (Lau & Murnighan, 1998). When group members align with others of similar demographics, they will see the others in the group as outsiders (Hogg, Turner, & Davidson, 1990), resulting in tensions that intensify relationship conflict within the group (Jehn, Bezrukova, & Thatcher, 2006). In addition, research indicates that aligned subgroups will have negative beliefs about members of the other subgroup, the “out-group,” causing feelings of inequity and disrespect (Hogg, 1996), which increase experiences of relationship conflict. This can distract members from the task and can cause competition within the group based on non–task-related dimensions (e.g., “we older workers know more than you young members” or “those of us from the U.S. are more capable than you others”). These distinctions and splits within a common-goal workgroup can cause decreased performance and negative attitudes that, in the end, will decrease the effectiveness of the task performance of the group.

While demographic faultlines are likely to increase relationship conflict, their effects on task conflict within the group are less clear. On the one hand, when in-group and out-group identities are salient, subgroups may polarize (Lau & Murnighan, 1998) and talk less with each other about work issues. When communication between subgroups declines, task conflict is less likely to occur. On the other hand, when members have subgroup members to share their opinion with, they may be more willing to hold onto their own opinion during group discussions (Asch, 1952; cf. Lau & Murnighan, 1998). Task conflicts are therefore more likely because members backed up by representative subgroup members may be more willing to enter into task conflicts, given the support they feel based on their alignments. Task conflicts may become even more intense as subgroups each rally around their own unique point of view (Lau & Murnighan, 1998).

In addition, the different backgrounds that members of different functional subgroups have may lead members to approach process issues differently (Bantel & Jackson, 1989; Gruenfeld et al., 1996; Pelled, 1996). These differences may be accentuated by subgroup dynamics relating to equity and appropriate delegation of staff and resources. When subgroups form, inter-subgroup competition may take place as to who should get the overall group resources and how to delegate sought-after tasks (Lau & Murnighan, 1998). When subgroups feel compelled to compete for group resources, higher levels of process conflict may also result.

Findings so far on the effects of faultlines on conflict and performance have been mixed. Li and Hambrick (2005) found that strong faultlines (based on age, tenure, gender, and ethnicity) led to increased task conflict, relationship conflict, behavior disintegration, and decreased performance. The relationship between faultline strength and behavioral disintegration (decrease in interaction, exchange, and collective effort) was entirely
mediated by relationship conflict, but not by task conflict. They found that relationship conflict had a negative influence on performance, but did not find an effect of task conflict on performance. The group processes (relationship conflict, task conflict, and behavioral disintegration) fully mediated the negative relationship between faultline size and performance. Lau and Murnighan (2005) found that faultlines (based on gender and ethnicity) explained more variance in perception of team learning, psychological safety, satisfaction, and expected performance than single-attribute heterogeneity indices. Lau and Murnighan also found strong faultlines to decrease relationship conflict. Thacher, Jehn, and Zanutto (2003) found that diversity faultlines (based on years of work experience, type of functional background, degree major, sex, age, race, and country of origin) were linearly associated with lower levels of relationship and process conflict, but did not find a linear effect on either task conflict, performance, or morale. In curvilinear tests, they found that faultline strength had a curvilinear effect on relationship conflict, process conflict, performance, and morale. Groups with low faultline strength (where no subgroups existed; i.e., Asian male accountant, Black male manager, Native American male salesman, and Hispanic male secretary) and groups with very strong faultline strength (where subgroups cleanly align on the basis of multiple characteristics; i.e., two Black male managers and two White female assistants) had higher levels of process and relationship conflicts and lower levels of performance and morale than groups where medium faultline strength existed (i.e., one female Asian consultant, one White female consultant, one White male assistant, one Black male assistant).

Molleman (2005) found that both demographic faultline strength and distance (see Bezrukova, Jehn, Zanutto, & Thatcher, 2009; Thatcher, Jehn, & Zanutto, 2003, for overview of faultline strength and distance) increased general intragroup conflict (the average of task and relationship conflict items). He also found that faultlines formed on the basis of personality types significantly interacted with team autonomy in predicting intragroup conflict, such that when personality faultline distance was high and team autonomy was high, intragroup conflict was the highest, and when faultline distance was low and team autonomy was low, intragroup conflict was the lowest.

Furthermore, Pearsall, Ellis, and Evans (2007) found that relationship conflict mediated the relationship between activated gender faultlines and team creativity, such that faultlines were positively related to relationship conflict and relationship conflict was negatively related to team creativity. Choi and Sy (2010) found that social category faultlines, such as gender/age or age/race faultlines, were positively related to relationship conflict, which was indirectly negatively related to team performance. Lastly, Jehn and Bezrukova (2010) found that activated racial faultlines positively influenced general levels of conflict in the team, which negatively affected team outcomes.

In sum, research on faultlines and conflict has mixed results. Faultlines have been shown to both positively and negatively relate to general levels of intragroup conflict. We suggest by taking a more nuanced view of conflict, in terms of how it is asymmetrically perceived in groups, and investigating the effect of diversity and faultlines on conflict asymmetry, we may be able to gain better insight into how diversity and faultlines affect the conflict dynamics and ultimate outcomes of diverse groups. Therefore, we provide a new framework for understanding diversity and disagreement in groups using the conflict asymmetry perspective.

A new framework for understanding diversity and conflict: conflict asymmetry

We suggest that research needs to consider the asymmetry of perceptions by members of diverse groups to more thoroughly explain the effects of diversity and disagreement on group conflict and outcomes. Past conflict research often assumes that all members interacting on a work task perceive and experience the same amount of conflict (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; cf. Jehn & Chatman, 2000). This assumption ignores the possibility that different parties involved in a conflict may perceive different levels of conflict. For example, one person in a workgroup may perceive a high level of conflict, while another may perceive little or no conflict. This view of asymmetric conflict perceptions has often been ignored in past research on conflict (e.g., Amason, 1996; Jehn, 1995; Pelled, 1996; cf. Jehn & Rispens, 2007). Similarly, research on organizational groups and teams in general often takes the view that groups possess shared team properties, or that experiences are commonly held by team members (Klein & Kozlowski, 2000; Mason, 2006), rather than configural team properties, or properties that reflect the differences in attitudes and perceptions among individuals working together (Chan, 1998; Klein & Kozlowski, 2000).
Recent research (Jehn et al., 2010) shows that group conflict asymmetry (the degree to which members differ in perceptions of the level of conflict in the group) decreases performance and creativity in groups. This effect was explained by the social processes (e.g., communication, cooperation) and the group atmosphere (e.g., trust, respect) that resulted from asymmetric perceptions. In addition, at the individual level, high perceivers of conflict reported lower performance and satisfaction with the team than did low perceivers of conflict. We therefore suggest that it is critical to assess individuals’ different perceptions of conflict levels to accurately predict the effects of diversity on group and individual behavior and outcomes.

In addition to perceiving different levels of conflict, individuals may also respond or behave differently when conflict is perceived in a team. Individual conflict engagement is defined as an individual’s behavioral confrontation of conflict issues (Greer & Jehn, 2010). This distinction between conflict perceptions and behaviors traces back to the classic work of Pondy (1967) on felt versus manifest conflicts. As an example of the differences between asymmetries in conflict perceptions and conflict engagement, imagine a team meeting in which a member perceives that others’ opinions are in disagreement with her own, but has not yet expressed her own opinion. Perceptual conflict asymmetry may exist at this point. She may choose whether or not to verbally contradict the opinions of the others. If she does choose to express a contradictory opinion, this would be defined as conflict engagement. Similar to asymmetries in perceptions of conflict, individual engagement in conflict can also have negative outcomes for the individual within a team. Behaviorally engaging in relationship or process conflicts can distract individuals from the task and create tensions with other team members (Jehn & Bendersky, 2003), while behaviorally engaging in task conflict may help the individual to showcase his or her expertise on the issue and may increase the individual’s intellectual engagement with the issue as the individual formulates the argument. Therefore, by distinguishing between group-level and individual-level conflict perceptions and behaviors, more nuanced and clearer understanding of conflicts can be obtained (cf. Jehn et al., 2012; Korsgaard et al., 2008) and better insight gained into the exact process by which diversity influences team outcomes.

Given these different views of conflicts (asymmetry of perception and engagement), we suggest three areas for future research to move forward the study of diversity and disagreement in groups: (1) How do different conceptualizations of diversity affect these more nuanced conceptualizations of conflict in groups? (2) How do different understudied types of diversity (e.g., lifestyle and power) influence conflict perceptions and behaviors? (3) How does the perception of diversity add to or differ from the examination (as is common in much past research) of objective diversity when predicting multifaceted notions of conflict in teams?

**Research question 1**

As previously discussed in this chapter, the concept of demographic faultlines, wherein demographic characteristics align within a team in such a way as to create a clear dividing line between similar team members (Lau & Murnighan, 1998), has generated a steady stream of research over the past decade. However, these studies have revealed contrasting results. We suggest that this is because past views of faultlines have been too simplistic and do not allow the possibility of understanding how different configurations of diversity differentially affect the conflict perceptions and behaviors of individual team members.

Recent work by O’Leary and Mortenson (2010) as well as by Polzer and colleagues (2006) and Greer, Jehn, Thatcher, and Van Beest (2010) all suggest that not all faultlines are created equal. Rather, the way in which faultlines divide a group (such as between two equally sized subgroups or between a larger subgroup and an excluded individual) may have not only important implications for group-level conflict (e.g., Polzer et al., 2006) but also important implications in that different faultlines may create important differences in the perception and expression of conflict between individuals within the same group. For example, Greer and colleagues (2010) show that when faultlines create a solo member, that solo member is more likely to perceive higher levels of conflict than other group members, but less likely to behaviorally engage in conflict. They show that this can then translate into impaired team climate and performance.

Future investigation of how different configurations of diversity can create differential experiences within the same team is therefore an important future research direction. The distinction between, for example, solo members or subgroup members based on demographic characteristics is theoretically and practically very relevant for the understanding of diversity and disagreement in groups. This is
Because in diverse teams, the solo members in particular need to share their opinions in order for the team to capitalize on the “value of diversity” within the team (Homan et al., 2007), but this is difficult as solos are likely to tend to conform to the dominant subgroup (Asch, 1952). Therefore, we suggest that it would be useful for future research to identify ways to make sure that all individuals on either sides of a faultline in a team have similar perceptions of conflict and feel empowered to speak about these perceptions when they are about the task. Research would benefit from both experimental designs that can create and compare different forms of subgroups in common-goal groups and also field research to examine the natural placement and perceptions of members based on their demographics and how they view the conflict in the group. For example, in a recent study of faultlines (Jehn & Bezrukova, 2010), members were placed into groups based on demographic alignment (e.g., Black males vs. White females). An interesting result of this research was that not all members perceived there to be a faultline and in turn did not perceive conflict or act in a conflict-filled way. The members who did perceive faultiness were more engaged in conflict and dissatisfied, thus leading to lower performance. This suggests that future research incorporate measures of both objective (calculated) and perceived demographic faultlines and relate these to individual perceptions of conflict to capture the asymmetry of conflict within the group that may exist.

**Research question 2**

We offer another line of inquiry challenging the assumptions often made in past diversity typologies. That is, we raise the question of whether there are non–task-related invisible characteristics that may be important. Much of the research assumes that all social category variables are visible and that all deep-level characteristics (often invisible) are task-related (e.g., personality traits, work values; Rink, 2005). We therefore seek to introduce a broader conceptualization of social category diversity. This is desirable because relying on prior conceptualizations of social category diversity has often led to contradictory results regarding conflict across studies. The typical troika of social category variables studied in the literature (age, sex, and ethnicity) could be classified as “visible” social category variables that often increase relationship conflict. While obviously a crude categorization (people do not always look their age, or look like they belong to a certain ethnic group), these features are usually more transparent to study than other potential social category variables (such as sexual orientation, marital status, social class, family background, whether one is a parent, whether one has a history of substance abuse, or whether one has changed his or her name), which may explain why they have been the focus of attention when examining conflict in organizational workgroups. Yet the knowledge that a group member falls into one of these latter categories is likely to activate the same categorization and comparison processes as occurs with the visible social category diversity variables. Thus, future research needs to more thoroughly examine what categories individual members are basing their behaviors and attitudes on (i.e., what is salient to them) in order to determine what type or level of conflict is likely to occur.

**Lifestyle heterogeneity and conflict**

An interesting and potentially highly influential demographic characteristic in teams that has yet to receive much empirical investigation in the workgroup setting is lifestyle diversity. Lifestyle diversity, as we have defined it, could be considered a form of value diversity related to nonwork issues (e.g., marital status, sexual orientation). We propose that stigmas against sexual orientation, substance abuse, and certain social classes will affect stereotyping and prejudice (Brauer, 2001; Button, 2001; D'Emilio, 1983; Fussell, 1983; Hartmann, 1970; Herek, 1993; Newcomb, Mercurio, & Wollard, 2000; Plummer, 1975; Sorensen, 2000), and ultimately performance, as much or more than the traditional social category aspects examined (i.e., age and gender). In related, initial studies of this form of diversity, Jehn and colleagues (1999) introduced value diversity, a third type of diversity, distinct from social category or functional diversity. Value diversity represents differences in the values that members hold regarding work. Value diversity was found to increase all three conflict types and to decrease perceived and actual performance as well as morale. Research on various other lifestyle characteristics suggests that this form of diversity will also increase conflict in groups, but has been understudied within organizations for a number of reasons. First, it is very controversial to ask employees about these characteristics; however, a study on punk rock bands by Jehn, Conlon, and Greer (2010) demonstrated that these characteristics may have a larger influence on workgroup processes such as conflict and performance outcomes (e.g., productivity and morale) than the more traditional diversity characteristics.
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confl ict, but more likely to act on confl ict when members in workgroups were less likely to perceive diversity, such that high-status demographic solo that status moderated the eff ects of demographic

For example, Greer and colleagues (2006) found their degree of personal importance to members. likely to result in actual confl ict behaviors, given which promote perceptions of confl ict and are also power diff erences and inequalities within the team, group confl ict may be through the instigation of
diff erences in, say, gender exert their infl  uence on characteristics would also be an interesting pathway
to power struggles and confl ict within the team. Further research into the potential moderators of power diversity and the exact underlying dynamics by which groups create and change power diversity within their team would be interesting.

Directly integrating work on power and status with work on traditionally studied demographic characteristics would also be an interesting pathway for future research. A potential mechanism by which differences in, say, gender exert their infl uence on group confl ict may be through the instigation of power differences and inequalities within the team, which promote perceptions of confl ict and are also likely to result in actual confl ict behaviors, given their degree of personal importance to members. For example, Greer and colleagues (2006) found that status moderated the eff ects of demographic diversity, such that high-status demographic solo members in workgroups were less likely to perceive confl ict, but more likely to act on confl ict when perceived, than low-status solo members in teams.

Therefore, integrating notions of power and status into research on diversity and confl ict is important for future research.

Research question 3

One key direction in future research that has been largely neglected thus far is the distinction between actual diversity and perceived diversity (for exceptions, see Dooley, Freyxell, & Judge, 2000; Harrison et al., 1998, 2002; Jehn et al., 1999). Most past work on diversity has focused on objective demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, or race (cf. Williams & O’Reilly, 1998), that can potentially infl uence team processes, such as confl ict, and team outcomes. However, as seen in the recent reviews and meta-analyses on diversity and group processes and outcomes (Jackson et al., 2003; Mannix & Neale, 2005; Stewart, 2006; Webber & Donahue, 2001; Williams & O’Reilly, 1998), fi ndings on diversity have been largely inconsistent. We propose that one possible way of explaining these contradictory fi ndings is by proposing that diversity aff ects group process and outcomes only when it is perceived or salient. Research has proposed and shown, for example, that individuals are not always accurate when assessing the degree of diversity in their work unit as compared to other work units (cf. Harrison & Klein, 2007).

Therefore, considering the perception, as well as the actuality, of diversity may help us better understand the eff ects of diversity on intragroup confl ict and outcomes. In addition, as we mentioned before, members may have different perceptions of the level of confl ict in the group, as well as different degrees of behavioral involvement. A member of a certain demographic category, when perceiving himself or herself to be in the minority, may be more likely to perceive the confl ict as relationship-based rather than task-based, but less likely to engage in actual confl ict behaviors while in a perceived minority position. If individuals feel that others are getting more resources or the best tasks within the group, they may be more likely to perceive process confl ict rather than perceiving that it is a task confl ict or based on task capabilities.

There is a conceptual distinction between objective and perceived demographic diff erences within groups (García-Prieto, Bellard, & Schneider, 2003; Harrison & Klein, 2007; Zellmer-Bruhn, Maloney, Bhattu, & Salvador, 2008) that has been acknowledged in the empirical work on surface- and deep-level diversity (Cunningham, 2007; Harrison, Price, & Bell, 1998; Harrison, Price, Gavin, & Florey, 2002; Phillips &

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Another form of diversity that is understudied and does not readily fi t into past categorization schemes of diversity forms is diversity in power or status within teams. Initial research and theorizing in this area has suggested that diff erences in power or status within a team may have the potential to both benefi t group interactions and to harm group interactions. On the one hand, power diversity offers a heuristic solution to problems of resource allocation (De Cremer, 2003; Keltner, van Kleef, Chen, & Kraus, 2008) and can facilitate order and coordination in groups (Magee & Galinsky, 2008).

On the other hand, power diversity has the potential to make salient feelings of inequality and injustice (Henderson & Frederickson, 2001; cf. Lawler & Proell, 2009; Muller, 1985) and can breed rivalry and competition (Bloom, 1999; cf. Harrison & Klein, 2007). Greer and Van Kleef (2010) reconciled these viewpoints by showing that the eff ects of power dispersion depend on the amount of resources available to the group. When a group has low power, power dispersion is helpful, but when a group has high power, power dispersion leads to power struggles and confl ict within the team. Further research into the potential moderators of power diversity and the exact underlying dynamics by which groups create and change power diversity within their team would be interesting.

Directly integrating work on power and status with work on traditionally studied demographic characteristics would also be an interesting pathway for future research. A potential mechanism by which differences in, say, gender exert their infl uence on group confl ict may be through the instigation of power differences and inequalities within the team, which promote perceptions of confl ict and are also likely to result in actual confl ict behaviors, given their degree of personal importance to members. For example, Greer and colleagues (2006) found that status moderated the eff ects of demographic diversity, such that high-status demographic solo members in workgroups were less likely to perceive confl ict, but more likely to act on confl ict when perceived, than low-status solo members in teams.

Therefore, integrating notions of power and status into research on diversity and confl ict is important for future research.
Loyd, 2006; Phillips, Northcraft, & Neale, 2006), mentoring relationships (e.g., Lankau, Riordan, & Thomas, 2005), value and goal diversity (e.g., Jehn, Northcraft, & Neale, 1999; Mannix & Jehn, 2004; Rink, 2005), face-to-face versus computer-mediated communication (e.g., Bhappu, Griffith, & Northcraft, 1997), and perceived variability/homogeneity in in-groups and out-groups (e.g., Lee & Ottati, 1993). Research on supervisor–subordinate relations has suggested that perceived differences often have a greater effect on interactions than objective demographic differences (c.f., Riordan, 2000; Strauss, Barrick, & Connerley, 2001; Turban & Jones, 1988). Ashforth and Mael (1989) explain this by suggesting that the effect of demographic differences is through individuals’ perceptions. Thus, we propose that these different perceptions of members’ demographics and their difference in the group may also lead to different perceptions of conflict.

This same discrepancy between perceived and actual diversity is also a point of contention in the literature on demographic faultlines. Most work on faultlines conceptualizes faultlines based on objective demographic characteristics that can potentially influence team processes and team functioning (Gibson & Vermeulen, 2003; Lau & Murnighan, 2005; Li & Hambrick, 2005; but for an exception see Earley & Mosakowski, 2000). However, as Lau and Murnighan (1998) put forth in their original article on faultline theory, groups may have many potential faultlines, “each of which may activate or increase the potential for particular subgroupings” (p. 328). Since faultlines can remain inactive and go unnoticed for years without influencing the group process (Lau & Murnighan, 1998), it is important to take into account whether team members actually perceive or experience these subgroup splits and to what extent these faultline perceptions determine intragroup processes and outcomes. Recent work on faultline activation (the process by which objective faultlines become perceived within a group; Jehn & Bezrukova, 2010) suggests one possible route toward exploring the relationship between actual and perceived diversity and conflict experienced in a group. In this research, faultlines were activated when there were group members with certain personalities in each subgroup (e.g., narcissism, entitlement) that pulled the groups apart and made the faultlines salient, hence increasing perceptions of conflict. Future research should also examine other factors that may activate faultlines and pull the demographically aligned subgroups apart, such as specific demographic characteristics or perceptions and attitudes of group members. It is also important to note that certain group aspects can “deactivate” faultlines; that is, when groups had a superordinate group identity, the faultlines were less likely to be perceived, and conflict was decreased (Jehn & Bezrukova, 2010). By understanding this and other such factors that can lead to faultline activation, researchers can increase their understanding of the role of faultlines in the perceived conflicts of workgroups; that is, one subgroup may perceive all is fine while the other subgroup is experiencing large amounts of conflict. What this means for actual conflict behavior is also interesting. If there are asymmetric perceptions, conflict behavior may be potentially less manifest than if all subgroups perceived the conflict. However, this also means such conflicts may be more difficult to resolve and more negative for group outcomes.

Other work looking at identity salience as a mediator of the relationship between intragroup conflict and outcomes (e.g., Garcia-Prieto et al., 2003; Randel, 2002) may also represent another way to better understand the effects of diversity on conflict and group outcomes. Faultlines may become activated and instigate conflict only when identity salience relating to the faultlines is high—and identity salience may vary between members within the team, leading to individual differences in perceptual faultline activation and conflict perceptions and behaviors. We therefore propose that it is the workgroup members’ perceptions that matter and that inform ultimate behaviors and group outcomes.

Conclusion

This chapter reviewed past research on diversity and disagreement in groups and proposed new frameworks to resolve the inconsistencies in past work and move the area forward. Three complex issues needing future research in the study of diversity and conflict in groups were presented, with special attention to how diversity may promote not only conflict but also asymmetric experiences of conflict in teams by diverse members. The areas for future research were the role of different conceptualizations and operationalizations of diversity in predicting the emergence and asymmetric experience of conflict in teams; the impact of new and understudied forms of diversity, such as lifestyle diversity or power diversity; and the role of the perception of diversity in activating the relationship between diversity and disagreement in teams. By examining these areas, we hope that research will continue to
advance our understanding of diverse teams and how they interact, as well as providing suggestions for group leaders, members, and managers.

References


