What's on the Agenda

Diversity as Non-performative in the Treatment of Identity Categories in Workplace Diversity in the Netherlands

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Abstract

Influenced by economic, societal and demographic developments in the Netherlands, there has been an increase in interest to treat diversity as a matter to be managed in the workplace. More and more large corporations announce their diversity strategies due to financial incentives, government regulations that are particularly aimed at women in leadership positions and the wish to show that they are in support of employees' talents. Due to the latter, corporate diversity strategies claim to be inclusive and welcoming for everyone regardless of ethnicity, gender, sexuality, dis/ability, age and religion. By means of an intersectional analysis of interviews with diversity managers and the diversity texts of various corporations, this thesis analyses how large corporations operating in the Dutch context understand and implement their diversity policies. Also, it considers what intersections and categories of identity are perceived as important by them and why. Additionally, this thesis examines how neoliberal ideals have an impact on this. For this research, Sara Ahmed's and Eike Marten's discussions of diversity as 'non-performative' are significant as they demonstrate that saying diversity is not similar to doing diversity. Due to the gap between a corporate sense of ´intersectionality´ and the understanding of this as conceptualized by black feminists, the strategies are still weak in terms of recognizing how the varying axes of identity are interconnected as well as how to avoid tokenism. Although diversity managers claim that there is a strong intrinsic motivation, corporations place a high value on diversity linked to Western, neoliberal terms of profitability, productivity and effectiveness which contributes to the non-performativity of diversity. In this way, toxic ideas of 'unvalued' differences are reinforced and different experiences and needs of people are neglected. The racialized system of whiteness and the idea that Dutch society is highly progressive is hindering corporations and their diversity managers to deal with dominant, binary and essentialist representations of gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity in a more active and critical manner. As the corporations' statements 'do not as they say', the corporate language on diversity is shaped in such a way that it fails to pay attention to the crucial, underlaying matters related to social inequality and oppression linked to racism and sexism.

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Introduction

> At ING, we promote diversity not just because it is the right thing to do but because we *can't deliver on our strategy* without it. Diversity is good for our business because different perspectives drive *innovation*, accelerate *growth*, and lead to *more robust decisions and outcomes*. ("ING Diversity Manifesto" 2)

In contemporary Dutch corporate businesses, there is a great demand for diversity strategies to foster 'equal opportunities for all'. Corporations have a varying set of incentives to work towards a more diverse workplace. In recent developments in diversity strategies, the approaches are highly centred around neoliberal market logic and notions as profitability and effectiveness. In McKinsey & Company's report "Delivering through Diversity", Vivian Hunt et al. argue that "for some, it is a matter of social justice, corporate social responsibility, their growth strategy or even regulatory compliance" (4). In addition to the Dutch government's regulations that require companies to set certain targets, the financial performance increasingly plays a role in how organisations rank among others. Eike Marten's engagement with gender and diversity in German Gender Studies can help to explain how in corporate language, the term diversity is used as a positive concept "with enriching variation and multiplicity" and it is put forward with "words that sound nice" (146). The quote at the beginning of this introduction uses words that sound 'nice' such as innovation, growth and more robust decisions and outcomes. In this and other quotes in the analysis, the words are purposely emphasised in italics to show how a significant number of similar large corporations produce statements on diversity that accentuate words that are closely related to the business case.

For this thesis, Sara Ahmed's and Eike Marten's discussion of diversity as 'non-performative' is highly relevant. Through the conceptualization of diversity as non-performative, Ahmed explains that saying diversity is not the same as doing diversity; thus, "the name comes to stand in for the effects" (*On Being Included,* 116-117). Whereas Ahmed introduces this concept to address the "lack of effects of diversity" in institutions such as the university, Marten uses Ahmed's discussion of non-performativity to analyse the discourse on diversity in the context of "genealogical stories in academic texts" (127-128). The author takes the concept of "performativity" in relationship to Michel Foucault's explanations of "discursive practices" which "systematically form the objects of which they speak" (qtd. in Marten 129). These examples of literature help to scrutinize the lack of critical evaluation and effectiveness of Dutch companies' diversity strategies. As companies' descriptions of diversity and

categories of groups of people appear rather limited, one of the aims of this research is to gain understanding of what it means when companies 'say diversity' and which fixed or non-fixed categories of persons fall under the attention of the diversity strategies.

Research question

This research will examine how large corporations operating in the Dutch context understand and implement their diversity policies, what intersections and categories are perceived as important by them and why some categories appear more prioritised than others. To analyse this, looking into what role neoliberal ideology plays in the establishment of the diversity policies may offer an explanation. This analysis refers to neoliberal ideology as the set of ideals that large corporations embody in relation to the free market and profitability. As companies seem to treat diversity strategies as a method to increase profitability and employees as drivers of profits, this thesis will also consider what categories are deemed beneficial by these organisations.

Methodology and structure of the thesis

To answer the research question, I have interviewed the diversity managers of three different corporations in the Netherlands. Moreover, I have conducted an analysis of several companies' statements on diversity. The research includes these companies because they appear to be open about their broad approaches to diversity, they have employed a diversity manager to deal with diversity issues as well as they highlight their image as corporate 'leaders' in diversity.

To create a better understanding of the contemporary Dutch corporate approaches to diversity and why this thesis adds new insights to this field, the first two chapters of this thesis include a mapping of corporate diversity policy, the theoretical framework and the methodology. The three analysis chapters that shape the structure and content of the thesis will explore the different issues that are crucial for my research on the non-performativity and neoliberal ideas of diversity. Drawing from the main theoretical concepts of diversity, non-performativity, intersectionality and neoliberalism, this thesis analyses the case study material that includes the information gathered from the interviews and the different corporate documents. The third chapter will use an intersectional approach to answer the question of what is hidden behind the single-axis approach to gender equality in the workplace. Chapter four discusses how the corporate definition of cultural diversity fuses identity markers of ethnicity, culture and nationality and how this contributes to implicit notions of valued and non-valued differences. Then, the fifth chapter examines the role of neoliberal ideology, which is embedded in 'the business case' of diversity, in the companies' approaches to diversity. Lastly, this thesis

will be reflected upon and personal views on possible interventions in the field of corporate diversity strategies will be discussed

Chapter 1 – Theoretical Framework

The main concepts that are discussed within the theoretical framework are diversity, non-performativity, intersectionality, whiteness and neoliberalism. This research uses an intersectional approach to examine whether companies render certain identity categories more important than others in relation to their diversity strategies. In addition, it questions if this leads to a failure to recognize the interconnectedness of issues as gender inequality and racial discrimination that are present in the workplace. A critical analysis of the concept diversity will allow me to study its meaning in the context of the corporate sector. Also, dealing with the notions of neoliberalism and ideas of difference is crucial in studying how gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, dis/ability and class are related to capitalist power structures and notions of profitability and value in the labour market. This section explains why this thesis contributes to the diversity discourse with new knowledge and insights. First, the following two sections will describe in what ways, by whom and from what perspectives the effectiveness of Dutch corporate diversity has been studied before.

Mapping of diversity in the corporate sector

A great amount of research that deals with diversity has been conducted particularly in the field of Human Resource (HR) Studies with a focus on 'managing' diversity. In this way, diversity is treated as a factor that requires management to achieve a company's desired effects such as increases in innovation, creativity and profits. In their case study of the Rabobank, management consultant David Subeliani and senior lecturer in Organizational Behaviour and Human Resource Management George Tsogas have identified an example of "managing diversity" in the Netherlands and illustrated a shift in the approach to this (831). An earlier approach called "Affirmative Action (AA)" was more driven by government regulations and shifted towards a focus on economic incentives for business (Subeliani and Tsogas 832).

Since the 1990s, a new form of managing diversity gained popularity in the domain of HR Management as a "tool" that can regulate the diversity within the organisation (Subeliani and Tsogas 831). According to the authors, this approach also claims to view "difference" more positively (Subeliani and Tsogas 832-833). On the one hand, the AA approach treats "difference" through concentrating on how "minority groups" differ from the "majority group" in terms of "age, ethnicity, gender, physical abilities, race and sexual orientation" and by doing so it fixates on socially constructed groups rather than considering individual experiences (Subeliani and Tsogas 833). On the other hand, Kersten emphasises that the "managing diversity strategy" attempts to develop an "inclusive and broad definition of diversity" that

requires the employer and all employees to be sensitive to the diversity strategies (qtd. in Tsogas and Subeliani 832-833). An example of a broad definition of diversity and a focus on individuals was exemplified by Hewlett Packard: "diversity is the existence of many unique individuals in the workplace, marketplace and community that includes men and women from different nations, cultures, ethnic groups, lifestyles, generations, backgrounds, skills and abilities" (qtd. in Tsogas and Subeliani 833).

Dutch corporate diversity

Due to economic, societal and demographic developments in the Netherlands, there has been an increase in interest to work on diversity in the workplace. TNO, a Dutch organisation for applied scientific research, delineates diversity policy according to the 'managing diversity' approach as "all activities within an organisation that contribute to the use of talent of all employees while acknowledging the differences as well as similarities among them" (Vries 8). First, there is great emphasis on creating a gender balance within organisations and on increasing the number of women in higher, decision-making positions which will be discussed in the analysis. The major driving force behind this is the Dutch law on management and supervisory boards that states that a certain percentage of the board members should consist of women (Diversiteit in Bedrijf).

Previous research has been conducted by the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment lacks an intersectional lens and focuses either on race, ethnicity or gender, as opposed to a multiple layered analysis that views these as interconnected. In the latest published report, the Ministry describes "good practices" of fostering cultural diversity within the workplace and it argues that diversity policy encourages anti-discrimination (Van Beek and Henderikse 3-5). The report's authors argue for the importance of doing research on cultural diversity, as there is a gap within the research which has been highly centred around the policy aims connected to the binary of male and female employees (Van Beek and Henderikse 3-5).

Additionally, diversity should be everyone's responsibility within an organisation. However, a great amount of government and consultancy agencies' research documents that report on best practices of the implementation of diversity initiatives is often aimed at the HR department, diversity managers and the people in leadership positions as appears in the ministry's report that was written by Annemieke van Beek and Wilma Henderikse in collaboration with advisory and monitoring company Van Doorne Huiskes (1-11). A pitfall with this approach is that it can devalue the urgency of working on diversity; as it implies that only a small part of an organisation should be concerned with diversity matters.

The Dutch ministry's report is aimed at the importance of researching the "added value" of cultural diversity to the company as well as at the possibilities to effectively implement diversity strategies (Van Beek and Henderikse 3-5). There are various reasons that drive companies to deal with diversity such as a more efficient use of the labour market, an increase of "innovation, better financial performance, increased wellbeing of employees and a better corporate image" (Van Beek and Henderikse 4-8). Van Beek and Van Doorne-Huiskes describe that organisations wish to adapt to the "current changes in the labour market; aging population, growth of individualism, increase of women's participation as well as from people with migrant backgrounds" (7).

Effectiveness and results of Dutch corporate diversity policies have been studied before by the Dutch government in collaboration with the corporate sector (Van Beek and Henderikse 1). The research often highlights 'the business case' for diversity which is aimed at the neoliberal ideology of the corporate sector of maximizing profits. However, these effects are difficult to measure. Thomas Kochan et al. claim that there is "a mismatch between research results and diversity rhetoric" (5-6). A positive relationship between a diverse workplace and financial performance of the company is not as "self-evident" like it appears in the corporate diversity discourse and it is rather complicated to demonstrate proof of this (Kochan et al. 5-6).

Diversity and non-performativity

The analysis starts from a broad understanding of the concept of diversity. This thesis will critically deal with the concept as it is treated in the context of workplace diversity strategies and as it is conceptualized in combination with non-performativity by Eike Marten and Sara Ahmed. First, Ahmed describes the term diversity in the context of institutions. She argues that for them the concept can be used as a form of "protection" through which "recognition" of diversity is used as a "justification" of neglecting deep rooted problems (Ahmed, *On Being Included* 1-17). In Marten's contextualization of Ahmed's discussion on diversity as non-performative, Marten states that diversity is used as "a narrative of overcoming" and therefore erases complex matters (129-146). According to Marten, "saying diversity" is performative to some extent as it adds to the knowledge production around diversity, but it produces effects that are contradictory (Marten 129-146). This discussion is interesting for this thesis as it deals with how the 'language of diversity' is used by companies in a way that when they 'say' diversity and just carry out the common best practices, they can also avoid crucial issues such as gendered racism. Also, the critical debate, or a lack thereof, around diversity in corporate workplaces is important. This includes questions around what "saying diversity" means in terms of

interventions, who is rendered better off and if solely having a policy takes away the 'burden' to actively "perform" the policy (Ahmed, *On Being Included* 1-17).

It is problematic when an approach to diversity and difference becomes a form of neglecting the complexities of people's everyday life experiences as addressed in intersectionality theory. The use of diversity as a "multidimensional" tool erases the necessary and complex academic discussions of gender and other social categorizations and reduces these to narrow concepts or "categorizations of difference" (Marten 140). According to Dagmar Vinz and Katharina Schiederig, who examine issues of gender and diversity, the concept of diversity exceeds the idea that it only captures differences but that it is also an "affirmative" notion in the sense that it brings "more options and choices" (26). In the same field of work, Gertraude Krell and Barbara Sieben explain how diversity is used as a "democratic concept of difference" in the sense that it is about both "differences and similarities" which emphasises that it not only enlarges a gap between people but that it also connects them "through their differences" (qtd. in Marten 140-141). In her work, Marten discusses the questionable approach to diversity as an overarching "embrace of all sorts of differences" which is not as infinite as it appears to be (144). This means that diversity stands in for "valued" or "acceptable" differences, and that there are "de-valued" differences which are perceived as "unproductive" within the neoliberal ideologies of a society (Marten 144). In line with Marten's discussion and the corporate diversity efforts, social anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen states that diversity is treated as if it is particularly "economically profitable and morally harmless" as opposed to the differences that are too deviating from the norm which harm the individualist freedoms associated with a neoliberal society (13-25). This way of thinking that he addresses contributes to a neglect of the oppressive structures and dominant power relations that keep these in place.

As managing diversity can be viewed as an action, Ahmed touches upon the work of Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders*, and M. Jacqui Alexander's *Pedagogies of Crossing* (*On Being Included*, 13-14). First, Mohanty describes how diversity is used by institutions to "bypass power as well as history to suggest a harmonious empty pluralism" (208–216). Second, Alexander critiques diversity policy as it has an "ideological function in the manufacture of cohesion" which leads Ahmed to add the question of how diversity contributes to "an idea of the institution that allows racism and inequalities to be overlooked" (qtd. in Ahmed, *On Being Included* 13-14). This also connects to the "strong paradox" that social and cultural anthropologist Gloria Wekker encounters in Dutch society as she points out in her book *White Innocence*: "the passion that race, in its intersections with gender, sexuality, and class, elicits among the white population, while at the same time the reactions of denial and

elusiveness reign supreme" (1). This will be discussed further in the following sections on intersectionality and whiteness.

Intersectionality

Black feminist scholar in critical race theory Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality, which was developed as a strong tool for analysis to bridge the gap between theory and practice to examine "simultaneous systems of oppression" (139-140). Using an intersectional approach for this analysis is relevant as it helps to ask the questions that aim to identify gaps of the corporate discourse on diversity. Instead of analysing different forms of oppression as separate issues, this thesis discusses corporate approaches to diversity by examining the categories of identity that are used within the strategies, to reveal who are privileged and who are marginalized through the current strategies. In line with social theorist Patricia Hill Collins' definition of intersectionality as a tool of scrutiny "within the power relations of social contexts", it fosters understanding of the meaningfulness of the multiple intersections as well as of the importance of attention to this in context of the workplace (1). As an intersectional lens is more powerful than using a single-axis approach, it sheds a light on what is missing in diversity policy and it challenges oppressive structures related to social locations and lived experiences. It is necessary to move away from thinking in fixed, isolated categories of identity as this fosters stigmatization and stereotyping. Therefore, it is valuable to view these as dynamic, interconnected, in conversation as well as changing through time and space.

The use of intersectionality theory is imperative as it serves the process of asking questions and to design the research method to answer those. It helps to identify which categories of identity are perceived as important when intersections of for example race and class are left out in corporate statements on diversity. This way of identifying which categories are prioritized by corporations and which are not, is also done through considering them as acting simultaneously and co-constructed. Additionally, this approach relates to intersectionality theory which broadens a single-axis analysis on gender to race and class for instance. In this way, systems of power such as whiteness can be better understood and it helps to continuously "ask the other question", a method that is explained by feminist law professor Maria Matsuda:

> When I see something that looks racist, I ask, "Where is the patriarchy in this?" When I see something that looks sexist, I ask, "Where is the heterosexism in this?" When I see

something that looks homophobic, I ask, "Where are the class interests in this?". (Matsuda, 1189)

Ann-Dorte Christensen and Sune Qvotrup Jensen describe how intersectionality theory was developed by black feminists and later also built upon by gender, sociology and political studies to further foster the awareness to "focus on processes in intersectional analyses and to approach power as relational" (109-111). Moreover, Hae Yeon Choo and Myra Marx Ferree illustrate this by stating that the focus on dynamic processes scrutinizes "racialization more than races, economic exploitation rather than classes, gendering and gender performance rather than genders" (qtd. in Christensen and Jensen 111). The use of categories might be helpful but challenging in analysing minority issues and it can be problematic when it becomes a form of focusing on a "deviating other" as opposed to a "normalized" dominant group, therefore, it is imperative to be "majority-inclusive" as it contributes to a deeper and more "nuanced" understanding of power relations (Christensen and Jensen 112). Furthermore, this is linked to the patterns of whiteness that play a major role in Dutch society. The national debate, as well as the corporate discourse on diversity, often focuses on the 'minority' group and lacks reflection on the problematic and oppressive structures that are produced by dominant patterns of whiteness.

To uncover the lived experiences that are often rendered invisible in contemporary discussions, social justice scholar Philomena Essed has developed the concept of "everyday racism" that is connected to intersectionality theory ("Towards a Methodology"). In her article that was published in 1982, "Feminism and Racism", Essed already raised awareness for the necessity to address how the interrelated oppressive systems of racism and sexism operate in the Dutch context ("Feminisme en Racisme" 16-17). She has coined the term "gendered racism" to talk about people's daily life experiences and interconnected structures of oppression that are not only gendered but also racialized (Essed "Towards a Methodology").

Whiteness

Dutch society often presents itself as highly developed in terms of progressiveness and tolerance on a whole range of social and political matters. The country is recognised for its liberal attitude, for instance towards the freedom of speech, LGBT-rights and sex workers. However, when this idea of tolerance towards people who are not part of the dominant group is critically challenged, it is more often met with rejection than with frankness to be open to criticism (Wekker 141). Wekker addresses the example of how the Black Pete figure is wrongfully sustained by large groups within Dutch society, to highlight how such overtly racist

practices go without the willingness to gain a better understanding of why this is unjust and how the dominant racialized group plays a significant role in reinforcing oppressive structures (141).

The pivotal issues raised by black feminist scholars as Philomena Essed and Gloria Wekker, are highly relevant in discussing the structural problems in the contemporary Dutch society. In her work, Wekker coins the concept "white innocence" to explain that whiteness is a "dominant and racial positioning" which is often overshadowed by the notions of progressiveness and tolerance (113-120). Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana build upon Wekker's conceptualization by defining an "epistemology of ignorance" that relates to the ignorance of dominant patterns of a white supremacy in which white people fail to acknowledge their own privileges, whereas they do benefit from the "racial hierarchies, ontologies and economies that exist in the world they live in" (2).

Both concepts of white innocence and the epistemology of ignorance are relevant when analysing how diversity is treated within the Dutch corporate sector. The corporate statements on diversity seem to have an emphasis on minority groups and a limited understanding of the ways in which whiteness plays a role in diversity issues. Linked to intersectionality theory, the discussion of whiteness challenges the way in which efforts for gender equality in the workplace are carried out. Also, it emphasises the necessity of bringing awareness not only to issues around gender but also around race, sexuality, dis/ability, and age and how these intersect. It seems as if systemic oppressions as racism and the connection to dominant structures of whiteness are neglected in the diversity strategies which will be further addressed in the analysis.

Adrienne Rich' "Politics of Location" is also highly relevant in this discussion. The feminist scholar has written about the ways in which Western, white feminism fails to acknowledge that neither their point of view is universal nor that there is a homogeneous group of 'women' (218-224). It is imperative to critically deal with the production of statements about 'women' as it helps to avoid thinking about women's issues in a way that is based on one material body that stands for all women. The erasure of lived experiences and representations of women who are not perceived as part of the dominant majority group fosters the creation of a disembodied 'woman' as subject of diversity policy.

Neoliberalism

A significant factor that renders persons as subjects to corporate diversity is the influence of neoliberalism. In relation to the other concepts that have been discussed in this chapter, a critical

discussion of neoliberalism is relevant in this research as it helps to look for the words in the corporate sector's diversity statements. These contribute to the non-performativity of such 'speech acts' as addressed by Ahmed. Neoliberalism is defined as an ideology that goes hand in hand with the market of commodities, freedom for the individual and is intertwined with social spaces (Read 26). Foucault discusses how neoliberalism produces subjectivity which renders individuals "subject of human capital" and how it presents society as the provider of ideas and creativity for market purposes (25-36). The neoliberal focus on competitiveness and the idea of investing in human capital gives the "ruling class", for example board members of multinationals, power to make decisions on elements in their strategy that aims to make profits (Foucault 25-36).

In his article "Diversity versus difference: Neo-liberalism in the minority debate", Eriksen examines the debate around cultural diversity linked to neoliberal ideology (13-25). The author argues that "neoliberalism is not in itself xenophobic" but he describes it as a "doctrine of freedom" which fails to acknowledge the realities of people's lives that do not fit within the normalized categories that have been delineated by this dominant ideology (24-25). Although his discussion is centred around cultural diversity, there is a strong link to the neoliberal ideals in workplace diversity. As neoliberalism is based on a normative view of "what it means to be human", it does not match with lived experiences which relates to how for instance racial and sexist oppressions are overlooked or dealt with from one angle (Eriksen 13-25). Furthermore, Eriksen concludes that the dominant group's praised and "unreflected individualist values", linked to ideals of achieving social and financial success, play a significant role in how harmful ideas of "intolerable difference" versus "unproblematic diversity" are shaped (20-25). This idea of unreflected individualism also relates to the problematic structures of whiteness within the Dutch society as addressed by Wekker.

Chapter 2 - Methodology

This chapter discusses the methodology that this research uses to answer questions such as if and how corporate diversity strategies benefit some identity categories over others while treating them as separate rather than interconnected. As part of the methodology, it explains how this thesis aims to uncover neoliberalist ideals interwoven with corporations' approaches to diversity.

Choice of companies

This research focuses on several large organisations that seem to have a comprehensive approach to their diversity policy. In the corporate sector, these companies are acknowledged as leaders in workplace diversity. Also, they are high in benchmarks of organisations such as D&I (Diversity and Inclusion) Company and Workplace Pride, win awards as tokens of appreciation for their diversity efforts and they contribute to research carried out by consultancy organisations such as McKinsey & Company who recently published the report "Diversity Matters". Moreover, these multinationals have a great sense of 'corporate responsibility' and a focus on working on internal diversity issues. This entails that these and other companies often set goals to achieve certain diversity targets and place high value on their HR management or a diversity manager to deal with a broad approach to diversity. This is imperative for this research, it is important to not only aim at gender diversity but also at how race, ethnicity, dis/ability, sexual orientation, age and other axes of identity are dealt with and whether companies treat these as separate or as co-constructed.

To spread the focus in this research, I have analysed the corporate diversity language of businesses that are operating both on a global scale but more importantly for this thesis also those operating specifically in the Dutch context. The 'language' that is analysed can be found in the corporations' documents and texts that are published by them on their websites. Additionally, the research seeks emerging patterns in these texts and the data that is gathered from the interviews with three diversity managers. This form of analysis was chosen as it fosters understanding of the extent to which both the companies' and diversity managers' 'speech acts' are 'performative', or in other words how these statements will 'stand in for their effects'. Also, it reveals the underlaying meanings of such written and articulated words on diversity strategies. However, it does not go into the measuring of diversity policies' effects or learning more from the people that are affected by them. Rather, by using the concepts as described in the theoretical framework it will focus more on why companies say they commit to diversity and why some of the 'diversity categories' are treated as more significant than others. The following sections

of this chapter, that discuss the semi-structured interviews and the intersectional analysis, will further explain how the combination of these methods contributes to answering the research question.

Although some of the discussed corporations operate worldwide, one of the diversity managers confirmed that the diversity strategies are adjusted to the local context. The diversity managers emphasised that the companies they work for, as well as themselves, wished to be treated anonymously. Therefore, there will not be spoken directly about the companies in connection to the diversity managers. Instead, websites and documents of various corporations with similar characteristics have been used to render them more anonymous in this thesis among the number of other companies. In this way, the analysis discusses the recurring patterns in several organisations' written statements without revealing the diversity managers' direct connections to the companies that they work for. The interviewed diversity managers will be referred to as diversity manager 1, 2 and 3. The interviewees happened to be two white men and one white woman. In relation to what has been discussed on whiteness in the theoretical framework, it is important to take this into account in the analysis as it influences how the diversity policy is carried out and discussed both in the interviews and in this thesis.

Research method

Semi-structured interviews

The aim of this research is to gain insights from the diversity managers who are in a position to act on the strategies which enables them to possibly drive change. In Ahmed's book *Living a Feminist Life,* she coins "diversity work" to discuss the ways in which "diversity workers" are in a pivotal place to "transform an institution" but where they can also face strong opposition or as the author describes it; "brick walls as the materiality of power" (89-91). Another goal of this research is to analyse how the diversity managers operate and how they experience different challenges or 'brick walls' considering the implementations of diversity policy within the organisations that they work for. Such insights are imperative, since they foster understanding of matters such as why companies commit to diversity, why diversity managers are appointed and what kind of initiatives are in place. Moreover, this information helps to identify the influences of whiteness and neoliberal ideals that are embedded in both the managers' articulations and in the companies' texts.

Although the interviewed corporate diversity managers might not work from a feminist, intersectional point of view and do not always seem similar to the feminist diversity workers

that Ahmed discusses in her writing, this statement discusses a part that plays a considerable role in the motivation behind this kind of research:

> Diversity work is feminist theory: we learn about the techniques of power in the effort to transform institutional norms or in the effort to be in a world that does not accommodate our being. (*Living a Feminist Life* 91)

The quote that is taken out of Ahmed's book is of significant value to this analysis. Although I am not a diversity worker but a Gender Studies master's student who is writing her thesis, I strongly believe that the way in which this programme's students learn to see the workings of the techniques of power. This helps us to use that knowledge to identify gaps and to intervene in a world that needs to transform and accommodate all beings.

As part of the method, the corporate diversity strategy texts have been analysed and the people who 'manage' diversity were interviewed to gain knowledge that is "hidden and unarticulated" within the texts (Hesse-Biber 113). The interviews were semi-structured and the interview plan functioned as a form of guidance through the main issues that are related to the research question (see Appendix A). However, the aim was to create an open conversation to gain "in-depth understanding" from the individual about their role within the organisation to carry out the values of diversity that are stated in the corporations' texts (Hesse-Biber 115).

Interview Guide

In order to structure the planned interviews, I developed an interview plan with key questions that include the main topics that were important to cover (see Appendix A). The guide was helpful to analyse both the companies' and the diversity managers' views on diversity issues. For example, I could ask the managers to elaborate on questions such as when they would consider issues from a gender perspective, whether they would also be aware of ways in which race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, dis/ability are acting simultaneously or not. Sometimes, it became clear when a diversity manager was upholding a form of external public relations through sharing the corporate message as stated in the organisation's documents. There was a clear difference between the interviewees who did this and those who could give more elaborate insights and examples of their own experiences.

Intersectional analysis

In addition to the interviews, I carried out an intersectional analysis to discover the meaning and power that is embedded in the companies' written statements on their diversity strategies and what types of diversity 'goals' are articulated in these in terms of identity categories. In line

with Ahmed and Marten's conceptualization of diversity as non-performative, George Kuh and Elizabeth Whitt argue that "what people say, espoused values, and what they do, enacted values, are not always congruent" which is why I think the combination of the two methods is interesting (111). This is also the core of the non-performativity argument as described by Ahmed, who writes that such speech acts "do not commit an organisation to an action" ("The Nonperformativity" 104). As the documents represent the companies' values and ideas of diversity, this form of textual analysis can help discover whether depictions of diversity reflect the needs of individuals or solely that what is in the interests of a company (Hesse-Biber 235).

The companies' texts and interview transcripts were analysed through looking at the recurring themes and words, while keeping in mind Ahmed's and Marten's discussions to consider the possible (non-)performativity of those speech acts. The collection of information and the analysis could be better connected through the method of coding and translating the "literal codes into more abstract categories" which fosters the process of interpreting the data (Hesse-Biber 334-335). For this research, it is valuable to pay attention to words in the gathered data such as business (case), innovation, productivity, growth, (financial) performance, diversity, difference, background, gender, LGBT, ethnicity, and cultural or multicultural diversity as these can serve the questions of what the major drivers are to work on diversity and how it seems to be increasingly used as a way to achieve neoliberal ideals. Also, it is imperative to identify striking statements that are articulated by the diversity managers as these can help to further reflect on the patterns that emerge. Furthermore, this approach allows the identification of differences between the companies' and diversity managers' expressions as well as to analyse whether in some texts on gender the category of race is overlooked, or in texts that talk about sexual orientation neglected ethnicity or class for instance. As part of the method, Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber depicts the kinds of questions that can be important to ask as these help to go from the codes towards a broader and deeper analytical understanding:

- "What is going on?"
- "What are people/companies doing?"
- "What is the person doing?"
- "What do these actions and statements take for granted?" (Hesse-Biber 335)

With these questions in mind, it is valuable to go back to the theory and to reflect on the themes that become more visible through the texts and transcripts. In addition to the information that can be found on companies' webpages, the diversity managers shape the ways in which diversity is discussed within the corporate culture.

Ahmed illustrates this by stating that in "speech acts" she not only includes "spoken words but also writing and visual images—all the materials that give an institution interiority, as if it has a face, as well as feelings, thoughts, or judgments" ("The Nonperformativity" 104). Thus, when a company produces statements it simultaneously produces ideas of diversity as one of the company's qualities or makes a claim for "future actions" which Ahmed treats as examples of speech acts that "do not what they say" ("The Nonperformativity" 104). Also, connected to Essed's discussion on "everyday racism" that includes a way of conducting an intersectional analysis, she is critical of the use of statistics in attempts to show proof of diversity efforts. This also applies to how it is done in the corporate sector. Essed argues for the necessity to move away from this and to look for "stories behind the statistics":

> Statistics are a vital tool for generating and legitimating anti-discrimination policies. In addition, we need a different type of information as well. The question how the marginalization of women of color takes places – the seclusion or openness of those practices, the way in which discriminations of different kinds converge – refers to a world, largely hidden from view. (Essed "Towards a Methodology")

This argument is related to Christensen and Jensen's discussion which emphasises the necessity to carry out intersectional analysis including the consideration of everyday experiences with structures of oppression (109). Although this method will not include interviews with people who experience structural oppression themselves, this form of analysis is valuable as it will not only deal with what is stated in companies' documents and statistics. Rather, it will discuss the articulations of people who are in the position to have a say in what diversity means to a company and whose strategies impact people in the workplace. This method will seek for similar topics and words as these are covered in the interviews. Additionally, Christensen and Jensen touch upon an important issue that comes with working with intersectionality which is also in line with the motivation for the research of this thesis. The authors argue that also for an intersectional analysis it is pivotal to recognize the intersecting "forms of social differentiation" as non-hierarchical (Christensen and Jensen 111-112).

Chapter 3 – Gender and race

> Each person is a sort of *sum*, minus certain aspects of all the aspects that make up him or her. This can be about something like *gender*, one that we have a *clear understanding* of. In fact, everything together forms that individual, and that can be linked to so many of the various topics that receive attention within diversity. (Diversity manager 2)

The quote illustrates how the different aspects of a person are often treated as parts of a sum. However, starting from this point of view can be problematic because it creates a sense of competition for companies to recruit a 'diverse' labour force that seeks people who 'tick most of the diversity boxes'. Moreover, it appears as a hierarchical way of treating categories of identity of which this thesis attempts to analyse whether this is the case in corporate diversity strategies or not.

This chapter will analyse why the identity axis of gender is often at the centre of workplace diversity strategies. It analyses whether the focus on gender diversity overshadows other crucial issues that need to be addressed and if the identity axis of gender is treated as more important than other co-constructed axes. First, it discusses how an essentialist view of a homogenous category of 'women' and a limited definition of gender diversity erase the complexity of race and gender issues. Second, it explores how such essentialist ways of thinking and uses of separate identity categories in companies' diversity strategies seem to neglect how these axes are co-constructed. Lastly, this chapter will examine how the current notion of non-performativity of anti-racism and anti-sexism workplace diversity strategies can become more performative.

Women as a category in workplace diversity

Within the Dutch corporate domains of managing diversity, the treatment of a broad category of 'women' seems to be a strong pattern. To explore what the written 'categories' of gender and women in corporate diversity statements mean, I asked the diversity managers how the companies' policies define gender. In the quote above, the 'clear understanding of gender' within corporate diversity, often includes a focus on the binary form of male/female diversity. Diversity manager 2 states that within the corporate sector, gender is often treated as an "HR term" that aims at this binarism which is also strongly present in societal thinking patterns. However, she claims that the company that she works for applies a broader definition that views gender as a spectrum. There is no written definition of what this includes. However, she explains that within the company's diversity policy gender refers to sex which is often

associated with either male or female but which is not the meaning of gender within this strategy; it does not require people either to be or to identify as man or woman. The diversity manager views the lack of a written definition as "instrumental", as she argues that "it [gender] can be what you make of it". However, as the corporation's strategies on gender diversity still largely aim at the ratio between the percentages of men and women in its workforce, I think that leaving this space open for a great number of people in the corporate sector to shape their own definition of gender will reinforce binary and essentialist thinking.

Holvino demonstrates the problem of an essentialist category of women in her article "Intersections: The Simultaneity of Race, Gender and Class in Organization Studies" in which she develops Calás and Smiricich's argument by stating that "the liberal feminist paradigm" has wrongly treated "white, middle-class, heterosexual women as representative for all women", in a way that their daily life experiences are treated as "normative" and become the focus within workplaces (qtd. in Holvino 255-261). Since there is an explicit focus on raising the number of women in leadership positions which also connects to the issue of class and socio-economic background, it is important to be cautious of this issue in how diversity strategies are treated in the context of Dutch corporations.

The focus on this gender binary is influenced by the "law of management and supervision" which provides the Dutch government with a great amount of data (Diversity manager 2). This approach fixates on a definition of gender that only considers the "balance between men and women in the workplace" and centres 'women's' participation (Diversiteit in Bedrijf). The data that is gathered from corporations in the Netherlands shows that there is a disbalance between the percentages of women and men who participate in the corporate sector. Diversity manager 3 emphasised the significance for the company to be a "reflection of society". He indicates that the business provides products for the "entire Dutch society" and that it should be able to "be the Dutch society". The interviewees have argued that as the result of a great governmental 'push' for the diversity of men and women, especially considering leadership positions, there is a sizeable emphasis on this within corporations. However, applying this to Essed's criticism on the use of statistics which was highlighted in the methodology chapter, this gathering of data can also be used as a form of protection of interests of the dominant racialized group. There is a silence around that what is invisible behind the numbers. Particularly in the case of gender diversity in the workplace, having these measurements as forms of proof contribute to a lack of clarity about who these people are and what role other identity axes such as race and class play in this.

Separation of categories of identity

> Diversity cannot be achieved by just talking about it. It should not just be about *making statements* to go along with *what other corporates do*. Instead, we should focus on 'doing' diversity'. (Diversity manager 2)

It is striking that despite such arguments and several claims that every employee in the corporation is included in the diversity strategy, it also becomes clearer from the diversity managers' answers what the 'focus' groups of employees are as already illustrated in the case of gender diversity in the section above. The three interviewees claimed that many contemporary corporations articulate their definition of diversity together with the motivation to be an inclusive and welcoming workplace for all employees. For instance, in its' "Diversity Brochure", IBM defines what diversity means to the company as well as 'who' is part of the identity groups that appear as separate and are addressed as "diversity constituencies" such as "Asian, Black, Hispanic, LGBT, Men, Native American, People with Disabilities, and Women" (IBM Corporation). This seems like a broad and inclusive approach to workplace diversity and many other corporations use such statements to tell the outside world that they 'do something with diversity'. However, it is not clear how effective this is or if it is just a nice way of 'saying' diversity.

Due to a lack of explanation of what diversity means to the companies, it is not clear whether the strategies equally focus on each 'category of identity' or if these divide the groups into those who are perceived as more important and those who are treated as less of a priority. A company that appears the most insightful on its diversity strategy and its focus on the organisation's web page is VodafoneZiggo. The corporation states that the main themes within their diversity strategy are "the creation of an international workforce, a more open corporate culture towards LGBT+ and attention to the support of women in top positions and in engineering" (VodafoneZiggo, "Thema's – Diversiteit"). Although this example still includes broad depictions of "international, LGBT and women", other similar organisations remain rather vague on their web pages by including every separate 'diversity group' one can think of while leaving out more specific explanations of what their diversity strategy entails.

After asking one of the interviewees whether there is an identity category that gets a greater amount of attention than others, diversity manager 1 answered that particularly members of the LGBT community and the number of women in leadership positions are high priorities for many large corporations in the Netherlands. Additionally, I asked about the awareness of these 'categories' as interconnected. For instance, when one considers an issue from a gender

perspective and there is also sensitivity towards the ways in which race and sexual orientation are affected simultaneously. Diversity manager 1 argued for the importance of "bringing together the similarities and needs of the different groups" and to focus on "particular elements that are essential to the organisation such as talent, visibility and recruitment". From the diversity manager's answer, it seemed as if the use of an intersectional approach to the diversity strategy was not as explicit or was overshadowed by the corporation's interests. When I asked him again in less academic terms whether there is sensitivity towards the notion of intersectionality in the implementation of diversity, it came across as if he did not fully grasp the idea of co-constructed identities and systems of oppression or how this could translate into diversity in the workplace when dealing with many individuals. A similar pattern occurred as I asked diversity manager 3 about the complexity of the use of categories and what happens when an employee could 'fit into' different categories separately, but there is no clarity on whether there is space for a 'multiple-axis' approach as discussed in this thesis' theory section. He answered:

> The gag is, that through my role I now know quite a few people within this domain. I know a guy, who knows that lady that you just described, of course she exists several times, but this is a *black, lesbian woman in a wheelchair*: she ticks *all of the diversity boxes*. She also seems to have *a great personality*, so we really wish to create a platform for her as *the ideal employee*. Also, she seems to be quite *outspoken*. (Diversity manager 3)

From his answer, it seems as if one can only be the "ideal employee" by being nice and outspoken as well as by contributing to non-performative speech acts that can proclaim that the organisation is diverse because this kind of person is connected to the company. Furthermore, the diversity manager mentioned an employee with autism who had been articulate about some of his worries such as travelling to work. Then, I asked him about the space within diversity strategies for people who might not be as articulate about their needs and experiences, possibly due to differences in experiences in their lives, upbringing, cultural background or norms and values. The manager found it a complex matter, as he believes that "everyone is responsible for his or her own success". Although I agree with his claim that as an organisation it is pivotal "to create space for people to feel secure and to be able to share and to ask for help", I also think this includes being accountable as a company and to actively and critically review how this space is currently created and for who (Diversity manager 3).

During the interview with diversity manager 2, I learned that my understanding of

intersectionality as it is discussed in the theoretical framework is different than how it is understood within these corporations' approaches to diversity. This also explains why, in the previous paragraphs, I found it difficult to grasp the diversity managers' forms of 'corporate intersectionality'. I discussed the notion of intersectionality and what it means within the organisation of diversity manager 2 who affirmed that "in academia, there can be a different definition of intersectionality than in the business community". According to her, it is vital to establish working groups in which the members are not solely women to discuss women's issues for instance. Diversity manager 2 argues that it is valuable to work with mixed teams of people that also deal with "cultural and gender diversity". For example, several topics are dealt with from a perspective that "centralises the inclusion of differences" (Diversity manager 2). Diversity manager 2 states: "diversity in all its forms contribute to our company as a competitive advantage". Moreover, diversity manager 3 argued for the importance of listening to different needs in support of different employees. These statements are key since it can be questioned whether companies view diversity solely as part of a strategy or as compliance to their employees. Dealing with the interconnected issues that play a role in cultural and gender diversity for instance, is already more closely related to an intersectional approach. However, the corporate approach is still significantly influenced by neoliberal ideals as competitive advantage.

Non-performativity of anti-racism and anti-sexism

As I discussed corporate ideas of gender, women and intersectionality in the sections above, the issue of race was still missing from the diversity managers' stories. I asked diversity manager 1 if he experiences resistance towards his work from people within the organisation and he explained that this was not the case. However, he argued that he notices a general idea among people in the Netherlands who feel as if "all is well" in terms of the diversity and inclusiveness and that dealing with it is perceived as a "luxury", which in his opinion is "absolutely not true" (Diversity manager 1). Considering Wekker's discussion on the ignorance that is connected to whiteness and the general belief that Dutch society is completely progressive and 'tolerant', the diversity manager touches upon a strong pattern in the Netherlands. This pattern, in combination with a lack of awareness on how structural oppressions are co-constructed, explains why efforts of anti-racism and anti-sexism are non-performative since a great number of white people in Dutch corporations fail to recognize forms of 'everyday racism' and 'gendered racism' as discussed earlier with Essed's work.

The increasing implementation of hidden bias trainings is an example of how the

inability to recognize everyday racism and gendered racism can be challenged. All three of the diversity managers mentioned this as an influential implementation of the diversity strategy. Diversity manager 2 explained:

> There used to be a Chinese man in my team and often I was annoyed as I often thought *'why does he never say anything'*. Then I bought a book about how cultural backgrounds affect society. There were certain examples given and then I thought *'I do this too'*. From that moment on, I approached him in a very different way. But it seems as if you, as an individual, first must *experience* this. What we are trying to do is that through training, coaching, *discussing experiences* and differences, so that you should not actually go wrong first, but that you discuss this preventively. (Diversity manager 2)

After this statement, she argued that the employees are becoming more critical and conscious towards their own biases through initiatives such as hidden bias trainings. These thinking processes include raising awareness on how to reflect on one's own privileges and 'blind spots'. The trainings can significantly contribute to change not only in the workplace, but also in terms of structures of gendered racism and white supremacy. Nonetheless, I think that it is important to remain in conversation and to not only look at what is taking place within the organisation itself as it is always part of the larger structures in society. This means that workplace diversity trainings are important for companies to achieve various targets. Nonetheless, what is highly imperative is to approach these with openness and eagerness learn from narratives that might not seem as 'beneficial' or 'visible' according to dominant views and to those who are in power in the corporate sector.

In relation to the use of separate identity categories or "constituency groups" as one of the diversity managers called them, it can be problematic when this is also the approach towards initiatives as diversity trainings. The idea that particular issues only belong to a specific group is sustained when trainings are separated on the basis of these groups. For example, when trainings about women's issues are aimed at 'women', hidden bias trainings are for the people in leadership positions only and trainings about LGBT diversity issues are solely encouraged among members of the LGBT community and allies. Diversity manager 1 claimed that not all layers within the organisation were given access to participate in such trainings as the hidden bias trainings were exclusively meant for "all people in management" in order to foster "inclusive leadership". During the interview with diversity manager 3, I wanted to gain a better understanding of the trainings that the corporation provides and whether these focus on specific groups of people and if the topics are approached from multiple angles. One of the trainings, a

"Women's Traveling Training", aims at 'women' to talk about matters that are important to consider before a female employee travels to a country which might have a "different way of living" (Diversity manager 3).

> Josja: Is this type of training only meant to discuss this with women or is there also space for men who…
>
> Diversity manager 3: … need to be brought up a bit? Haha. That is included in the bias trainings, but it is also in the code of conduct which emphasises what we stand for and what is not accepted. The travel trainings are mainly for women.

By approaching the categories and various matters as separate, such strategies reinforce the circle of not acknowledging that structures of racism and sexism affect everyone in an organisation. It shapes the 'diversity agenda' in such a way that it gives a voice to the people in power who decide how much space is given to the groups to have a say in this process as well as what matters are solely shared in documents as 'code of conducts' which people can decide to take seriously or not. All issues are in conversation with each other, therefore it would be interesting to see what happens when the various trainings and 'target groups' are mixed to start this conversation. It is imperative to implement diversity trainings with an intersectional approach that centralize issues of racism and sexism and the relation to whiteness to turn the non-performativity of anti-racism into a more performative approach.

Conclusion

Corporate organisations approach different categories of identity that they list in a selective manner. Within the diversity strategies, gender diversity is treated as an overarching matter. Because of this explicit attention to the binary idea of what gender includes and a view of 'women´s issues' as universal which is enforced by government regulations, current approaches to corporate diversity fail to critically address other categories of identity. Although there is a corporate sense of 'intersectionality', this diminishes the strength of the strategies in terms of recognizing how the varying axes of identity are interconnected and acting simultaneously rather than the contemporary strategies which predominantly treat them as separate.

Furthermore, not only hierarchies in identity categories but also divisions in organisational layers impact the manners in which diversity policies are carried out and the extent to which they are effective. Together with more clarity and focus within the corporate diversity strategies and speech acts, there is a need for a greater sensitivity towards the use of concepts and language in the ways that these are discussed in academic approaches to

intersectionality theory as developed by black feminists. Within a racialized system of whiteness in the Dutch context, this also influences what issues are rendered most important in terms of diversity connected to race, gender and other intersections. This relates to the ignorance of the race issue that will be analysed further in the following chapter on cultural diversity.

Chapter 4 – Cultural Diversity

Cultural diversity is one of the categories of identity that are discussed in corporate diversity statements, but of which the meaning remains unclear. Ethnicity, nationality and religion are frequently mixed under the umbrella of cultural diversity. As the term cultural diversity is used abundantly in corporate speech acts on diversity, it is interesting to analyse whether this is a pattern of non-performativity of diversity or not. This chapter examines how the corporate establishment of cultural diversity groups fuses identity markers of ethnicity, cultural background and nationality and how this contributes to implicit notions of valued and non-valued differences. First, it examines how the definition of cultural diversity is discussed by the corporate diversity managers and how it contributes to the ways in which some cultural differences are treated as if they are of greater value to organisations as opposed to differences that are unvalued. Second, this chapter discusses how the use of an overarching category as cultural diversity is entangled with the lack of discussion of race issues. Lastly, it explains how the contemporary corporate treatment of cultural diversity can involve forms of non-performative diversity that foster tokenism.

Valued differences

It is not apparent who the implicit subjects of the cultural diversity strategy are. Binary thinking is not only maintained in the diversity category of gender as analysed in the previous chapter, but also in thinking in terms of western and non-western or how 'autochtoon' and 'allochtoon' used to be described in Dutch. In the '90s, the central agency for statistics in the Netherlands, the CBS (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek), described "allochtoon" as a "non-western foreigner of whom at least one parent is born in a non-western country" (Ree, "Termen"). More recently, the terms have been transformed into "a person with a Dutch background" and "a person with a migrant background" which are often also the definitions that diversity managers apply (Ree, "Termen"). However, it leads to the question of what these definitions, that still focus on people's countries of birth, can disclose in relation to measuring the ethnic and cultural diversity within a company. It is a rather one-dimensional measurement which says little about the different employees' backgrounds as also the group of people with a "Dutch background" becomes more and more diverse in terms of many co-constructed 'identity categories' such as ethnicity, culture and religion that are now seem to be put together with nationality in an incoherent manner. As I asked diversity manager 2 about the definition of diversity of the company that she works for, she made a distinction between the concepts of diversity and inclusion and claims:

Diversity is mainly about *differences*, for example differences in gender, cultural background, class, ethnicity, socio-economic background, sexual orientation. Diversity is more a kind of *measuring tool*. Through diversity management, one can say 'we have this many women or this many men'. Inclusion is much more about, regardless of the differences in diversity, that the employee can be fully appreciated for his or her work. That everyone is *valued* for his/her diversity. That a man can have a different approach than a woman. That if you are *purely Dutch*, you have a different approach to problems and solving them than if you have a *different background* than Dutch. I *do not even mean Moroccan Dutch*, but I am talking about an *Italian lady* who works in the Dutch context, but approaches it in a different way, but that it can be shown to advantage. So that all *positive things* that are related to diversity such as difference of opinion, different communication style, different approach style, a different way of working, that there is space for that. (Diversity manager 2)

In her answer, I added emphasis to the words that struck me. For example, I read the division she makes between 'positive things' connected to diversity, such as a person's qualities and work ethics in relation to a more privileged, western, upper- middle-class expat, and the implicitly addressed 'negative' matters connected to having a different cultural, ethnic, national background than "purely Dutch". Eriksen's work applies to this, as he writes about the relationship between diversity and difference. The author argues that "the same people who endorse diversity tend to reject difference" which also shapes perceptions of "acceptable and unacceptable cultural differences" as well as what issues gain attention (13-36). The diversity manager's answer illustrates how some differences are more valued than others and how it privileges white, western "persons with a migrant background" over non-western employees. Furthermore, it demonstrates ideas of "good and bad diversity" as Alana Lentin and Gavan Titley describe in their work *The Crises of Multiculturalism: Racism in a Neoliberal Age* (176). The scholars in social and cultural studies Lentin and Titley explain that within societal, political and corporate domains there is an implicit division between which groups of people are viewed as closer to "us" as "the right kind of diverse objects" and who are deviating from the norm and belong to "them" (176).

It is important to recognize that the ideas as described above are not solely articulated by this particular white, Dutch diversity worker but they are part of a larger pattern within Dutch society as also pointed out by Wekker and Essed. This dominant form of "societal and political regulation" that can be found within workplace diversity efforts, reinforces dominant racialized

structures as it does not "challenge the forward march of the neoliberal project" which will be discussed further in the next chapter (Lentin and Titley 188).

Cultural diversity and race

Although the term cultural diversity is mentioned regularly, a great number of companies' statements are written in such a way that it seems as if a person's identity axis as ethnicity does not play a role in recruitment processes; as if such elements in diversity strategies are neutral whereas they are not. As illustrated above, the discussion regarding race issues is also erased from the diversity managers' approach to cultural diversity as a category that ambiguously touches upon cultural, ethnic and national background. In the "Diversity Manifesto" that was also highlighted in the introduction, ING prioritises "to create diverse team by attracting and selecting people based on their competencies, not their background" (ING). A similar text can be found on the ABN AMRO Bank's diversity and inclusion web page:

> We are curious why you visit this page. What are you looking for and do you hope to find? Probably not a story about 'the power of *other cultures'*, 'synergy' and 'equal opportunities'. *Important topics, but you can read about that everywhere.* What is more interesting is who you are and *what you can add.* (ABN AMRO Group, "Diversiteit maakt het verschil")

This speech act appears as non-performative because it notes that these matters are "important topics, but you can read about that everywhere" (ABN AMRO Group). Although it is presented as if this is a likeable, 'progressive' thing to say among all other organisations that engage in corporate diversity initiatives, it also demonstrates that the corporation decides on what issues are a priority and diminishes the weight of issues that need critical reflection instead.

Furthermore, this connects to the notions of white innocence and the epistemology of ignorance that also discuss people's fear of being wrong or uncomfortable when reflecting on and one's own position and privileges in a discussion about race and cultural diversity. In the interview with diversity manager 2, I asked her about race issues and if and how this is discussed in relation to diversity work. She responded to this by stating:

> Race is not a term that I ever use. However, a term that is very prevalent there
> is discrimination, which is linked to racism, sexism and so on, I think that that
> is the only thing that returns. But you do see that if you, as a company,
> formulate your policy and when it is presented to the outside world, one will
> stay away from *highly politically or emotionally triggering* terms. I have to say

that *racism is not present*.. or yes of course it is, it will happen unfortunately.
I wish it was not like that, but it happens. It is something *inherent to humans*.
In the company we rather speak in terms of discrimination or exclusion.
[…] Nevertheless, it should not become too general as it is important to uncover
painful issues if you want to be able to change those. (Diversity manager 2)

As discussed in the previous chapter on gender and race, diversity manager 2 advocates for raising consciousness among employers and employees as she argues that it is a crucial "neurological process" that examines how in- and exclusion take place. However, she first attempted to say that "racism is not present" in the corporation. This relates to people's failure to recognize their own privileges and role in oppressive practices. According to Ahmed, similar expressions as these of diversity manager 2 who has argued that talking about race can be too "politically or emotionally triggering" are statements "that reproduce racism" (*On Being Included* 4). This is also related to Mohanty's and Alexander's critical views on managing diversity as discussed in the theoretical chapter, who both claim that it is an ideological practice that fails to acknowledge history as well as power relations. By saying something as "racism does not occur here", "our company is free from racism" or "it is inherent to humans", just as Dutch society claims to be tolerant and "free from racism", one ignores that corporations are not neutral or free from societal structures and that they should be accountable to deal with these issues.

Saying diversity and the danger of tokenism

The use of an overarching category of cultural diversity can have as a problematic effect that people are made tokens and to present this as a form of positive change, whereas it in fact is an oppressive phenomenon. An increasing number of corporations in the Netherlands is implementing quota on gender diversity to better balance the ratio between men and women in higher positions. According to diversity manager 3, this is a "challenging topic" within his corporation as well. As he explains why it is challenging, he depicts the problem of tokenism:

My worry is that when the organisation will use quota for the varying topics of gender,
multicultural, LGBT and others, one needs to be careful with statements such as '*we
have a woman, three Moroccans and a gay man who we just put away somewhere*'.
(Diversity manager 3)

Nonetheless, not only with this example but also with the other interviewees, I have noticed the sometimes contradictory nature in their statements. In the previous chapter's discussion on

intersectionality in corporate diversity strategy, diversity manager 3 mentioned a black, lesbian, dis/abled woman through which her position and personal characteristics gave her a free pass for visibility in corporate conversations on diversity. Ahmed has explained this issue as a way in which companies treat "the other" employees, who are perceived as beneficial to the diversity strategy "as a property": "we are diverse because 'they' are here" ("The Nonperformativity" 119-120). After his example of the black woman who "ticks all diversity boxes", diversity manager 3 continued with a case of a Chinese gay man who identifies himself with having a "double diversity". The difference with this example, is that the diversity manager now claims that one should be careful with the "companies who all announce their wish for employees with different backgrounds". During this research, I have recognized this sense of contradiction as a pattern among the interviewed diversity managers and the various corporations' statements on diversity. This pattern is significant considering the non-performativity of diversity as it uncovers how the corporations' positive speech acts fail to challenge the issues of diversity strategies to make them performative.

Conclusion

In corporate approaches to cultural diversity, diversity is inextricably linked to difference. An ambiguous use of the concepts of ethnicity, culture and nationality seems to conceal something. Also within this diversity category, thinking in binary oppositions of western and non-western, valued and unvalued differences is present. It shapes a division between who, as subjects to the diversity strategy, are beneficial to cultural diversity and who do not belong to this group of 'us' in the corporate culture.

The lack of reflection on whiteness contributes to the ignorance towards racial categories and issues of racism. Corporations reject to explicitly deal with issues that they find too "political" which appears as if discussions on race are not perceived as relevant enough. Furthermore, the contradictions in corporations' and diversity managers' speech acts fail to critically address the underlying issues. Instead, this exercise of the non-performativity of diversity shifts away from challenging the problematic practice of using people as tokens. Through the deceptive production of positive statements, companies reproduce racism and the erasure of crucial issues from both the corporate and the public discourse which is an issue that will be discussed further in the following chapter.

Chapter 5 – Neoliberal ideals in corporate diversity

> In fact, it is also profoundly selfish of the company, because if someone feels more involved with the company the employee will be *more productive*. There is a study that says that one cannot *fully deliver* if there are issues that hinder that person. (Diversity manager 3)

This research aims at how large corporations implement their diversity strategies and why some identity categories are considered more important than others. To answer this question, it is also pivotal to identify the neoliberal ideals that influence this and what incentivises the corporations to commit to diversity. This chapter will discuss the concepts of diversity and the ways in which neoliberal ideals are entangled with this. The kind of corporations that are part of this research frequently use words as effectiveness, productiveness, profitability, innovation, (financial) performance in public statements on their approach to diversity. This analysis seeks such expressions both in the texts and within the interviewees' articulations.

Following Ahmed's ideas on the non-performativity of diversity and how it overshadows issues of sexism and racism, it is important to examine how neoliberal ideals connect diversity and the co-constructed axes of identity. First, this chapter discusses how the financial and economic conjuncture is a major influence for contemporary corporate diversity approaches. Second, it analyses how descriptions of corporate diversity appear as if the 'added value' that employees can bring is limited to the dominant cultural group's neoliberal ideas of value. Lastly, it addresses the concept of pinkwashing to argue that corporations foster forms of marketization of LGBT rights to uphold a positive image while concealing the structural oppressions they reinforce.

Diversity as a trend

A considerable part of the non-performativity of corporate diversity is related to the ways in which organisations render themselves as "subjects in their commitment to diversity" and shape their external image through statements that associate words such as 'differences' and 'backgrounds' with words as productivity and comparative advantage (Ahmed, "The Nonperformativity" 119). The business case of diversity plays a major role in the corporate sector's commitment to work on diversity issues in and outside the workplace. Diversity manager 2 explains that there are many elements that contribute to a commitment to develop a diverse workforce. In the Dutch corporate sector, government incentives are significant drivers

particularly in the cases of gender diversity and regulations for people with a dis/ability. Nonetheless, diversity manager 2 also states that:

> Although there is legislation, we also do everything based on the intrinsic motivation. We want to do it, because we think it is normal. Everyone deserves a chance, period. (Diversity manager 3)

Additionally, within the diversity manager's companies it is about finding "the best talents" and whether the company is a "likeable employer" or not (Diversity manager 2). In line with this argument, diversity manager 1 claims that:

> Within [company name] diversity efforts have been an urgency for a long time. This connects to the essential idea of *transformation* as we are a [type] company, including the *need for innovation* and support for the future. This is a *'fast moving' business* as we call it, which is focused on the *innovation and dynamics of people* as well. (Diversity manager 1)

Within the corporate sector, the focus on diversity efforts is strongly connected to the financial and economic developments. Moreover, the interviewed diversity workers all emphasised the necessity to adjust to the labour market and the future economy. Diversity manager states 2:

> You see that diversity and inclusion also seem to be a kind of *trend subjects* that sometimes arise and are considered as very important, and then slowly seem to disappear unnoticed. One can also link this to the economic and financial market. So, one notices that if things are going well with a company, then there is more space for them to work on diversity than when things are going less well. Whereas one could argue that it is an essential part that really should not be cut back to have a successful future as a company. (Diversity manager 2)

As discussed above, the three interviewees emphasise that according to them the company's commitment to diversity should not originate from the business case and that ultimately their "job position should not need to exist" (Diversity manager 3). Although one can state that it is unfortunate that there is a need for diversity managers, it is also an issue that is created and sustained by the companies' neoliberal interests. It is simple to create a place for a diversity manager and to present this to the outside world as a great effort. Nevertheless, the individuals that fill this position are part of a larger structural issue and the goals they are demanded to achieve are also limited to the corporate ideals. The corporations do benefit from an increase in

popularity of the topic of diversity which will be emphasised in this chapter's last section as well. Diversity manager 3 argues that although the market does play a role in corporate diversity strategies, it is imperative "to be honest about it". Diversity managers are increasingly part of the contemporary corporate cultures and to make their positions more effective, openness and transparency can play a significant role in transforming the non-performative speech acts into more performative actions.

Subjects of diversity and added value to the company

Aside from the intrinsic motivation, the economic value is still emphasised and appears connected to particular subjects in the corporate sector's articulations on diversity strategies. For example, the "Executive Vice President Talent & Development" who is responsible for Shell's worldwide diversity policy states that the company's definition of diversity links to employees' various ways to approach issues "more effectively and more productively" which boosts "innovativeness and performance" and she concludes her statement with: "now, do the math" (Shell, "Diversity and Inclusion Beleid Shell"). Statements on corporate diversity web pages give the impression that particularly the subjects of 'cultural diversity' need to contribute with a certain advantage which is still limited to the company's dominant cultural group's ideas of what this should entail. For example, the text on Deloitte's website on the theme "Cultural Diversity" emphasises these words in bold:

> As an organization, we need to **increase** the sense of **inclusion** for people with different backgrounds in order to **strengthen** the **high-performance culture** we strive to have. By doing so, we aim to instil a sense of inclusion as well as **attract more talented individuals** to Deloitte'. (Deloitte)

Instead of applying words as "high-performance" to the company's theme "cultural diversity", it would be helpful to reconsider this type of business language that builds on the value of matters that relate to financial performance and productivity. To foster a greater sense of 'doing' diversity, it is significant to shift away from seeking this kind of value. Therefore, the underlaying issues that hinder the corporation's performativity of diversity should be scrutinized.

Pinkwashing and the intersections of gender, sexuality and race

The ignorance of race issues is a dominant pattern in corporate discussions on LGBT equality in the Netherlands. There is a lack of recognition of how the axes of "race, gender and sexuality" are always "in conversation with each other", as explained by Wekker who emphasises that

these "are all part of each other's histories and representations" (Wekker 24). It is imperative to take this intersectional approach into account, as in discussions of gender, the axis of sexuality is often neglected or treated as a separate category. A category that only seems to belong to the dominant racialized group of people in the Netherlands which is rendered more visible during public events as the Gay Pride for instance. Dutch corporations foster partnerships with NGOs such as Workplace Pride to impact both the corporate and public discourse on LGBT equality in the Netherlands as well as on a global level ("Most LGBT-Friendly Organisations").

The concept of pinkwashing is relevant to the context of this thesis' discussion as it relates to Ahmed's argument in which she addresses the way in which 'saying diversity' becomes a matter of concealing damaging, oppressive practices ("The Nonperformativity" 121). The combination of the words pink and whitewashing was first coined in 2003 to address the ways companies unjustly profited from the marketing around the combat against breast cancer (Peters "Pinkwashing"). In contemporary discussions, the concept is often treated in relation to the problematic efforts of the "Israeli government" to promote itself as a progressive democracy to cover up its severe "violations of human rights" (Peters "Pinkwashing"). For this thesis, the concept is also useful to identify how companies attempt to conceal underlying, harmful issues that they are involved in by doing an appeal on LGBT rights through their business strategies.

As a part of the diversity and inclusion web page that most corporations have created, their collaborations with Gay Pride events are often proudly announced. Each year, there is a great deal of criticism towards corporations who take part in the Canal Parade and other Gay Pride celebrations (Bruinenberg). This an appropriate example of what the non-performativity argument means to demonstrate; 'saying' that the company is all for LGBT inclusion while marketing the rainbow colours via social media platforms and merchandise and thus focusing on what is visible for members of society takes less effort than to deal with the deeper laying issues that require more sustainable and effective change. For example:

> ING was *one of the first* companies to participate in Amsterdam's Canal Parade in 2006. Each year, we take great pride in demonstrating our commitment to diversity and inclusion with *creativity, flair and plenty of fun* to tell the world that ING you can be who you want to be. ("Diversity and Inclusion")

"Creativity, flair and fun" are the kind of positive words that are frequently produced by corporations and demonstrate the 'happy talk' of diversity. It adds a sense of competition among

the organisations by stating that they were "one of the first" to participate in the Canal Parade as also expressed by each separate diversity manager. The emphasis on positivity and competitiveness in diversity initiatives is an example of non-performativity. Despite the criticism on the marketization of the pride celebrations, diversity manager 3 explains the wish of the corporate sector to lose this image:

> It is often the corporates who are criticized, 'they all' [those who are critical] find the participation of those big corporates problematic. Yes, but it is also the corporates who can also make change, or at least 'push' some matters. (Diversity manager 3)

However, this does not alter the fact that this form of 'saying' diversity allows corporations to remain silent about problematic matters that are part of the daily life experiences of their employees and other members of Dutch society. It does not cost the organisations great effort to commercially benefit from the visibility and the 'fun'.

The notion of corporate responsibility is applied to demonstrate that the organisations are 'progressive and tolerant' and that their involvement is the ultimate ethical thing to do, whereas this corporate participation also reveals the divide organisations make between valued and non-valued differences. The notion of pinkwashing is related to the non-performativity of diversity as the context of this section illustrates Ahmed's argument on the "damaging effects" of companies' stated commitments to diversity ("The Nonperformativity" 120). The effects are damaging the matters that are rendered invisible and the issues that are not perceived as harmful to the dominant racialized group. It appears to be more 'convenient' to give a voice to white people in the LGBT community; to those who are closer to 'us'.

The idea of tolerance also appeared in a discussion with diversity manager 3 as I asked him about the corporation's approach to diversity. According to him, the organisation works with main pillars, such as women or people with a dis/ability, that include various subgroups. About the pillar LGBT+ he states:

> Also, I have noticed that with LGBT agenda for example, the Netherlands is not as 'tough' as it used to be; the rate of *tolerance* has come down. There might be all sorts of other causes and maybe because of the *mixing of other cultures*. (Diversity manager 3)

With stating that a diminished sense of tolerance, a matter that is based on an appearance which is reinforced by the dominant racialized group, might be linked to a "mixing of other cultures", one choses to uphold a fixed pattern in which groups of people in the Netherlands look for an

'other' to put the blame on. This articulation by a corporate diversity manager is questionable as this person has the power to carry out the organisation's diversity strategy which could include the challenging of this type of problematic thinking patterns. Wekker draws attention to this issue by demonstrating how the "dominant representation of homosexuality" in the Netherlands is shaped by the "dominant racialized group" (Wekker 117-118). Notions of acceptance and tolerance have become 'nice buzzwords' that are taken up by the dominant, white, heterosexual group which on the one hand renders visibility to more visible "white gay men" and on the other side make "the gay Other", "black, migrant, and refugee gays", invisible to the public eye (Wekker 117-118). Nonetheless, the diversity manager makes an important remark as he states that "gender is a separate topic within LGBT, thus there is a separate women's agenda within the LGBT, because it is also often about the gay men, and not about the women" (Diversity manager 3). This relates to the problematic way of essentialist thinking in which LGBT is often thought of as one, predominantly white group, which needs to change.

Conclusion

Corporate diversity appears as a business of feeling good. In companies´ commitment to work on internal diversity issues and the simultaneously shaping of an external image that is more positive than the underlying realities, the organisations overlook the issues that are necessary to address to foster a more performative diversity strategy. Contemporary practices demonstrate that corporations pay more attention to particular groups in the LGBT community; a trend topic which renders it commercially interesting for businesses. However, it seems that issues such as racism and ableism are not treated equally as these might not be as profitable for companies to deal with. Rather than to focus on neoliberal ideals that are connected to people, it is significant to think of what is necessary to become a diverse workplace that is more based on people´s own experiences and needs which can be achieved through transparency and the vulnerability to reflect upon one´s fixed ideas. If, as the diversity managers have expressed, the intrinsic motivation plays a larger role than the business case, it is crucial to revise the neoliberal meaning of diversity and why it hinders diversity strategies to be more performative than solely 'saying' diversity with 'nice' words. Furthermore, this applies to the phenomenon of pinkwashing that is entangled with corporate diversity matters so that companies can promote themselves as progressive and modern while concealing harmful issues. The dominant idea that Dutch society is completely progressive and tolerant is hindering corporations and their diversity managers to deal with essentialist, oppressive representations of gender, sexuality and race in a more active and critical manner.

Conclusion

This thesis aimed to analyse how and why large corporations operating in the Dutch context understand and implement diversity policies, what intersections and categories are perceived as important by them and why some categories are considered more important than others. As part of this research, it was imperative to identify the role of neoliberalism in diversity strategies. By means of a critical discussion of diversity as non-performative as conceptualized by Ahmed and Marten, an intersectional analysis and the interviews with diversity managers, this thesis contributes to understanding of what socially constructed identity categories are treated as more significant to corporations in the Netherlands.

Chapter 3 explained that although the government's focus on binary views of gender equality in the workplace might not match with the broader definition of gender within the organisations' strategies, the sector still fixates on approaches to diversity that are driven by power structures including neoliberal ideals and whiteness. The corporate diversity policies are non-performative as they claim to work on anti-discrimination, whereas they fail to thoroughly tackle underlaying, intersecting issues as well as to acknowledge the connection to a dominant racialized system of whiteness.

In response to the research question, chapter 4 identified an ambiguous approach to the umbrella term of cultural diversity that seems to hide problematic patterns, both within society and in the workplace. The act of 'saying diversity' is entangled with a company's image and the wish to be an attractive employer to attract the 'best talents' in the labour market. The corporations have a large say in what human bodies they address and attract with diversity strategies. This means that although they state that they are open to everyone, they still shape the ways in which people are recruited and what topics are addressed internally. Therefore, it is pivotal for diversity managers and all other employees to reflect on such processes.

Furthermore, it was argued in chapter 5 that the corporate 'neoliberal project' does not necessitate the companies to engage with matters of social justice which leads to non-performativity of written and vocalized statements on diversity. The marketization of diversity treats the separate categories as factors that should bring profitability to the companies and it rejects the types of 'differences' that deviate from the norm. For example, pinkwashing is used as a marketing strategy to go along with the increasing attention to LGBT rights and the value of creating an image that is progressive, whereas it disguises problematic practices that reinforce systemic oppressions in which the corporations play major roles.

Corporations that operate in the Netherlands are not free from the dominant and systemic oppressions that exist within Dutch society. Diversity policies often delineate separate, socially constructed categories of identity. Driven by demands from the Dutch government, corporations largely focus on the people who are rendered more visible through various structures and biases. The strategies aim at more privileged groups of people based on gender and/or ethnicity, which is greatly influenced by the system of whiteness.

For further analysis, there are several issues that can contribute to increasing performative forms of diversity in corporations. As the chapters focused more on the visible characteristics of diversity, it would be valuable to further engage with invisible characteristics as well as issues of femininity and masculinity. Due to the scope, this analysis has not focused specifically on issues of dis/ability and invisible dis/abilities such as mental health issues that are often neglected. Also, this thesis has aimed at the corporations' approaches in the Dutch context, but it would be interesting to carry out a comparative analysis that considers the Netherlands in relation to the other countries where the organisations operate.

There is a need for an approach to diversity that uses an intersectional lens to reflect on oppressive structures. Intersectionality fosters understanding of how such systems of power operate and it can give better insights into individual experiences that are affected by gendered racism or other intersecting oppressions. However, such thinking processes still seem to lack within organisations' approaches to diversity. Corporate diversity efforts should not just focus on the issues that are 'easier' for them to perceive or to discuss. Instead, it is necessary to encourage awareness of the intersecting oppressions and to include a critical approach to address whiteness. This should centre a majority-inclusive approach as opposed to the treatment of separate, minoritized groups. For future research, it is important to bridge the gap between academia and practice and to examine how this could be carried out within the Dutch corporate sector. Additionally, I think it is important that the companies' webpages also embed this diversity and inclusion approach. Corporate diversity speech acts should not be about flaunting corporate successes and producing 'nice' narratives. Moreover, it is crucial to move away from placing high value on numbers to measure diversity as this fosters the ways in which every day experiences are overlooked. It is pivotal to share and uncover matters as racism, sexism, ableism and other systemic oppressions to create a more transparent and honest image of corporate diversity issues as well as to deal with these even more effectively and sincerely.

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Appendix A – Interview guide

Key questions

What is the definition of diversity in the company's diversity policy? /

Does this correspond with the definition of the diversity manager himself?

Do you think there is a limit to how different employees can be within the organisation, that there is a difference between valued and unappreciated "differences"?

What are the motives for the company to work on diversity / employ a diversity manager?

How does the company think about the 'relevance / urgency' of working on diversity?

What are the concrete effects that the organisation wishes to achieve with the diversity policy?

Does 'the business case' (including ideas on stimulating innovation, productivity, profit, effectiveness) for diversity play a (major) role here?

Categories

Who is the implicit subject in the diversity policy? Which groups / persons does this diversity policy 'see'?

Is it more about diversity in visible or invisible characteristics?

Visible: gender, skin colour, ethnicity, age, physical dis/ability?

Invisible: personal character, qualities and work ethic?

Which identity categories are considered important?

Gender? Race? Ethnicity? Sexuality? Age? Class? Dis/ability?

Are there categories that receive more attention or are emphasised more than others? (like gender?)

What are the benefits of diversity at work in terms of gender, race, ethnic diversity or sexual orientation?

Do you see these categories as crossing / interconnected?

For example, if you look at a matter from a gender perspective, do you also look at ways in which race and / or sexual orientation are influenced at the same time?

Approach to diversity

In what ways do you implement the diversity policy?

What strategies / initiatives are there?

How do you deal with the different needs of different individuals? (does this go via HR, a confidential adviser?)

How do you deal with stereotypes and promote awareness of (the importance of) diversity and inclusiveness throughout the organisation?

Examples of strategies

Diversity training?

Hidden / unconscious bias training (and / or other initiatives to promote the understanding of dominant power structures) for employees / leadership / recruitment?

Support from leadership?

Working groups or networks?

Cooperation with external organisations / NGOs?

Diversity in selection procedures?

Mentoring?

Image of the company

How does the company work on the image of the external / partners / future employees etc.?

How is the language used in the diversity policy / the various documents used?

Are you and/or the company more focused on a business or academic definition of diversity?

Diversity manager

What do you see as challenges regarding working on diversity? What issues do you face?

Do you feel that you need to be strategic with how you put forward ideas about diversity initiatives within the organisation?

As a diversity manager, do you experience resistance to your work from within the organisation?

Do you think this has an impact on how the diversity policy strategies are implemented?

Do you feel that your gender and position as a white diversity manager have an impact on the effects of the diversity policy?