THINKING THROUGH MICROAGGRESSIONS WITHIN DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT

THE RELEVANCE AND THE NECESSITY EXPLAINED

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Abstract

In current diversity management practices, the focus often lies on (in)formal mentoring, single category networks, and employee training programmes. In this thesis it is argued that adopting the microaggressions framework into diversity management practices is a necessary and beneficial addition to the field. This is argued to be the case because this microaggression framework is non-essentialist in its approach to identity of employees in that it leaves room for an intersectional conceptualization of identity, not reducing employees to one particular aspect of their social identity. Furthermore, introducing and working with the microaggression framework in the workplace would be beneficial for the diversity climate in organizations, working to diversify the conceptualization of the "normal" worker. In understanding discourse as shaping reality as much as vice versa, following Fairclough (1992) , the necessity for eliminating microaggressive instances becomes clear. This theoretical argument will be supported with quotes from interviews with seven team-managers at a Dutch energy network company, in which the need for guidance and intervention from the diversity management department was indicated. In these interviews the respondents reported their own difficulties in navigating (semi-) discriminatory remarks, made either intentionally or non-intentionally. Furthermore, the respondents indicated feeling and/or seeing some feelings of resentment towards diversity management policies with a target group-approach, such as the women's network at the Dutch energy network company, since they felt these groups were of a discriminatory nature. This further supports my argument that introducing microaggression theory into diversity management practices would be beneficial, since this approach would not in- or exclude any group in particular, since any person might commit microaggressions or experience microaggressions. Instead, the focus would be more on self-reflection of each employee personally. The interviews also led me to conclude that any approach to the incorporation of microaggression theory into diversity management would need to focus on lower level management rather than on higher management, since the facilities of the lower layers of management have so far been underutilized, at least at the company in which the interviews took place, reducing the reach of current diversity management practices.

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Introduction

Doing my internship at a Dutch energy network management company, called The Company from now on, and conducting research in said company for their corporate social responsibility department, I learned a great deal about diversity management. During my internship I conducted research into perceptions of diversity management displayed by seven team managers in this company. In analyzing the results, I focused on a number of themes, one of which was the theme of microaggressions. I used the term "microaggressions" to describe a certain type of remark or joke communicating exclusion of a particular demographic from the normative body of employees, using the definition given by Sue et al. (2007). Not only were remarks made in the interviews that could be understood as microaggressions, but the team-managers also expressed concerns regarding instances of microaggressive remarks in their teams. In connecting these results I gained from the interviews with the academic scholarship available, I started to formulate a hypothesis. It is my hypothesis that in reducing microaggressions in the workplace the diversity climate will be improved, providing a better working environment for minority employees and majority employees alike. It is because of that reason that I argue that making working against microaggressions a focal point in diversity management would be a beneficial strategy. The use of the term "microaggression" is not unanimously accepted, however, and likewise, the use of this term in any real-life application is criticized. In this thesis, then, I want to propose my reading of the term and how this term might be relevant for diversity management strategies.

In the first chapter in which I will be establishing my theoretical framework, I will argue that the use of the term 'microaggressions' is a useful one. Then, I will connect the microaggression framework with the current practices in diversity management, also paying attention to the essentialist and non-intersectional approach to diversity and difference that is currently used in many strategies. After establishing my theoretical framework, I will connect the findings from the interviews I did during my internship with the theoretical framework, further illustrating my argument. In the second chapter I will speak about the current situation at the company I interned at, illustrating how their approach falls short where microaggression theory could provide an answer. In the third chapter, I will attempt to formulate a possible approach to handling microaggressions on the work floor. I will suggest increasing the role of team-managers. I will be using quotes from the interviews to support my arguments.

My research question will therefore be:

> Why do microaggressions matter and how could this framework be a beneficial addition to the field of diversity management?

In order to answer this research question, my subquestions will be as follows:

What research has been done on microaggressions and how can I incorporate this into my methodological framework?

Why is using “microaggressions” as a term necessary and how can this term be used in diversity management?

How might this work in practice?

In this thesis, I will be combining academic findings with the results from the interviews I already conducted for my internship research. These interviews were done with seven team managers at my internship company and were semi-structured. In conducting this research, I was aiming to explore the difficulties and strengths of the current diversity management strategies used at The Company. Having written an (unpublished) internship-report for The Company, there will be overlap between this thesis and that report in for example the quotes quoted and the description of the research design.

I argue that microaggressions re-instate the (majority) norm by othering minority employees. Conceptualizing discourse as structuring reality and reality as structuring discourse, following Fairclough (1992), intervening in microaggressions, though they might seem small, might have positive effects on creating a more open work climate in reducing this othering. Then, I will argue that the microaggression framework is a non-essentialist and intersectional approach to diversity management, that is more sensitive to power dynamics than current diversity management practices, generally. Key authors in my theoretical framework include Sue and his work on microaggressions, Fairclough and his theory on the nature of discourse as being embedded within a sociocultural practice (1992), Crenshaw and her work on intersectionality (1989), and Friedlaender and her work on responsibility versus blame regarding microaggressions (2018).

Research design

My research design for this thesis started from the experiences gained during my internship at The Company. I interned at the Company for a period of ten weeks, during which I conducted an interview-based qualitative research project focusing on seven team-managers in order to answer the following question: “What attitudes towards diversity management can be seen displayed by seven team-managers at [company name] and how can these attitudes be put into context?”. This project was not, initially, focused on microaggressions within diversity management. However, I found a number of instances in these interviews of (non-intentional) microaggressive remarks, and, additionally, indications that my respondents were thinking about the power of remarks at work. It is for this reason that I continued the research project in this direction.

For the sake of clarity, I will also elaborate on the research design of the research project at The Company, since I will be using these interviews for this thesis as well. I chose to interview team-managers, since they are in a central position within the company, functioning just one management layer up from the technicians. The team-managers are, therefore, in a central position for connecting management strategies to real life application of said strategies, and they are in a position to be able to comment on attitudes of their technicians, themselves, and their own managers. I obtained permission to ask one team-manager from each of the (regional) teams to cooperate. Then, I randomly selected one team-manager from each group. In some cases this random selection was denied because of practical or undisclosed reasons by the team-manager's manager, and another participant was indicated. Though this change of participants might be said to decrease the academic soundness of my selection, I accepted these changes for practical reasons. I met my respondents in person, planning in one hour each for the interviews. I informed my respondents of the goals for the interviews and I informed them of who I was, only omitting the precise nature of my degree. I did this because I have experienced negative reactions when telling people what I study, and I did not want to jeopardize the interview in such a way. I told respondents I study "Media and Culture Studies", which is the name of the group of programmes that Gender Studies is a part of. I am therefore convinced that my respondents had enough information to be able to give informed consent. Before starting the interview, I gave my respondents a short questionnaire asking for some basic personal details. I choose to do a semi-structured approach for the interviews, asking my respondents to self-report on their experience rather than asking standardized questions to each person in the same way. An important reason for this choice was that semi-structured interviewing leaves room for discussion, nuance, and clarification (Reinharz and Davidman, 1992, 18). I had prepared a topic list, to be found in Appendix A (in Dutch). The interviews took place between 12-02-2019 and 01-03-2019 and varied in length between half an hour and an hour and fifteen minutes. After conducting the interviews, I transcribed them all. Then, I conducted comparative and thematic analysis, close reading some selected quotes and putting the themes I found into context. I have decided to omit the transcripts from this thesis, since I feel the interviews were confidential. The names of the respondents given in this thesis are fictional and have no correlation with the real names of the people involved. In Appendix B a short summary of each interview can be found.

After having completed this research project at The Company, I continued researching the absence of microaggressions as a term in diversity management, resulting in this thesis. In this thesis, I will be connecting the results from my interviews with the scholarship available on diversity management as a field and microaggressions as a term. My focus will primarily be on my theoretical framework, and showing how my theoretical argumentation has resonance in practice, using quotes from my interviews to show the resonance of my theoretical stance in reality. The field of diversity management is a very interdisciplinary field in itself, drawing from social and group psychology and many other fields. It is because of this that my argumentation might not be said to fit into one particular field. I aim to use the existing research to

formulate a better way of theorizing and handling the problem at hand, namely the lack of a microaggression framework within diversity management. Choosing this qualitative approach to this thesis is mainly based on practical consideration. Though qualitative research, especially when based on such a small number of respondents as in my research, namely seven, cannot pretend to make any broader claims on society, the findings can add to our understanding of what exists in society today. In combining the findings from the interviews with academic literature that is already available, I am also hoping to add to the bridging of the perceived gap between academia and the non-academic world.

Reflection on research design

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, my group of respondents is small. Having this select group of respondents was done because of practical reasons. I had ten weeks to complete my internship, and having any more respondents was not possible within this timeframe, especially because I was conducting this research on my own. It is for this reason that I chose to use the results from my interviews to illustrate my theoretical stance rather than vice versa.

Additionally, six out of seven respondents identified as male, with the seventh identifying as female, and seven out of seven respondents were white. Six out of seven interviewees indicated being heterosexual, with one respondent choosing to withhold this information. Most of my respondents could, then, be said to be majority members of the workforce. Though the selection was made randomly, getting this majority member-perspective was very interesting and useful for my research project. It should be noted, however, that the views expressed in this interviews were not from a diverse body of respondents, and also from a small sample group. However, I am of the opinion that since these opinions and attitudes were expressed in the interviews, it is important to take these signals seriously, especially when the views expressed were also reflected in the scholarship available.

Furthermore, the interviews all took place in Dutch. In this thesis, I will be translating the quotes I use into English. Some nuances will be lost in translation, but my main focus will be on translating the general tone and message of the words rather than directly translating word for word. For the sake of transparency, all the quotes I use will be included in Appendix C, in Dutch and English.

Moreover, the issue of translation also applies to translating the data of a little over seven hours of interview-data to useable data and themes. In analyzing thematically, the nuance that was often applied during the interviews was sometimes hard to preserve. It should therefore be noted that the analysis made in this thesis is a generalization of a nuanced reality. More research on the issues I speak of is needed.

Chapter One: Theoretical framework

Defining microaggressions

The use of the term “microaggression” is not unequivocally accepted, either in general or specifically for diversity management. Though the use of the term is increasing on, for example, college campuses, there are many disagreeing voices. Through a selective reading of the literature, I have attempted to indicate the main difficulties in accepting the microaggression framework. This is not meant to be an exhaustive review of the literature. It is important to note that intensive research into microaggressions is a relatively recent development, and that the field needs more research, more data, and more resources. Many of the theoretical findings of scholars writing on the microaggression framework are not supported by empirical data. However, the merits in shifting the moral language, in listening to non-dominant narratives in order to gain a richer and more accurate account of the world, are not to be dismissed. It is for this reason that I choose to work with this framework.

Let us first take a look at the history and the multiplicity of definitions used throughout the debate. The term was coined by Pierce (1970) who was referring primarily to racial slights in his definition, but the current most used definition is by Sue. He defines microaggressions as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color. Perpetrators of microaggressions are often unaware that they engage in such communications when they interact with racial/ethnic minorities” (Sue et al, 2007, 271). Sue then further categorizes these microaggressions into three subcategories, namely microinsults, microinvalidations and microassaults (Sue et al, 2007). I will speak more on this subdivision later on in this chapter.

Microaggressions can be, and oftentimes are, unintentional, and they express a certain (either implicit or explicit) bias in the person or instance expressing the microaggression. An example of a microaggression I encountered during my internship was that one of my interviewees said, when asked if there were any LGBTQ+ employees in his team, that everybody was “gewoon hetero”, “gewoon” roughly translating to “regular”, or “ordinary” used as a modifier adverb for the word “hetero”, “straight”. This remark was seemingly not made with any rude or discriminatory intent, but the message communicated through the remark is not one of inclusion. The implicit message communicated through this small remark is that employees who are LGBTQ+ are, in some way, irregular and possibly abnormal. In making this remark, the respondent inadvertently reinforced majority culture by putting being heterosexual as the norm, and not-heterosexual as being the other.

Proponents of the microaggressions framework have argued that microaggressions, though called micro, have macro effects on marginalized groups and their (mental and or physical) health (for example Nadal et al , 2014). This harm is not derived from each microaggression in and of itself, but is rather based on the idea that the accumulative harm is bigger than the sum of its parts (Friendlaender, 2018). This "cumulative harm", as Friedlaender (2018) calls it, is not direct or clear, but rather more covert and long term. Since the effects are cumulative, it might seem a though people are being over-sensitive when they react to these microaggressions in anger, while it actually can be seen as the result of many small wounds evoking more pain than each of them separately. Posing that "microaggressive harms intensify in their accumulation", Friedlaender argues that we must not be convinced to let go of the concept of microaggressions just because the offenses spoken about are "micro" (2018, 10).

Scott Lilienfeld, however, argues in his article *Microaggressions: Strong Claims, Inadequate Evidence* that the "microaggression research program" is underdeveloped, referring mostly to the lack of empirical data, and should therefore not be used in any non-hypothetical discussions (2017, 138). He sees no real-life application for the term, especially not in "microaggression training programmes" (2017, 138). He has many objections, most relating to the scientific validity of the term. I will be taking his arguments as exemplary for the anti-microaggression movement.

The issue of identification

Lilienfeld is skeptical about the issue of identification of microaggressions. Basing his argument on a quote by Sue et al. saying that "[f]irst, the person must determine whether a microaggression has occurred" (2007, 279, via Lilienfeld, 2017, 141), Lilienfeld contends that the link between the identifier and the identification of a situation as a microaggression might often not reflect the existence of an objective microaggression, but rather reflects the temperamental disposition of the person identifying the microaggression. I argue that this quote of Sue's might more plausibly be referring to the ambiguous nature of many microaggressions, which makes it hard for people to definitively define when a microaggression has taken place. This ambiguity is also argued to be part of the harm in microaggressions, so this quote might not be referring to the existence of microaggressions as being dependent on identification by its victim, but rather to the difficult situation victims find themselves in when experiencing a possible microaggression. Is it, or is it not a microaggression and should I speak up or not? I will elaborate on the issue of ambiguity later in this chapter.

Lilienfeld, however, is speaking of the temperamental disposition of the victims, labeling it "negative emotionality", or "NE", defined as "a pervasive temperamental disposition to experience aversive emotions of many kinds, including anxiety, worry, moodiness, guilt, shame, hostility, irritability, and perceived victimization". He then goes on to say the following: "Individuals with elevated levels of NE tend to be

critical and judgmental of both themselves and others, vulnerable to distress and emotional maladjustment, and inclined to focus on the negative aspects of life." (Watson & Clark, 1984, via Lilienfeld 2017, 153). This line of thought seems to imply that many of the reported microaggressions are merely fictions produced by people who cannot see the world for what it is: a place where people do not make insensitive remarks that communicate exclusion. However, this is simply not the case, and furthermore, as said before, identification by its victim is not necessarily a prerequisite for existence of a microaggression. Friedlaender (2018) argues that identification by its victim is no condition for the existence of a microaggression. She argues that there are instances where a person might think there has been a microaggression, but that they are wrong in their assessment. In her definition, a microaggression needs to have a link to an objectively existing form of structural oppression, and that a remark must reinforce majority privilege position in order to be able to be classified as a microaggression (2018, 9). It follows from this line of argument that there need not be any identification of an exchange as a microaggression for it to be able to be classed as a microaggression.

In the previous paragraph I mentioned the issue of ambiguity. This is a key issue in the critique of the microaggressions framework: the perpetrator/deliverer of the remark did not mean it that way, and the victim is just misinterpreting things. Lilienfeld refers to this as the "projective hypothesis", which hypothesizes that "ambiguous stimuli allow for multiple interpretations and the choice of these interpretations affords insights into respondents' personality traits, attitudes, and learning history" (2017, 145). With this he means that ambiguous remarks, because of their ambiguity, could also be interpreted as *not* being microaggressive. Lilienfeld then goes on to say that this ambiguity makes it increasingly hard to "independently verify" whether or not a microaggression has taken place or was "merely imagined"(2017, 145). Therefore, identifying a remark as being a microaggression might say more about the person making this identification than about the veracity of their claim. This is a very similar argument to his "negative emotionality" point. He connects this interpretive factor in microaggression-identification to cognitive behavioral therapy, calling this tendency to interpret well-intentioned remarks as microaggressions a "cognitive distortion [, namely] *mind-reading,* in which individuals assume – without attempts at verification – that others are reacting negatively to them" (2017, 147, emphasis in text). Here, I would like to refer, again, to Friedlaender's conceptualization of microaggressions where a potentially microaggressive act needs to be linked to an objectively existing form of structural oppression, making the identification of microaggressive exchanges not subjective but objective, or rather, existing without the outside validation of any participants in the exchange (2018, 9). However, the doubt involved in assessing if a remark can be considered microaggressive and additionally, in assessing what to do next, is part of the harm in microaggressions. This is often referred to as a "catch-22" for the victims: ""damned if they do" (choose to confront the perpetrator) and "damned if they don't" (choose to do nothing)." (Sue, 2010, xviii). What this line of argument by Lilienfeld seems to imply is that statements or situations can only be harmful if the deliverer intends them to be so. This is simply not the case. I have already spoken on the non-intentional

nature of many microaggressions while discussing the terminology used in this debate. In thinking of intent vis-a-vis microaggressions, Friedlaender distinguishes between blame and accountability / responsibility, saying that "some individuals display genuine moral ignorance (even if this ignorance is not innocent structurally) regarding their harmful actions […] Thus, a responsibility model for microaggressive harm must be able to hold non-blameworthy individuals accountable as well" (2018, 14). She, and I with her, argues that the question should not be who to blame, but rather, who to hold accountable.

The issue of epistemology

Lilienfeld also critiques the microaggressions research project for "fall[ing] prey to the pitfall of embedded political values, using the "myth of meritocracy" as an example. Lilienfeld says at one point that it is "not at all evident that the "myth of meritocracy" is genuinely a "myth", especially if one regards it as an aspirational goal" (2017, 146). Regarding meritocracy as an "aspirational goal" does nothing to counter the reality of the world where meritocracy is, indeed, still a myth, and where factors other than merit such as race, gender, and sexuality still play a vital role in how one is treated. Additionally, it is misguided in this day and age to think of "good science" as value-free, neutral, and objective. The idea that knowledge and knowing is political is defended by many feminist scholars, for example Haraway (1988). She refers to the traditional view of good science as being value free as an illusion, calling this idea "the god trick", referring to a view of the world that has no embodiment (and thus no political affiliations) and is coming from nowhere, as it were (Haraway, 1988). In accordance with this view, I argue that it is not being politically embedded that we must critique, but rather being so in a non-reflective manner.

Accepting the microaggression framework could fit into a more feminist epistemology, where non-dominant narratives are taken seriously and incorporated into the view of the world. Lilienfeld often focuses on the non-scientific nature of the microaggression framework. I argue that accepting the microaggression framework simply implies a shift in perspective. Sue said the following regarding this matter: "Those in the majority group, those with power and privilege, and those who do not experience microaggressions are privileged to enjoy the luxury of waiting for proof. Meanwhile, people of color, LGBTQ brothers and sisters, and other socially devalued groups continue to be harmed and oppressed." (Sue, 2017, 171). Sue compares the difference in perspective to the difference between the perspectives of the lion and the hunter. The one who is in power, the one with the tools to communicate their truth and be heard, is the one who shapes what is seen to exist in reality. The argument is, then, as following: if "truth" can only be found speaking in and on the terms of the hunter, the story of the lion will never get heard. This is the difference Sue sees between the two approaches: Lilienfeld is defending an empirical epistemology, while Sue adheres to a more experiential view of what constitutes reality, though he also points out that this is not an either/or debate: both epistemological approaches have their merits and their limits (2017, 171). Both approaches could complement each other. Similarly, Friedlaender argues that it is a form of testimonial injustice to fail

to “give the oppressed epistemic credibility regarding their own experiences” (2018, 16). Calhoun argues that this shift in who one grants credibility is a moral shift: going from disinterest regarding the underprivileged to caring about their perspectives and giving credibility to their accounts of reality, referring to this process as a “moral re-education”, in which social norms are shifting from moral disinterest or ignorance to moral reflectivity (Calhoun, 1989, 399 as interpreted in Friedlaender, 2018, 13).

Other scholars have analyzed this supposed shift differently, such as Campbell and Manning (2018). They refer to the new morality that can be seen exemplified in the use of the term microaggression as a “culture of victimhood” (2018, 11). This culture of victimhood is seen to be a non-dominant moral culture that is clashing with the dominant “culture of dignity” they see in the West, where the former is defined as a culture “in which individuals and groups display a high sensitivity to slight, have a tendency to handle conflicts through complaints to authorities and other third parties, and seek to cultivate an image of being victims who deserve assistance” and the latter as a culture in which “people ignore slights and insults” (2018, 11). Though this definition might seem to imply that the claimed victimhood is false, Campbell and Manning also state that oftentimes the people who assert their mistreatment are factually correct. Campbell and Manning, rather, wanted to highlight the importance of the shift that made it socially acceptable to call attention to victimhood rather than being shamed by victimhood (2018, 24). In this approach to the moral shift, there seems to be a rather individual focus on each particular victim with little regard for the structural inequalities at the basis of this victimhood. In failing to call attention to this part of victimhood, this analysis of microaggressions loses its track. Calling attention to microaggressions is not about personal victimization, it is rather about the re-assigning of (negative or positive) stereotypes to certain people because of their membership to a particular social group. In doing so, structurally oppressive mechanisms are reproduced.

A critique that is of a different caliber is the critique of the term “microaggression” itself that Lilienfeld brings forward. Let us first look at the second part of the term: “aggression”. In social psychology, the term “aggression” is defined as behavior that has the intent to harm someone who does not wish to be harmed (Baron and Richardson, 1994, 7). This, then, leads to a problem in terminology, seeing that for many microaggressions their intent was not malicious. This is also referred to in the most used definition of microaggressions: “brief and commonplace […] indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults towards people of color” (Sue et al, 2007, 271). If the remarks are unintentional, how can they be considered aggressive? Or, as Lilienfeld puts it, “[w]here is the aggression in microaggressions?” (2017, 148). This is a solid critique, but it of course depends on the definition of aggression one uses. Having previously discussed the different epistemological starting points of Lilienfeld and Sue, I would like to highlight that in different epistemologies, “aggression” might be defined differently. However, the point of intent and microaggressions remains a difficult topic,

especially because of the “hostile attribution bias” that Lilienfeld mentions (2017, 147) which suggests that if someone thinks a remark is meant in an aggressive manner, they are more likely to respond aggressively in turn, creating a more hostile environment than was anticipated and envisioned. It could be an idea, then, to rename microaggressions to for example “microbarbs”, referring to the small prickles of barbed wire that can collectively (and individually) be quite painful, or, as Lilienfeld proposes, to “inadvertent racial slights” (2017, 147). However, if it is not possible to change the term, it might be necessary to work with it and keep these caveats in mind.

Then, let us turn to the first part of the term: “micro”. Sue et al distinguished between three subcategories of microaggressions: microinvalidations, microinsults, and microassaults (2007). The first category refers to situations in which the victim has their personal reality invalidated in some sense (2007, 274). The second refers to situations in which the victim hears a remark that conveys “a negative or humiliating message[ ]” towards the victim (Lilienfeld, 2017, 142). The third category is the most explicit type, consisting of “explicit racial derogation(s) characterized primarily by a verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt the intended victim through name calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discriminatory actions” (Sue et al, 2007, 277). Lilienfeld points out, and I must agree, that the actions described in this last category do not seem to fit the “micro” label, but should rather be described as “macro”, because giving this category the “micro”-label downplays the explicit discriminatory nature of these instances (2017, 148). Although I do not agree that calling something “micro” means it is necessarily less important than something “macro”, as Lilienfeld seems to imply, I do think that microassaults should not be considered either “micro” or part of the microaggressions framework. Because an important part of Sue’s argument of the harm in microaggressions is that they are ambiguous and unclear, it is surprising to me that he includes such explicitly discriminatory instances in his subcategories as well. These do not seem ambiguous in their intent or implicit message. However, as Lilienfeld also helpfully points out, there has already been an effort to circumvent this odd classification: Donovan et al. (2013) reclassify microassaults to be macroaggressions, while microinsults and microinvalidations remain in their own microaggression category. I would also like to broaden the category of microaggressions to include certain jokes that are using structural inequalities to gain their comical value and that are reinstating majority norms in the process. I do this because I argue that these exchanges also fall under the definition given by Friedlaender: “Microaggressions serve to reinforce structural relations of oppression by harming those in oppressed groups psychologically, socially, physiologically, and materially” (2018, 9).

Connecting diversity management and microaggression theory

Having elaborated on why I choose to engage with the term microaggressions, I will now elaborate on why I am of the opinion that thinking through microaggressions would be a valuable addition to diversity management practices. Diversity management is a relatively young field, but it is considered a vital tool in

many companies for creating a more diverse workplace. This is done based on the conviction that a healthy company has a diverse body of employees in order to benefit from all the different perspectives and standpoints these different people have to offer, which is understood to improve the quality of the company in general (Benschop et al, 2015). This business case for diversity management is often given as an argument for diversity management that most stakeholders can get behind: it is a business strategy for optimization of the company, leading to more flexibility, more innovation, and better financial performance (Carter & Phillips, 2017; Harvey, 2015; Homan, Van Knippenberg, Van Kleef & De Dreu, 2007; Krishnan & Park, 2005 via Ellemers et al, 2018, 410). From a social justice viewpoint, the argument for diversity management is that creating and sustaining a diverse body of workers will help combat social inequality and lessen prejudice and stereotypes towards minority groups (Benschop, Berg & Winden, 1999; Ely & Thomas, 2001; Luijters, 2008 via Ellemers et al, 2018).

I adopt Mor Barak's definition of diversity in understanding the workforce to be divided into specific culturally or nationally determined groups, where membership of said groups has (negative) effects on chances or treatment on the job market regardless of the skills of the employee concerned (2014, 136). It is then also of importance that these employees are not only part of the workforce, but also that they are included, or at least not excluded on the basis of their membership of these social groups. This means that there should not only be attention to diversifying the workforce, but also to making the workforce inclusive. It is therefore of great importance to create inclusive spaces. I use Ferdman's definition of inclusive spaces: "In inclusive organizations and societies, people of all identities and many styles can be fully themselves while also contributing to the larger collective, as valued and full members." (2017, 235). In this definition the necessity in being able to bring one's identity to work, as it were, becomes clear. Being inclusive is not, then, a matter of mere tolerance of potentially non-normative others, but rather a matter of acceptance and incorporation of minority employees into the fabric of the company. This is also supported by the conclusion Mor Barak et al (2016) drew when researching effective diversity management practices: creating an inclusive climate is essential for effective human resource management. They concluded that representation in an organization is not enough, for a truly diverse and inclusive atmosphere, there should be additional focus on creating a climate of inclusion. This view also implies, then, that there should be no one normative worker, one type of worker who is the standard of which others deviate, but that the "norm" should be rather more pluralistic. To put it differently, there should be heterogeneity within the members of the workforce, the degree of which determines the diversity climate of an organization (Hyde and Hopkins, 2004). An inclusive climate, a place where "the collective perception [is] that there are expectations and norms that allow employees to behave in a manner that is consistent with aspects of their self-concept together with the various identities that they hold, and that they are included in decision making and supported in sharing views that are not part of the status quo" (Shore et al, 2018, 6, referencing Nishii, 2013), should follow from the diversity management measures. The aim of diversity management should

therefore be to shift the company's norm from uniform to pluralistic in order to reach a true inclusion. This will have a positive influence on the employees and the organization at large, the effectivity of teams is said to improve, as well as the well-being and productivity of individual employees (Ellemers et al, 2018, 410). An inclusive climate has been shown to increase job satisfaction, and decrease leave of absence due to illness (Jansen et al., 2014; Jansen et al., 2017; Şahin et al., 2018 via Ellemers et al, 2018, 413). These positive effects of an inclusive climate are stronger for employees who differ from their colleagues who are part of the majority, but they also affect "normative" workers (Sahin et al., 2018, via Ellemers et al., 2018, 413).

The question then remains why microaggressions are a relevant category to use within diversity management. It is argued that microaggressions work to reinstate the majority norm. By emphasizing the otherness, or non-normativity, of the victims, microaggressions reinforce structural oppressive relations and reinforce the dominant position of the normative (Friedlaender, 2018, 9). Since the goal of diversity management is, among other things, to achieve a more pluralistic norm at work, having and accepting microaggressive behaviour on the workfloor will negatively impact the experienced freedom of employees to express possibly non-normative factors of their identity. Mor Barak and Daya (2014, 393-394) argue that "an exclusionary workplace is based on the perception that all workers need to conform to pre-established organizational values and norms (determined by its "mainstream"), the inclusive workplace is based on a pluralistic value frame that respects all cultural perspectives represented among its employees" (Shore et al, 2018, 2).

Evidence suggests that the harm in microaggressive remarks and/or situations could have negative effects on worker retention, hiring and promotion (Friedlaender, 2018, 8), which ties in with the arguments made for the need for an inclusive climate at work. According to Pierce's definition of microaggressions, small insults can collectively create a hostile atmosphere for minority individuals (1970). Microaggressions are also said to have negative effects on mental health of victims (Sue, 2010). Reducing microaggressions at work would, then, benefit the overall atmosphere, and would create space for all employees to express their identities. It is for these reasons that I argue that working on improving how people handle microaggressions could improve the general quality of working life for the employees.

It could be argued that, like employee training programmes, focusing on microaggressions leaves the current system intact. It is argued that the focus should be on organizational change rather than on individual employees (Ely and Meyerson, 2000). I argue that one strategy for change does not eliminate the need for the other, and additionally, I do not agree that the system remains intact when measures do not directly target organizational structures. Using Fairclough's approach to discourse which poses that discourse and social reality stand in a dialectic relationship with one another (Fairclough, 1992, via Zanoni

and Janssens, 2015), I argue that changing how people speak of and to each other will have an effect on a structural level, since I understand social reality to be shaped by discourse as much as discourse is shaped by social reality. Elaborating on this relationship, Chouliaraki and Fairclough say the following:

> Relations between language and other elements are dialectical in the sense of being different but not 'discrete', i.e. not fully separate. We might say that each element 'internalizes' the others without being reducible to them (Harvey, 1996) – for example, social relations, power, institutions, beliefs, and cultural values are in part discursive, in the sense that they 'internalize' discourse without being reducible to it. This means that, although we should analyse business organizations as partly discursive objects, we should simultaneously keep a constant analytical focus not just upon discourse as such, but on relations between *discursive and other social elements*. (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 2010, pp. 1214–15, emphasis in original, via Zanoni and Janssens, 2015, 1466)

It is thus that I also understand microaggressions to function, as remarks and situations in which structural inequalities are reproduced and made visible. In this way, social reality is naturalized, and the status quo reinforced. Raising awareness of these issues, then, will have structural effects, and is less symbolic or ineffective than one might think.

Let us then look at the practices that are most commonly found as part of a diversity management structure. The majority of companies that are working with diversity management at his moment in time mostly focus on three separate strategies: (in)formal mentoring, single category networks, and employee training programmes (Benschop et al, 2015). These strategies have often been critiqued, with opponents arguing that these are targeting 'the Other' employees, "to get them on a par with the majority employees, leaving the current system intact" (Benschop et al, 2015, 2, referencing Ely and Meyerson, 2000, and Zanoni et al, 2010). This focus on minority employees is unequal and also often relies on essentialist notions of otherness. The importance of avoiding essentialist narratives on diversity, and the importance of avoiding reducing minority employees to mere representatives of a stigmatized social group has been noted by Janssens and Zanoni as well (2014, 328). Another, related, point of critique towards these practices is that they are insufficiently intersectional, especially when looking at single category networks as an example. Often, policies are targeting single category identities (for example: LGBTQ+ people, women, ethnic minorities), which is a failure to understand and/or accommodate the nuanced reality of identities constituted along multiple axes.

In conclusion, I argue that having working against microaggressions at work as a focus of diversity management would be beneficial. First of all, eliminating microaggressions at work would benefit the inclusive climate at work, ensuring that employees feel safe and secure in bringing their identities to work.

This would benefit the climate of inclusion in the workplace, which has beneficial effects on worker retention and job satisfaction. Second, working on how people address each other, even regarding small remarks or incidents, will eventually have structural effects. In the following, I will argue why and how the microaggression framework could complement the existing field of diversity management.

Why microaggressions could be considered to be intersectional and non-essentialist

Thinking through microaggressions in a corporate context has been critiqued by for example Lilienfeld (2017), because he thinks the framework has not been analyzed enough for any real-life application. In the previous chapters, I have attempted to show that reducing microaggressions at work will improve the inclusive climate, which has positive effects on all employees. These employees are often categorized into separate and distinct groups, with little or no room for nuance. For example, at The Company, policies were divided into the following groups: women, people with a migration-background, LGBTQ+ employees, older and adolescent employees, and employees with a disability. Though this approach has merits, seeing that these strategies do provide for many employees and they have the benefits of having a clearly delineated focus group in mind, the main critique here is that this approach to diversity management is not intersectional. Intersectionality, a term brought to general attention by Kimberle Crenshaw (1989), draws attention to the insufficiency of any analysis that only takes one factor of identity into account. With this in mind, Crenshaw calls attention to the reality many black women face of having not only race but also gender play a role in how their oppression works, and that the sum of these different axes of oppression is more than its parts. Because of this blind spot, for many years and still to this day, many feminist conversations are dominated by the voices of white feminists, ergo the most privileged women. The reality is, however, that differently constituted identities lead to different experiences of reality, with different challenges for each different identity. White feminist views of the world and demands and needs in the workspace cannot be the only views or needs that are heard. The importance of an intersectional approach to diversity management, then, lies in need to be heard and seen for all experiences. Policies based on single axis identities, then, do not suffice in providing for intersectional experience. In their analysis of single-identity networks, Dennissen et al. (2018) argue that these networks marginalize employees with multiple disadvantaged identities, since the heterogeneity of the group is not acknowledged and therefore policies made for this group are often made with only the most privileged members in mind. Research shows that different groups of employees benefit differently from (single category) networks: white women benefit significantly, black women do not, and black men were even shown to experience disadvantage from these networks (Kalev et al., 2006, via Dennissen et al., 2018, 3). This one dimensional approach to identity, therefore, has real implications for the employees involved. Inequality is more complex than single identity diversity management practices would imply.

Another point of critique to this approach of the target groups is that it implicitly takes one particular social group as the norm(al) group. Comparisons are not made between these groups inter alias, but rather, difference is conceptualized between the stigmatized social groups and "white, heterosexual, western, middle/upper class, abled men" (Zanoni et al., 2010, 13) . That norm is the one from which members of other groups differ. Additionally, the conceptualization of identity used in these categorizations is a fixed, essentialist conceptualization of identity categories. In thinking of these identities as fixed and natural, diversity management fails to acknowledge the socially constructed nature of these identities (Zanoni et al, 2010, 13). Janssen and Zanoni (2014) argue that a broadening of norms, or practices that "offer multiple understandings of […] multiple identity positionings" would be more effective approaches to diversity management since they would work to destabilize the "dominant hierarchical system of binaries which values the ethnic majority of the ethnic minority in work settings" (2014, 328). They argue, furthermore, that this destabilization of categories would provide the opportunity for diversity management to approach minority employees "as 'full' subjects" rather than as "mere representatives of a stigmatized social group (Janssens and Zanoni, 2014, 328).

Being seen as a mere representative is known to have negative effects on employees. This principle is known as "stereotype threat". Stereotype threat is defined as "the expectation that one will be judged or perceived on the basis of social identity group membership rather than actual performance and potential." (Block et al., 2011, 570). For this to take place, there must be negative stereotypes attached to this group, so that being a member of said group might be interpreted as reflecting negatively on performance. Research shows that individuals' performance is affected by the perceived presence of stereotype threat, regardless of whether the individual thinks the stereotype is true or regardless of if the stereotype is accurate. Minority employees are seen as either conforming to or rebelling against these stereotypes, and in doing so these stereotypes are re-produced (Block et al., 2011, 572).

In the workplace, being a minority employee has been shown to increase the perceived stereotype threat, but also the stereotyping in itself increases when minorities are represented (Ely 1995, via Block et al., 2011, 572). The scholarship analyzing long term effects of stereotype threat on employees in terms of retention rates and job satisfaction is scarce, but evidence suggests that stereotype threat often leads to different types of disengagement. Disengagement from the "domain in which the threat is experienced (Stone, Lynch, Sjomeling, & Darley, 1999; von Hippel et al., 2005)," or "the group that is stereotyped (Pronin, Steele, & Ross, 2004; Steele & Aronson, 1995)" (Block et al. , 2010, 573). Stereotype threat is also shown to lead to "self-handicapping strategies that allow individuals to make external attributions for their performance (Keller, 2002; Stone, 2002)" and "reactance, where individuals work harder in response to stereotype threat

(Kray, Reb, Galinsky, & Thompson, 2004)" (Block et al. , 2010, 573). In eliciting disengagement from the domain in which the threat is experienced, having employees at risk of stereotype threat is not a sustainable option.

Seeing difference in diversity management, then, not from an essentialist but a rather more constructivist viewpoint, will change what measures are considered fruitful. Differences are not to be seen as internal and fixed in the individual, but rather as "constructed in interaction with others and the wider social environment" (Hern and Louvrier, 2015, 3). This means, then, that difference is produced in discourse(s) in social reality rather than factual or fixed and natural or even neutral. The construction of this difference is tied in with power relations in society (Hern and Louvrier, 2015, 3). The link between diversity management and issues of power is a relatively understudied field, but it is argued that for diversity measures to have any transformative potential, it is necessary to take power dynamics into account and to create a practice that supports and stimulates self-reflection (Benschop et al., 2015, 8). One merit, then, of using the microaggressions framework in diversity management lies in its more intersectional and constructivist approach of reality. The microaggressions framework takes power into account: microaggressions are defined on the basis of structural inequalities. If there is no structural inequality being reiterated in a remark or situation, it cannot be legitimately identified as a microaggression. In asking employees to think about how they themselves might have committed microaggressions, diversity management can create a space for critical self-reflection. In asking employees to think about what might be considered a microaggression, they are triggered to think about what sort of power dynamics are at play within the exchange. I argue that this is a radically different emphasis from other diversity management practices that focus on essentialist difference rather than difference in power. This factoring in of power into the fabric of this diversity management strategy leaves room for the intersectionality of identity in not reducing minority employees to one factor of their identity. Rather, it asks participants to steer away from essentialist (and stereotypical) representations of colleagues since these representations emphasize otherness from the normative and do not promote an inclusive climate in the workplace.

In this chapter I have argued that making increasing awareness of microaggressive harms a priority in diversity management could be considered a more intersectional approach to this field, since it leaves space for the different factors of an individual's identity and does not make essentialist claims about stagnant group identities and characteristics. Instead, the idea of microaggressions is based on inter-group relations and power difference in these relationships. Working with the concept, then, might help to work against stereotype threat, rather than creating or solidifying stereotypes. This will positively affect the inclusive climate in the workplace.

Chapter Two: Connecting theory and practice

In this chapter I will connect some of the theoretical arguments made in the previous chapter to the situation I encountered at The Company. In doing so, I want to support and prove my point that working with, or rather against, microaggressions at work would be a beneficial addition to the field of diversity management. At The Company, I researched attitudes towards the diversity management strategies used at The Company, asking seven team-managers for their opinions, and analyzing these interviews. In conducting this research, I was aiming to explore the difficulties and strengths of the current strategies used. What I found at The Company was that their strategies lacked engagement from the majority members that I interviewed. Additionally, some measures were met with antipathy, which was clearest regarding networks, for being exclusionary and unfair. Interviewees also noticed a strong "masculine culture" at their level of The Company. Furthermore, the people I interviewed had experience with microaggressive jokes or remarks in their teams, and some of my interviewees were struggling with trying to navigate these interactions as managers.

Lack of engagement

Seeing that I interviewed six white heterosexual men and one white heterosexual woman, most of my respondents were majority members. The selection of respondents was made randomly, but it was very interesting to listen to the perspectives of people who are not included as target groups in the diversity management strategies at The Company. All seven respondents agreed on the necessity of equality, but not all agreed on the necessity of diversity management. In the interviews, the company's networks were the main focal point as an example of strategies used. The Company has three employee networks, one for LGBTQ+ employees, one for women, and one for young employees. In the interviews, the focus was mainly on the women's network since this is what the respondents talked about. The other two networks were not mentioned in any depth. Eef called diversity measures a "rand-ding" in Dutch, or a "non-central thing" for her as a manager. Bauke related to me how gender topics were not really relevant in his team, since his whole team exists of men. He also said the following:

> "When I came here [to manage this team in this region], I did notice that specifically people from [place in same region], well they think that sort of stuff is all quite scary. […] Me, I have no doubts [about hiring minorities], but I do notice, in other regions, other people, they do tend to make a fuss, and they can be quite skittish." – Bauke

Frits also mentioned how in his team there was no need to pay attention to diversity issues since there were no women in his team:

> *"All is well [regarding The Company's diversity management]?* I think so, yes. *But this, this region, or at least with your team, you are not quite representative with your [employees]…* No. *But?* But that does not manifest itself, now. *No, exactly.* So that's the difference. *But is diversity then only a thing when there is diversity?* Eh, sometimes, yes. You can't do everything before it happens, I think."– Frits

Frits also said that the name of the women's network (ergo "women's network") did not invite participation from him:

> "No, those men won't join the women's network [laughs] *No? Why not? It's possible, right?* Is it? Are there many men in there, then? *There are some men, yes.* Yes but not many, I think! *No.. I do wonder why that is, then.* Well, just the name in itself. That it is a women's network, that does not invite the association of "oh I want to join that". *No?* I put that into a box immediately. *Which box is that?* Box "that is not for me". *Because…* Well, it is a women's network!"– Frits

In other interviews, similar sentiments were expressed: their focus was on the work, diversity measures were considered non-essential, or at least low-priority.

At The Company, the focus of diversity management is on minority members. Majority members are invited to participate in activities of, for example, the women's network, but the response is usually not overwhelming. This approach to diversity is said to emphasize the "otherness" of minority employees, seeing them as divergent from the norm, aiming to get these Others on par with the 'normal' employees. As mentioned previously, the comparison between groups is not made between themselves, but the minority groups are compared to "white, heterosexual, western, middle/upper class, abled men" (Zanoni et al., 2010, 13).

This normative group is the group for whom no facilities have been organized. The work done towards creating an equal workplace, then, appears to be falling onto the shoulders of minority employees. They are the ones who are gathering, who are organizing talks and events, who are thinking about these issues. Majority members, on the other hand, are feeling disengaged: they feel responsibility is not shared with them. Jansen et al. (2015) researched the effects of explicitly including majority group member into communication regarding diversity management, and found that doing so had positive effects on their support for the measures. This approach is called All-Inclusive Multiculturalism (AIM). While this approach is mainly referring to diversity measures regarding ethnic minorities, the findings might be applied more broadly to diversity management in general. They also argued for inclusion of majority members into diversity activities, proposing a "diversity taskforce" as an example (Jansen et al, 2015, 13).

Microaggression theory could add a sense of shared responsibility and majority engagement. Friedlaender (2018) argues that there must be a distinction made between blame and responsibility regarding microaggressions and their perpetrators. She maintains that while some people are blameworthy for their microaggressions, oftentimes people are not. This innocence, however, does not detract from the harm microaggressions do, and that therefore people should take and accept responsibility. Her understanding of responsibility is based on Young's social connection model of responsibility (2011). This social connection model is theorized in opposition to the liability model. The latter model poses that fault (and thus, responsibility) is found when agents "voluntarily and consciously committed a harm" (Friedlaender, 2018, 17). This model would be ineffective regarding microaggressions. The social connection model, however, focuses on cumulative harm rather than individual actions, on moral quality of the action within its context regardless of the intent, and gives the opportunity for retrospective analysis of cumulative harm. For harm, then, individuals share responsibility, and this responsibility can be taken by collective action (Young, 2011, 104-113, as paraphrased in Friedlaender, 2018, 17). Following this, Friedlaender states that in the particular case of microaggressions, individual responsibility is also a key factor, since most microaggressions are done by individual people. Additionally, the possibility to let go of the question of allocation of blame in cases of microaggressive harm might also benefit the usefulness of this framework. The goal of the framework should not be to allocate blame, but rather to encourage taking responsibility, reflecting on effects of interactions, and taking power difference and in- and exclusion into account when making remarks.

This individual responsibility is also one of the reasons I argue raising awareness of microaggressions would be a valuable addition to the field of diversity management. There is no one specific group that commits microaggressions: minority and majority employees alike make these sorts of remarks or jokes. Because there is no one group that carries responsibility**,** everyone shares this individual responsibility (Friedlaender, 2018). This leaves room for individual agency. It also steers clear of any undue emphasis on either minority or majority employees. In doing this, it could be argued that the application of microaggression theory in diversity management could fall under the AIM umbrella, which would then be expected to have positive effects on majority support. This approach is not excluding anyone, and just asks people to think about what they are saying: does it include or exclude? Does it rely on stereotypes? In asking these questions, structural effects might be triggered, as argued in my theoretical framework. Furthermore, this power sensitive approach to diversity and inclusion might create space for critical self-reflection for employees.

Antipathy

Not only did the people I interviewed appear disengaged from the topic at hand, as became clear in the previous, there were also some negative sentiments regarding, most prominently, the women's network. Multiple interviewees considered the networks to be exclusive rather than inclusive.

> "It's the same with women, and also a little bit with young employees, you kind of have to explain it, so that other groups don't feel discriminated against. Hè, because in the beginning it was really like, men said "oh, so we are not allowed to be there, shall we start a men's network of our own?" and stuff like that, so yeah, you do have to explain these things well." – Eef

Coen said the following:

> "Yeah, that is looked at by the men with astonishment, like, hey, why is that there especially for women, and why not for men? […] well, I think that that's actually quite surprising, if you do [it for] the one you also have to facilitate it for the other. […] And I think for women it is also done from a diversity standpoint, like, how are you treated by men, or maybe also women, I don't know, […] that that sort of stuff is talked about, like, how do you handle that." – Coen

Speaking of the declaration of intent that The Company has available in which their diversity goals are made clear, he said the following:

> "Yeah, there are some things here that I am like, do you need to mention that explicitly? I mean, every company writes in the annual plan what they do for women, different generations in the workforce, and then I think like, why not also men? I mean, really, I think we work with a big percentage of men here as well. I think, does it benefit the workplace if people start building walls? […] I get why it is put here like this [in this declaration], but, again, if I were to read it as a man, say I don't know the company, I would say, well, I can't work there, because the men are not allowed to be there. To put it black and white." - Coen

Daan also seemed to agree with this sentiment that networks work to separate rather than connect employees:

> "And I think especially when you have a group of all youngsters together or all women together, then you are actually separating yourself from the group again. And you should not put those people together, actually. *No?* Just be in it together! [..] Why a women's network? […] Well, for me it elicits an opposite reaction." – Daan

Here we see that these majority members appear to feel excluded from these initiatives. This experienced exclusion elicits negative feelings for them. The AIM approach that Jansen et al. (2015) spoke of might also have positive effects in this case. Since speaking about microaggressions does not target any specific social

group and instead focuses on individual responsibility, I argue that this use of the microaggressions framework could be considered as part of an AIM approach. This non-specificity could, then, be considered a strength of the microaggression-theory approach.

Dominant culture

Furthermore, though at the level of the technicians there is not a great degree of gender diversity at The Company, at the level of the team-managers, there are some women to be found. In speaking about the position of women at The Company, specifically at the level of lower management and/or the technicians, interviewees mostly remarked on the strong masculine culture they experienced. Especially Daan noted how he thought the hiring policies on women were meant to break through this "macho culture of men".

> "When I look at women within the company, I think that there is a motivation there to break through the macho culture of men, yes. And that [culture] is, I am finding out more and more, a lot less healthy than I thought it to be in the past in my eyes, let's say." – Daan

Eef also remarks on this masculine culture, saying that she does not know if women have to prove themselves more than other newcomers, but the more feminine you are, the more skeptically you are perceived. Daan also remarked on how female employees have to navigate working in this environment:

> "When a new [female] team-manager would have to be introduced to her team, that used to be quite a thing… And when [woman's name] came to work here she really thought about it and she drove a motorcycle onto the parking lot here, all tough. […] Then she would be seen as a tough woman, and then she would rise a level in the pecking order, you could call it" - Daan

Adding onto this, he later said that if a woman were to come in wearing a fur coat and pink nail polish (as proposed by me, sketching a very stereotypical view of femininity) she would not be taken seriously because she would be positioning herself outside of the norm of the technicians.

These quotes indicated to me that while there might be women working at this lower management level, the culture here is not welcoming to all identities. Though an increase in numbers of women would also be beneficial, an additional focus should be on effecting cultural change. As of now, some forms of femininity were accepted, but only some. Working as a woman in such an environment might mean having to work against stereotypes, which takes up energy that could be used more relevantly. This stereotype threat could be lessened by people not being seen as representatives for their social group and jokes not being made about their position as such. I argue that working against microaggressions at work will create space for a more pluralistic norm, which would also decrease the experience of stereotype threat for minority

employees, because more identities can exist without being relegated to the position of the 'outsider' who has to fit the norm of the 'insiders'. This would be beneficial to the inclusive climate. Creating this cultural change, in addition to also affecting numerical change, should be a focal point for diversity management.

Microaggressions and how to navigate them

Though the respondent were not generally negative about the state of diversity management at The Company, they were disengaged and sometimes critical of some of the measures they were familiar with. It could be argued, then, that the current measures at The Company are not effective. Furthermore, I recognized some microaggressions during the process of conducting the research and in analyzing the interviews. Not only were there instances of verbal microaggressions, there was also an instance of an environmental microaggression. In this case, I was visiting one of The Company's distribution centres to interview one of the team-managers. While I was there, I noticed that there was no trashcan available in the only toilet on the property. Though this might seem innocent at first, it communicated to me as a woman who experiences periods that that experience was not facilitated for in this building. This communicated to me that I was out of place. Additionally, team-managers reported seeing and hearing discriminatory jokes or "unpleasant" remarks in their teams. These factors lead me to conclude that focusing on increasing awareness of microaggressions would be beneficial for The Company.

One of my interviewees, Daan, said that most times, these jokes were not made with any ill intent. He said the following:

> "One time I did have a technician, that an unpleasant remark was made toward someone, on the color of his skin. I talked privately to those two, and was like "but what do you mean by that?", and it was like "yeah, I don't mean anything by it, it only stood out to me that he is different from the rest." – Daan

Here, then, the nature of these jokes as re-inscribing majority norm and working to sustain an in-group/ out-group dynamic can be seen. Gerard also saw how some of the jokes that are generally made in the groups of technicians that he manages are insensitive to people who are considered different:

> [describing a racist joke / incident] "The moment it happened I did not notice, I did not see it because everybody is equal so I did not search anything behind the words. But later that did turn into a conversation, because he did feel kind of discriminated against […] but yeah, in the moment, you just do not see it. Because yeah, I had just thought, everybody is equal so that's all alright." – Gerard.

He himself was firmly of the opinion that everybody is equal in a very strict sense, but was criticized in this approach by one of his technicians of color.

> "I do think everyone is equal, for me, everybody is equal, man, woman, at work everybody is equal. No difference. But.. *Here it comes..* Yes, one of my technicians comes to me and says, and that was a technician with a little bit of color, by the way. I am saying it like that but I do not want you to think I mean anything by it! [He says] "Well, you can say that everyone is equal, but saying that might make you blind to some things as well." *Okay.* Hey! He is quite right. Because when everyone is equal, you might not be able to see things that others experience as well [as you might]." – Gerard

Bauke and Coen also mentioned the power dynamics at play when joking around at work.

> "It's just like, of course you can make a joke, but you have to be really sure if you cán make this joke and who you are joking with, and I would actually, at work, just not make the joke." – Bauke

Here, one can see the importance of paying attention to power dynamics in diversity management. It is through this avenue that the issue of (un)acceptable jokes might be handled the most effectively. This approach is not to be based on not being allowed to see difference, but rather on reflecting on how using this difference to exclude someone from the main group might impact the excluded employees.

In speaking of remarks being made at work that rely on stereotypes, Frits said the following:

> "Ehm, well, it is a difficult subject, because it is in a sense a sort of undercurrent, it is. And you kind of go along with in, unnoticeably, as a manager. I mean, not always reacting to what is said, and actually, no answer is also an answer, because me not answering means that I actually kind of agree, I'm letting it slide. […] It is really an art to take your responsibility as a manager, at moments when it is needed. And I think we accidentally slip up there, sometimes." – Frits

In some of the cases of racist remarks or discriminatory jokes, some would not class these as microaggressions since they are less ambiguous than what is usually seen as microaggressive. However, as I have indicated in the previous chapter, I am of the opinion that jokes that re-iterate majority norm can and should also be classed as microaggressions, and most of the instances mentioned in the interviews were intended as jokes, or played off as such after encountering pushback. Because of these reported microaggressions, although they were not analyzed as such by the interviewees themselves, and because of the reported difficulty in navigating these situations, I also argue that thinking through microaggressions

fills a conceptual void in the moral language available (Lehrer, 1974, 95, Lawson, 1992, 76-77, via Friedlaender, 2018, 5-6). This approach can, therefore, be considered a necessary addition to the field of diversity management.

As I saw that the team-managers I interviewed reported microaggressive jokes and remarks and additionally indicated concerns regarding their own role herein, giving them and the employees they manage the tools to navigate and intervene in these interactions is something necessary and ultimately beneficial for all. Having previously hypothesized this more generally in my theoretical framework, namely that working against microaggressions would be a beneficial addition to diversity management practices, I argue that the sentiments gathered from the interviews support this statement and show that there is a real-life need for this intervention.

Chapter Three: Putting theory into practice

Having seen the need for the microaggression framework in diversity management practices, the focus shifts to practical applications of this insight. Putting theory into practice cannot be done without due consideration of the difficulties and pitfalls of the approach envisioned. More research on this subject is needed. It is not the goal of this thesis to provide a definite answer to how microaggressions theory should be applied in practice. It is the goal in this chapter to invite discussion and to indicate some hypotheses I have formulated on account of the results of the interviews done during my internship. These hypotheses require more research and must not be considered anything other than preliminary. In the interviews I noticed some factors that could contribute to the success of measures in a general sense, indicating what would definitely not work, and what might.

Victim-based approach

Some of the respondents mentioned that it was imperative for the victims to speak up. Coen, for example, said the following:

> "I am like, please, speak up for yourself, that would empower the message way more." – Coen

> "Imagine I say something that, that does not sit well with you, that you are like [Coen], hold up. I expect that as well, it has to be a two way street: I think you have to indicate what crosses the line and what does not." – Coen

Later, he added that though he felt like this was the case, he also used his position as a manager to intervene in situations in which the victim did not speak up, providing he himself noticed what expired. It is for these interventions that I argue that microaggression theory could help in providing team-managers with the tools to more accurately scope out when a joke or remark crosses a boundary. I will elaborate on this later in this chapter.

Though it is often true that perpetrators of microaggressions do not notice the violence in their remarks and have to be made aware of this by others, I argue that it cannot be the sole responsibility of the victims to speak up. That approach shifts responsibility for inclusive speech to already less-privileged members of the workforce. When speaking up, then, victims have to put themselves and their position in the group at risk in order to protect their identity. In doing so, they position themselves as outsiders that break up the easy dynamic of a group. Ahmed referred to this position as being a "killjoy" (2017). She was referring mainly to feminist interventions in non-feminist spaces, writing specifically on "feminist killjoys" and how intervening in these situations positions one as a disruptor of the fun. Though in this diversity management

case we are not specifically speaking of feminist interventions, the dynamic in any other interventive space remains the same: a placement outside of the main group is the result. This, again, reinforces the excluding dynamic of microaggressions. Sue (2010) also wrote that the question on whether or not to speak up, for victims, also adds to the harm in microaggressions. He calls the decision to speak up the "result of an assessment between action benefits versus threat (negative personal consequences)" (2010, 57). In this assessment, the power dynamics between the persons in the exchange have to be taken into account. There is always a threat of retaliation in one form another, of which being seen as a "troublemaker" is one of the tamer.

So, the approach of diversity management cannot be solely on empowering people to speak up when they are a victim of a microaggression. This would leave the responsibility on the wrong party in the exchange. The goal should be to have perpetrators face their responsibility (not, necessarily, blame) in these exchanges. This would imply a great deal of introspection and self-reflection. Being aware of the power of words and remarks and how these words might affects others differently than they might affect you, then, would be essential. In this, everyone would be equally responsible. Equal individual responsibility, however, often leads to nobody actually taking the initiative. Whose job is it to speak up if it is everyone's job to speak up?

Another difficulty that is to be expected is that the identification of what is and what is not a microaggression remains difficult. This issue was already touched on by Lilienfeld (2017). For some who are already attuned to the field of diversity and inclusion it might be relatively easy to identify them, but for the regular employee, it might often be the case that these issues have simply never crossed their mind. The point of working with microaggression theory should, therefore, not be to blame uninformed people who mean no harm, or to create an atmosphere in which people do not feel free to joke or speak their mind. Instead, the focus should be on respectful intervention and education, asking for an open attitude towards intervention and openness towards opportunities for learning.

Manager-based approach

It is because of these difficulties that I would envision a more crucial role for team-managers. These managers are part of the group they are managing in a practical sense, since they work together and they might develop friendships with the employees under their management, but they are not part of the in-group in a technical sense. They objectively have a different position in the group from their counterparts. These team-managers, then, have the position to intervene without endangering their position within the group. Additionally, the team-managers are crucial in indicating core company values. Engaging lower management directly would also imply a more bottom-up approach to diversity management, avoiding or

lessening the antipathy that top-down approaches usually bring and increasing majority engagement in diversity management.

> "Sometimes I get a new set of rules from a [company] convention, and I am like, yeah, this is fantastic and nice that you thought of this and I get what you are saying but if I do it the way you think this will land, the old-fashioned way, it is not going to stick. *Okay, what is the old-fashioned way?* […] Schoolteacher, little kids. […] We are here with a team of eighteen men, right, when I read how they are approached, […] I think it's like [they think] we're here with a bunch of wankers [*literally: retards*] […] They're technicians, not autistic people." – Bauke

Coarse and ableist language aside, this quote shows how top down approaches without engagement of the people envisioned as target groups for the policies cannot count on support from the managers I interviewed. Daan also said the following:

> "The disadvantage is that often these measures are enforced with pressure from above and that they [, the technicians,] just have to do these things." – Daan

Aant, likewise, said:

> "If you are far away from the work floor, and you think of something, well, at some point you are going to have to get out of your little tower." – Aant

From these quotes, I analyzed a general disconnect between the wishes and lived realities of the technicians and their managers and the measures managers were introducing. The "little tower" Aant spoke of I interpreted as a place of disconnect. Managing from this place, with a top down approach that does not engage the layers of lower and middle management, might not be the most sustainable way into the future. Bauke was also convinced of the crucial role of team-managers in indicating what behavior is accepted in their teams, further proving how a bottom up approach might be more beneficial:

> "To tolerate [racist, sexist, discriminatory jokes and remarks], I think that team-managers are sometimes also just scared of the technicians, scared of how they express themselves, as a group, you always have… Well, I told those guys like, I am standing next to you [as a colleague] but I am also your manager, and I know exactly when I have to assume that position. […] But the most important thing is that when you promise something, you deliver on that promise." – Bauke

Additionally, Bauke said the following:

> [As a manager you should say:] “Well, we do not want this anymore, this is the policy now. If you make those rude remarks, then this is what is to be expected. But in doing that, you do need team-managers and area-managers who can do that, who dare to do that, and who are also able to just say, no, this is not what I want, I do not want to walk around at my job like this. *Yes, that seems essential to me, then.* No but I think that it really is essential, and not only regarding discrimination but also in all other areas. *And that is still lacking, you do not see that decisiveness right now?* I definitely do not see that decisiveness.” – Bauke

Frits was also aware of his position as a team-manager in these situations:

> “And if in that moment a remark is leaning towards… towards discriminatory behavior or something, yeah, then it might not always be up to me to intervene, how sensitive it is, then. But I might need to. And that right there is a point for improvement, I think, not only for me, but also for multiple people within this organization. To point out the [discriminatory] undercurrent.” – Frits

These fragments from the interviews indicated to me that the faculties of middle and lower managers are currently underutilized at The Company. In many of these instances the respondents were referring more broadly to management in general, but this conclusion can also be applied to diversity management measures. In focusing more on their central position within the company, awareness of microaggressions and their harms could grow, improving the inclusive climate.

General difficulties

In engaging these team-managers, it should be noted that not all diversity management approaches have the intended effects, and that an approach for application of microaggression theory cannot be chosen without due consideration for the implications and side-effects. One way of engaging the team-managers would for example be training. Doing this sort of training with the intent of suppression of stereotypical thinking is shown to actually activate these stereotypes, resulting in avoidance of stereotyped group members (Rudman et al. 2001, Macrae et al. 1994, via Jackson et al. 2014, 422). In order to avoid this, I argue that any approach working against microaggressions would have to be focused on intervention, not suppression. Similarly, “forced diversity training” is said to possibly result in backlash because of “reactance” (Rudman et al., 2001 via Jackson et al., 2014, 422). Focusing on awareness of implicit bias, however, has been shown to be effective in improving attitudes toward minority groups (Hillard et al., 2013, via Jackson et al., 2014, 421). Still, the research on the effectiveness of these measures remains sparse (Madera et al., 2011, 470). Additionally, practices that work for one company might not work for the other, depending on the structure and nature of the company. There is no one size fits all in this case. More

research on this topic is needed. This matter complicates the application of microaggression theory in practical contexts, but the need to find a sustainable way to do so remains.

Conclusion

In this thesis, the main goal was to argue why microaggression theory would be a beneficial addition to the field of diversity management. In order to support that statement, I first elaborated on why I argue thinking through microaggressions is a necessity to begin with. This was because there is a shift in attention implied in taking microaggressions seriously: the focus is moved to previously non-dominant narratives. In shifting this focus, the dominance of the dominant narrative is broken and the view of the world and what happens in said world becomes more nuanced. I argued that this nuance is very important. There are some difficulties in defining what can be understood to be a microaggression, seeing that microaggressions are often ambiguous and subtle, but the identification of a microaggression is not dependent on the victim noticing its presence. A microaggression can only be labeled as such when the remark or situation communicates a message of exclusion along lines of objectively existent oppression.

After defining my reading of the microaggression framework, I shifted my focus to connecting diversity management practices with this framework. I provided arguments why thinking through microaggression theory would be beneficial to diversity management in general. In doing so, I generalized what is happening in diversity management: currently it can be said there is a focus on (in)formal mentoring, single category networks, and employee training programmes. These approaches all focus on the non-normative employees, getting them on par with the norm rather than changing the norm. In adopting the microaggression framework, I argue that there can be a more inclusive focus on all employees, since all employees, regardless of group membership, have experience with microaggressions and carry responsibility for their own behavior. Additionally, I argued that the microaggression framework does not rely on a conceptualization of difference along lines of inherent difference between people, which is an essentialist approach, but focuses on difference in power, instead. This latter approach takes the constructed nature of difference between social groups into account. Additionally, the microaggression framework leaves rooms for multiple axis identities, which cannot be said for other diversity management strategies that focus on single identity frameworks, like for example employee networks. In this sense, adopting the microaggression framework is a more intersectional approach to reality, which would be beneficial to have represented in diversity management. Furthermore, eliminating microaggressions would improve the inclusive climate in the workplace.

Then, I continued onto the results from the interviews I did at an energy network company asking my respondents how they felt and what they thought about the diversity management strategies and practices at their company. In interviewing these team-managers, I noticed a few themes. First of all, their strategies lacked engagement from the majority members that I interviewed.

Moreover, some of the strategies were met with antipathy, mostly visible regarding the employee networks The Company has. These were considered exclusionary and unfair by some of my interviewees. Respondents also noticed a strong “masculine culture” at their level of The Company. Furthermore, the people I interviewed had experience with microaggressive jokes or remarks in their teams, and some of my interviewees were struggling with trying to navigate these interactions as managers. These findings led me to conclude that adopting the microaggression framework into this context could help with increasing majority engagement and diversifying the dominant culture in the workplace, as argued in my theoretical framework. Furthermore, it indicated to me that providing tools to the managers to deal with microaggressive remarks and situations in their teams would be a necessary and beneficial step for diversity management.

Finally, I looked at possible strategies for applying the microaggression framework to reality. From my interviews, I concluded that adopting a more bottom up approach rather than top down might be beneficial. This would mean focusing more on engaging middle and lower management rather than relying on upper management to have the message of diversity, or rather, the message of attention to microaggressions, trickle down. Furthermore, I highlighted that any approach focusing on microaggressions should be aiming to create an environment where self-reflection is welcomed and respectful discussion is invited, rather than forbidding people to joke. Additionally, I drew attention to the difficulties in applying any strategy to reality that has not been extensively researched, and concluded that more research into this field is needed. However, I also reiterated that these difficulties do not erase the need for this intervention, since it is essential for diversity management to start looking towards non-essentialist alternatives to current dominant diversity management practices to be able to continue to serve a continuously changing workplace.

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Appendix A: Topic list

Topic List Interview

EERST

Voorstellen: studie Media en Cultuurwetenschappen: stroming Cultuur

Introductie onderzoek: afdeling MVO: belang van horen meningen voor goed beeld van wat leeft

Uitleggen wat ik ga doen met de data, vragen om consent en aankondigen dat ik het nog eens ga vragen en dat ze het altijd kunnen intrekken.

RECORDER AANDOEN

Vragen om toestemming voor gebruik data voor onderzoeksdoeleinden.

Aanreiken vragenlijst + pen.

Meenemen manifest Diversiteit [The Company]

Kennis en definities

In hoeverre is men / bent u als teamleider op de hoogte van het diversiteitsbeleid van [The Company]?

Zijn specifieke richtlijnen aan u bekend? Management strategieën? Zo ja, hoe vaak gehoord? Zo nee, hoe komt dat, denkt u?

En hoe zit dat in uw team? Uw manager? Top down of bottom up, naar uw gevoel?

Wat valt onder diversiteit volgens u? Welke groepen?

(Manifest Diversiteit): door laten lezen.

Houding

Hoe staan de mensen in uw team tegenover het diversiteitsbeleid van [The Company]? Überhaupt diversiteit?

Ziet u cultuur als een risicofactor in deze tak van werken?

Heeft uw team bezwaren tegen specifieke overtuigingen in het diversiteitsbeleid? En u zelf? Heeft u er ooit anders over gedacht? Zo ja, wanneer en waarom veranderd?

Discriminatie ervaringen? Welke groepen worden niet genoeg geholpen, welke te veel?

Mening over netwerk groepen van minderheden?

Waarom denkt u dat [The Company] dit beleid voert? Zakelijk of anders? En wat vindt u daarvan?

Hoe zou u het doen? Wat vindt u van de haalbaarheid van dit beleid? Nut?

Gedrag

Doet u zelf specifiek dingen binnen uw team die te maken hebben met diversiteit? Heeft het prioriteit in uw dagelijkse werk?

Hoe zou u [The Company] omschrijven als werkgever? Hoe ziet u uw werkplek? Descriptieve woorden?

Voelt u zich wel eens buitengesloten op de werkvloer? Of hoort u dergelijke geluiden uit uw team? Op basis waarvan? Is daar beleid voor? Voelt u zich gehoord?

Frequentie van contact met diversiteit?

Afronding

Heeft u nog iets toe te voegen, wilt u nog iets kwijt? Wat vond u van dit interview zelf? Dat er onderzoek naar gedaan wordt?

Einde interview. Recorder uitzetten: bedanken voor de moeite, vragen of ze op hoogte gehouden willen worden van het vervolg van het onderzoek, CADEAUTJE geven!!

Appendix B: Summary of interviews

Aant

My first interviewee, Aant, kept his answers short. He mentioned the cultural diversity within his team, emphasizing how well that cooperation worked. Aant was not partial to the networks The Company has, preferring his own friends for emotional support and adhering to a strict divide between his private and his work life. He would have preferred networks based on function within the company rather than connecting employees based on factors relating to social identity.

Bauke

Bauke, a relatively new employee at The Company, highlighted the importance of strong leadership skills in managing teams of technicians, also referring to diversity management in such terms. Bauke also had a nuanced view of the networks, saying he could see why The Company would facilitate such groups, but fearing negative bonding within these groups, and a separating off of employees.

Coen

The interview with Coen focused mainly on cultural diversity rather than for example gender diversity. He mentioned the importance of knowing when jokes are crossing boundaries, and that jokes should be funny for both parties in the exchange. He also mentioned how The Company could do more to include men in their diversity policies, in the name of equality and inclusion of all. Additionally, he called the atmosphere among the technicians a macho culture.

Daan

Daan mentioned how he felt teams changed with the presence of women therein, and how he felt this change was a positive and necessary one. Like Coen, Daan also called the atmosphere among the technicians a macho culture. Daan disliked the networks, feeling they were discriminatory and worked to exclude and separate employees. Daan also talked about the negative reaction he sees from his technicians when measures from management are implemented with a top down approach.

Eef

Eef likewise mentioned her experience of the tone of management as patronizing. As a member of the women's network, her opinion of the networks was quite positive, but she also saw how men in her team and other teams were not of the same opinion. She also mentioned how jokes she did not find offensive might land differently with others who might not have the same life experiences as her, calling this her "blind spot".

Frits

Frits indicated that diversity management had little to no attention within his (homogenously white, male) team. He highlighted the position of the team-manager in intervening when discriminatory jokes are made in their team. Additionally, he spoke of the need to keep the conversation about diversity as open as possible, taking care to not shut down any questions or feelings in order to be able to talk them through. He

also mentioned how management measures were not communicated clearly and thus largely ignored by his team.

Gerard

Gerard, similarly, did not prioritize talking about diversity and inclusion in his team. He talked about not seeing difference and being colorblind, as it were, and how this approach was criticized by one of his employees for making him blind to some of the difficulties being “different” at work might imply. Gerard also felt that higher management should listen more and communicate more clearly to the technicians.

Appendix C: Quotes in Dutch

Chapter 2:

"When I came here [to manage this team in this region], I did notice that specifically people from [place in same region], well they think that sort of stuff is all quite scary. […] Me, I have no doubts [about hiring minorities], but I do notice, in other regions, other people, they do tend to make a fuss, and they can be quite skittish." – Bauke

"Toen ik hier kwam merkte ik wel dat zeker mensen uit [plaats in Zuid-Holland], die vinden dat allemaal wel eng hoor […] Nou, ík heb geen twijfel, maar ik zie wel, andere gebieden, andere mensen, die kunnen er wel íets van maken, en ook best wel bangig [zijn]." – Bauke

"All is well [regarding The Company's diversity management]? I think so, yes. *But this, this region, or at least with your team, you are not quite representative with your [employees]…* No. *But?* But that does not manifest itself, now. *No, exactly.* So that's the difference. *But is diversity then only a thing when there is diversity?* Eh, sometimes, yes. You can't do everything before it happens, I think." – Frits.

"Allemaal helemaal goed? Volgens mij gaat dat wel, ja. *Maar dit, deze regio, of tenminste met uw team bent u nog niet echt representatief met uw…* Nee. *Maar?* Maar het manifesteert zich ook niet, nu. *Nee, precies.* Dus dat is het verschil. *Maar wordt diversiteit dan pas een ding als er diversiteit is?* Ehm, soms wel . Soms wel. Je kunt niet alles voor zijn, denk ik." – Frits

"No, those men won't join the women's network [laughs] *No? Why not? It's possible, right?* Is it? Are there many men in there, then? *There are some men, yes.* Yes but not many, I think! *No.. I do wonder why that is, then.* Well, just the name in itself. That it is a women's network, that does not invite the association of "oh I want to join that". *No?* I put that into a box immediately. *Which box is that?* Box "that is not for me". *Be-cause…* Well, it is a women's network!" – Frits

"Nee, die mannen gaan niet bij het vrouwennetwerk [lacht] *Niet? Hoezo niet? Kan toch best?* Ja? Zitten daar veel mannen ook dan? *Er zit een aantal mannen bij, ja.* Maar niet veel, denk ik! *Nee… Ik vraag me wel af hoe dat komt dan.* Nou, door de benaming al. Dat het een vrouwennetwerk is. Dat associeert bij mij ook niet van, oh daar wil ik lid van worden. *Nee?* Die zet ik meteen in een hokje. *Ohja, wat voor hokje?* Hokje van "dat is niet voor mij". *Want…* Ja, het is een vrouwennetwerk!" – Frits

"It's the same with women, and also a little bit with young employees, you kind of have to explain it, so that other groups don't feel discriminated against. Hè, because in the beginning it was really like, men said "oh, so we are not allowed to be there, shall we start a men's network of our own?" and stuff like that, so yeah, you do have to explain these things well." – Eef

"Dat is hetzelfde een beetje met vrouwen, en ook wel met jongeren, dat moet je dan een beetje uitleggen, zodat andere groepen zich weer niet gediscrimineerd voelen. Hè, want in het begin was het echt dat mannen zeiden "oh, daar mogen wij dus niet bij zijn, zullen wij ook een mannennetwerk doen?" en dat soort dingen, dus dat, ja dat moet je wel een beetje goed uitleggen." – Eef

"Yeah, that is looked at by the men with big eyes, like, hey, why is that there especially for women, and why not for men? […] well, I think that that's actually quite surprising, if you do [it for] the one you also have to facilitate it for the other. […] And I think for women it is also done from a diversity standpoint, like, how are you treated by men, or maybe also women, I don't know, […] that that sort of stuff is talked about, like, how do you handle that." – Coen

"Daar wordt wel door de mannen met argusogen naar gekeken van héé, waarom is dat er wel speciaal voor vrouwen, en waarom niet voor mannen? […] Nou ja, ik vind dat in die zin best verrassend, als je de ene doet moet je dat ook voor de ander faciliteren. […] En ik denk dat bij vrouwen ook bewust gedaan is ook vanuit diversiteit, hè, van waar loop je nou tegenaan, van hoe wordt je misschien door mannen bejegend, hè, of misschien ook nog wel door vrouwen, ik weet het niet, […] dat daar wel ook veel zulke dingen besproken wordt, hoe ga je daar nou mee om." - Coen

"Yeah, there are some things here that I am like, do you need to mention that explicitly? I mean, every company writes in the annual plan what they do for women, different generations in the workforce, and then I think like, why not also men? I mean, really, I think we work with a big percentage of men here as well. I think, does it benefit the workplace if people start building walls? […] I get why it is put here like this [in this declaration], but, again, if I were to read it as a man, say I don't know the company, I would say, well, I can't work there, because the men are not allowed to be there. To put it black and white." - Coen

"Ja, er zitten wel wat dingen in dat ik denk van, moet dat nu expliciet genoemd worden? Ik bedoel, elk bedrijf omschrijft in het jaarplan wat ze doen voor vrouwen, verschillende generaties op de arbeidsmarkt, en dan denk ik van, waarom ook niet voor mannen? Ik bedoel, even, volgens mij werken […] we nu ook met een groot gedeelte mannen. […] Ik denk van, is de werkvloer daar nou echt bij gebaat als mensen muurtjes gaan bouwen? […] Ik snap wel hoe het hier [in het Manifest] staat, maar goed, nogmaals, als ik het als man zou lezen, ken het bedrijf niet, zeg ik, nou daar ken ik niet werken want die mannen mogen er niet zijn. Even zwart-wit." – Coen

"And I think especially when you have a group of all youngsters together or all women together, then you are actually separating yourself from the group again. And you should not put those people together, actually. *No?* Just be in it together! [..] Why a women's network? […] Well, for me it elicits an opposite reaction." – Daan

"En ik vind juist als je een groepje met allemaal jongeren bij elkaar, of juist een groepje met allemaal vrouwen bij elkaar, dan ga je juist weer afzonderen van de rest. En die zou je eigenlijk niet bij elkaar moeten zoeken juist. *Nee?* Doe het nou vooral met elkaar! […] Waarom een vrouwennetwerk? […] Nou, bij mij wekt het een averechtse reactie op.– Daan

"One time I did have a technician, that an unpleasant remark was made toward someone, on the color of his skin. I talked privately to those two, and was like "but what do you mean by that?", and it was like "yeah, I don't mean anything by it, it only stood out to me that he is different from the rest." – Daan

[…] "Ik heb wel m'n monteur een keer gehad dat er een keer een nare opmerking naar iemand gemaakt werd, over zijn huidskleur. Die twee heb ik ook apart genomen toen, en toen inderdaad van "maar wat bedoel je daar nou eigenlijk mee", en zo heb je "ja eigenlijk bedoel ik er helemaal niks mee, viel me alleen op dat 'ie anders is als de anderen"." – Daan

[describing a racist joke / incident] "The moment it happened I did not notice, I did not see it because everybody is equal so I did not search anything behind the words. But later that did turn into a conversation, because he did feel kind of discriminated against […] but yeah, in the moment, you just do not see it. Because yeah, I had just thought, everybody is equal so that's all alright." – Gerard.

[beschrijft racistisch incident] "Op dat moment had ik dat niet door, ik zag het niet want iedereen is gelijk dus ik zocht daar ook niks achter. Maar dat heeft later wel best wel heeft dat een gesprek eh… want hij voelde zich best wel gediscrimineerd […] maar ja, op dat moment zie je dat gewoon niet. Want ja, ik had gewoon gedacht, ja, iedereen is gelijk dus ja, dat kan allemaal." – Gerard

"I do think everyone is equal, for me, everybody is equal, man, woman, at work everybody is equal. No difference. But.. *Here it comes..* Yes, one of my technicians comes to me and says, and that was a technician with a little bit of color, by the way. I am saying it like that but I do not want you to think I mean anything by it! [He says] "Well, you can say that everyone is equal, but saying that might make you blind to some things as well." *Okay.* Hey! He is quite right. Because when everyone is equal, you might not be able to see things that others experience as well [as you might]." – Gerard

"Ik vind ook iedereen gelijk, voor mij is iedereen gelijk hoor, man, vrouw, in het werk is iedereen gelijk. Geen verschil. Maar.. *Nu komt ie..* Ja, d'r zegt een monteur tegen mij, en dat was trouwens een jongen.. een lichtgekleurde monteur. Ik noem het maar even zo, daar moet je niks achter zoeken. "Dat zeg je nu wel, maar daardoor zie jij soms dingen misschien ook wel niet" *Okee.* Hee! Daar heeft ie wel gelijk in. Want als iedereen gelijk is, zie je dingen van een ander minder goed." - Gerard

"It's just like, of course you can make a joke, but you have to be really sure if you cán make this joke and who you are joking with, and I would actually, at work, just not make the joke." - Bauke

"Is gewoon, een grap kan gemaakt worden, maar je moet heel goed weten of je hem kan maken en bij wie je hem maakt, en ik zou 'm vooral, in je werk, zou ik het niet doen."- Bauke

"Ehm, well, it is a difficult subject, because it is in a sense a sort of undercurrent, it is. And you kind of go along with in, unnoticeably, as a manager. I mean, not always reacting to what is said, and actually, no answer is also an answer, because me not answering means that I actually kind of agree, I'm letting it slide. […] It is really an art to take your responsibility as a manager, at moments when it is needed. And I think we accidentally slip up there, sometimes." – Frits

"Ehm, nou het is een lastig onderwerp, want het is een vorm van onderstroom, is het. Waar je soms ook ongemerkt, als leidinggevende deels in meegaat. Ik bedoel, niet altijd reageren op wat er gezegd wordt, en eigenlijk is geen antwoord geven is ook al een antwoord geven, want ik geef geen antwoord is eigenlijk ben ik een klein beetje het ermee eens, ik laat het gaan. […] Maar het is ook wel de kunst om als leidinggevende ook je verantwoordelijkheid te nemen, op momenten dat dat nodig is. En ik denk dat we daar ongemerkt wel eens een steekje laten vallen." – Frits

"When I look at women within the company, I think that there is a motivation there to break through the macho culture of men, yes. And that [culture] is, I am finding out more and more, a lot less healthy than it used to be in the past in my eyes, let's say." – Daan

"Als ik naar vrouwen kijk binnen het bedrijf dat denk ik dat daar echt een doel achter zit om de macho mannencultuur wat te doorbreken, inderdaad. En die is ook, kom ik steeds meer achter, een stuk minder gezond als dat ie in het verleden wel in mijn ogen was, laten we maar zeggen." – Daan

"When a new [female] team-manager would have to be introduced to her team, that used to be quite a thing… And when [woman's name] came to work here she really thought about it and she drove a motorcycle onto [the parking lot there], all tough. […] Then she will be seen as a tough woman, and then she will rise a level in the picking order, you could call it" - Daan

"Als een nieuwe teamleidster inderdaad aan haar team voorgesteld moest worden dan was dat best wel een dingetje. En toen [naam] hier kwam heeft ze er ook echt over nagedacht, en die is ook echt heel stoer op de motor is ze het [naam parkeerplaats] binnengereden. […] Dan wordt ze als een stoere vrouw wordt ze aangezien, en dan, er zit toch een bepaalde.. noem het maar een soort pikorde zit daarin, en daar stijg je dan in een keer op." – Daan

Chapter 3:

"I am like, please, speak up for yourself, that would empower the message way more." – Coen

"Ik zeg dan, zeg dat alsjeblieft zelf, want dat komt veel krachtiger over." – Coen

“Imagine I say something that, that does not sit well with you, that you are like [Coen], hold up. I expect that as well, it has to be a two way street: I think you have to indicate what crosses the line and what does not.” – Coen

“Stel dat ik tegen jou iets zeg waar je, wat bij jou verkeerd valt, dat je zegt van [Coen], wacht eens even. Dat verwacht ik aan de andere kant ook wel. Het moet wel over en weer zijn, jij moet volgens mij grenzen aangeven van dit kan wel en dit kan niet.”– Coen

“Sometimes I get a new set of rules from a [company] convention, and I am like, yeah, this is fantastic and nice that you thought of this and I get what you are saying but if I do it the way you think this will land, the old-fashioned way, it is not going to stick. *Okay, what is the old-fashioned way?* […] Schoolteacher, little kids. […] We are here with a team of eighteen men, right, when I read how they are approached, […] I think it’s like [they think] we’re here with a bunch of wankers [*literally: retards*] […] They’re technicians, not autistic people.” – Bauke

“Soms krijg ik vanuit een [company]bijeenkomst of een nieuwe set regels dat ik denk, ja, dit is fantastisch en dit is leuk bedacht en ik snap ook wat jullie zeggen, maar als ik dit zo doe op de manier dat jullie denken dat dit landt, dit is de ouderwetse manier, die gaat niet landen. Okee, wat is dan de ouderwetse manier? Schooljuf, meester, meester, kindjes. […] We zitten hier met [een aantal] man, hè, als ik lees hoe zij benaderd worden, […] ik vind dat echt alsof we [een aantal] debielen hier hebben zitten. […] Het zijn techneuten, maar het zijn geen autisten.” – Bauke

“The disadvantage is that often these measures are enforced with pressure from above and that they [, the technicians,] háve to do these things.” – Daan

“En het nadeel is dat het toch vaak toch wel met druk van boven wordt opgelegd dat ze dat dan móeten doen.” - Daan

“If you are far away from the work floor, and you think of something, well, at some point you are going to have to get out of your tower.” – Aant

“Als je ver van de werkvloer zit en je bedenkt wat, dan moet je toch een keer van die toren afkomen.” – Aant

“To tolerate [racist, sexist, discriminatory jokes and remarks], I think that team-managers are sometimes also just scared of the technicians, scared of how they express themselves, as a group, you always have… Well, I told those guys like, I am standing next to you [as a colleague] but I am also your manager, and I know exactly when I have to assume that position. […] But the most important thing is that when you promise something, you deliver on that promise.” – Bauke

“Gedogen, ik denk dat teamleiders ook soms wel gewoon bang zijn voor monteurs , voor hoe zij zichzelf kunnen uitlaten, als groep, je hebt altijd… Nou ik heb tegen die gasten gezegd van ik sta tussen jullie in, maar ik ben wel jullie leidinggevende, en ik weet precies wanneer ik mijn rol moet pakken. […] Maar het belangrijkste is dat als je iets belooft dat je je er ook aan houdt.” – Bauke

[As a manager you should say:] “Well, we do not want this anymore, this is the policy now. If you make those rude remarks, then this is what is to be expected. But in doing that, you do need team-managers and area-managers who can do that, who dare to do that, and who are also able to just say, no, this is not what I want, I do not want to walk around at my job like this. *Yes, that seems essential to me, then.* No but I think that it really is essential, and not only regarding discrimination but also in all other areas. *And that is still lacking, you do not see that decisiveness right now?* I definitely do not see that decisiveness.” – Bauke

“Nu, dit willen we niet meer, dit is het beleid. Als je dit soort grove uitspraken doet, dan is dit ook wat je kan verwachten. Maar daarin moet je wel teamleiders hebben en rayonmanagers die dat kunnen, durven, en die ook gewoon kunnen zeggen, nee, dit wil ik niet, hier wil ik niet, zo wil ik niet in mijn tent rondlopen. *Ja dat lijkt me dan wel essentieel.* Nee maar ik denk zelf echt dat het nodig is, en dit is niet alleen op discriminatie, dit is op alle gebieden. *En daar heb je nu nog tekort aan, je ziet die daadkracht nog niet helemaal?* Ik zie die daadkracht zeker niet.” – Bauke

“And if in that moment a remark is leaning towards… towards discriminatory behavior or something, yeah, then it might not always be up to me to intervene, how sensitive it is, then. But I might need to. And that right there is a point for improvement, I think, not only for me, but also for multiple people within this organization. To point out the [discriminatory] undercurrent.” – Frits

“En als dan op dat moment ook een uitlating richting… richting discriminerend gedrag gaat ofzo, dan ja dan is het misschien niet altijd aan mij om daar iets van te zeggen, hoe gevoelig het dan is. Dat moet ik misschien wel doen. En daar zit volgens mij wel een ontwikkelpunt, niet alleen voor mij maar voor meerdere mensen binnen ons bedrijf. Om die onderstroom toch echt te benoemen.” – Frits