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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Discursive managerial practices of diversity and homogeneity

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The concept of diversity as an organizational value has become an integral part of many organizational policies, yet women and minorities continue to be underrepresented as managers. Scholars have drawn attention to the paradox in which managers recognize diversity as an organizational value and yet top level managerial ranks remain primarily homogenous. How senior managers negotiate the use of the discourse of diversity and the underrepresentation of women and minorities at managerial levels has received relatively little scholarly attention. The purpose of this study is to interrogate the use of the organizational value of diversity by examining how constructions of diversity and of women and ethnic and sexual minorities by senior managers working in nonprofit organizations inform discursive practices of diversity and homogeneity. We assume managers use implicit and explicit norms to differentiate among individuals and assign them to groups, and draw on various discourses to justify these categorizations and related exclusion. In this study, we explore how senior managers in nonprofit organizations construct diversity and homogeneity and create categorical groups such as women and minorities.

Keywords: diversity; gender; ethnicity; sexuality; discourses; senior managers

Managerial practices of diversity and homogeneity

The concept of diversity as an organizational value has become an integral part of many organizational policies. Its discursive use marks a shift from a focus on affirmative action and anti-discrimination policies with respect to specific groups, to a valuing of a broad range of social differences among individuals (Wrench 2001). The business case for organizational diversity assumes that the presence and acceptance of social difference contributes to organizational productivity and efficiency, and eventually produces equality (see, for example, Thomas and Ely 1996, Wrench 2001, Catalyst 2004). A key assumption of the discourse of management of diversity is that employees will be more productive if the social differences they bring to the organization are recognized and valued by their managers and directors. Consequently, the discourse of management of diversity that values social difference has become an important stated organizational value in the USA and in Europe (Wrench 2001, Embrick 2011, Morrish and O'Mara 2011). In this paper, we problematize these understandings of social diversity and show how their discursive use does not necessarily result in practices of heterogeneity, erasure of institutionalized inequalities or acceptance of social difference, especially at managerial levels. Despite organizational commitment to diversity, senior managerial levels continue to be characterized by their lack

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of social diversity, that is, their homogeneity, due to the underrepresentation of social groups such as women and ethnic and sexual minorities (see, for example, Zandvliet 2002, Wirth 2004, OSA 2005, Lopez-Claros and Sahidi 2010, Netherlands 2010). We assume, therefore, that social diversity is not a neutral or natural fact but a discourse that is informed by a constellation of social relations of power such as gender, ethnicity, and sexuality that constitute organizational members (Zanoni and Janssens 2003, Janssens and Zanoni 2005, Prasad *et al.* 2006). In this paper, we explore the relationship between managerial understandings of diversity and of these three social relations of power.

Scholars have looked at how those in influential positions of leadership assign meanings to categorical groups associated with social relations. Managers have drawn on prevailing discourses about ethnic minorities to explain their shortage at managerial level by situating that absence in 'their' culture (Zanoni and Janssens 2003, Subeliani and Tsogas 2005, Tilbury and Colic-Peisker 2006). For example, Subeliani and Tsogas (2005) explored the discursive practices of bank managers in their hiring and promotion of ethnic minority workers. The researchers concluded that minorities were primarily hired for jobs in the lower ranks to serve as window dressing, that is, their presence was assumed to draw a diversity of ethnic customers to the bank. The managers framed the lack of ethnic minorities in the managerial ranks primarily in terms of lack of qualifications. In contrast to the prevailing notion that minorities lack the necessary education to be managers, the underrepresentation of managerial women has often been framed in essentialist terms based on assumptions about women's reproductive capabilities and responsibilities as primary caregivers and has often been confounded with sexual preference and heteronormativity (Wajcman 1998, Claringbould and Knoppers, 2004, 2007, 2008, Connell 2006, Meriläinen *et al.* 2009, Knoppers *et al.* 2012). For example, Claringbould and Knoppers (2004) found in a study of practices among senior sport journalists that the underrepresentation of women was attributed to the 'natural' care-giving abilities and responsibilities of married heterosexual women. In contrast to the considerable body of research focusing on managerial discursive practices with respect to ethnicity and gender, no available studies have focused specifically on how managers construct sexual minorities and explain their underrepresentation in the managerial ranks. Scholars who have examined the experiences of sexual minorities in organizations found they often make themselves invisible and are silent due to fear and isolation (Humphrey 1999, Bowen and Blackmon 2003, Ward and Winstanley 2003). This lack of attention to the ways managers construct sexuality is troubling, since managers and their rhetoric play an important role in shaping organizational climate and selection and promotion practices (Abrahamson 1996, Edelman *et al.* 2001). In contrast to this lack of research about managerial constructions of sexual preference, research on managers and their views on gender and ethnicity have tended to focus on either one or the other. As a whole, the research on the underrepresentation of women and minorities as managers suggests that the discourses managers draw on to describe (lack of) diversity at managerial level depend on the categorical group that is focus of the study. Research that focuses on how managers construct specific groups does not reveal, however, how these managers simultaneously negotiate these discursive constructions and the discourse of management of diversity.

Moreover, these strategies of negotiation may vary by context (Acker 1990). Possibly, some managers may frame management of diversity as managing individual differences. Others may see it as finding and reducing/eliminating practices that result in the underrepresentation of historically disadvantaged social groups (Blackmore 2006). In the Netherlands, diversity is defined primarily in terms of gender and ethnicity (with frequent conflation of sexuality and gender) (see, for example, <http://www.opportunity.nl>, Portegijs

et al. 2006). Discourses of race are largely absent in the public debate about diversity (Essed 1991). In contrast, the negative framing of immigrants from non-Western countries means immigration is a popular political issue and subsequently plays a large role in defining ethnicity (Verkuyten 2001, Ghorashi and Sabelis 2013). Janssens and Zanoni (2005) interviewed managers about their perspectives on management of diversity and concluded that how these managers constituted diversity varied by context. For example, those who worked in a bilingual context valued employees who were bilingual, whereas those who worked in a hospital wanted employees who matched the cultural and religious profile of patients. Such findings suggest that the salience of particular social relations and of definitions of diversity is contextual. Some organizations may, therefore, be more favorable toward white women managers while others are more welcoming to male ethnic minorities (Prasad *et al.* 2006). Consequently, the salience of constructions of various social relations within an organization may vary. This suggests that research into the strategies that managers use to negotiate discourses of gender, ethnicity, and sexuality and of diversity need to take organizational context into account as well. This constellation of discourses about social relations constitutes discursive practices of diversity and homogeneity and assumedly overlaps with the discourse of management of diversity. The extent to which constructions of categorical groups are congruent with the dominant discourse of management of diversity has received relatively little scholarly attention.

The purpose of this study, therefore, is to examine how constructions of diversity and of women and ethnic and sexual minorities by senior managers in various organizations may vary and overlap and together inform their discursive practices of diversity and homogeneity. Profit and nonprofit organizations tend to vary greatly in purpose, however. Profit organizations may emphasize the business case of management of diversity and associate it with financial profit. In contrast, nonprofit organizations are usually public service-oriented organizations (see also Janssens and Zanoni 2005). Discursive practices of management of diversity in such organizations are more likely to reflect the public they try to serve. Discursive practices of management of diversity and of categorizations of groups in nonprofit organizations should therefore be relatively similar. An exploration of how managers working various sectors in nonprofit organizations negotiate the management of diversity discourse and the underrepresentation of various categorical groups may yield insights into the strategies used to include and exclude social difference and add to understanding of the complexity of social diversity as an organizational value in serving the public. Since men collectively dominate senior managerial positions and since their discursive practices strongly influence organizational discourses, the focus of this study was on male senior managers.

Theoretical framework

We used a critical feminist approach to explore discourses that male senior managers working in nonprofit organizations use to explain their understandings of diversity and underrepresented groups.¹ A critical feminist perspective focuses on social power relations such as gender, ethnicity, and sexuality and the conditions that (re)produce them (Acker 1990, Benschop 2009). It assumes that organizational norms are defined in ways that strengthen constructions of managerial masculinities (Acker 1990). We assume organizational diversity is a multidimensional discursive practice in which language or talk about individuals, diversity, and groups plays an important role. Categorical constructions of gender, ethnicity, and sexuality are examples of discursive practices that may constitute the ways individuals understand diversity and homogeneity. These

discursive practices are not neutral but are products and resources of power, since their use privileges ways in which managers construct these categories and diversity itself (Zanoni and Janssens 2003, Janssens and Zanoni 2005). Since senior managerial discourses reflect and produce organizational culture, they ‘constitute a key vehicle for the flow of norms, scripts, and models of management ...’ (Edelman *et al.* 2001, p. 1631). Senior managers create homogeneity or diversity by legitimating or reframing hierarchies embedded in dominant organizational and societal discursive practices (Meriläinen *et al.* 2009). For example, research in academia has shown that decisions about criteria for promotion, although seemingly gender-neutral and meritocratic, tend to favor men (Benschop and Brouns 2003, Van den Brink and Benschop 2012, Fotaki 2013). This practice reinforces a hierarchy that sustains male domination of the highest positions in academia. Thus, we assume that what senior managers say about diversity, women, and ethnic and sexual minorities plays an important role in shaping and normalizing organizational constructions that produce diversity and homogeneity.

Normalization is a technology by which some individuals and populations are designated as the norm and others as deviant/problematic (Foucault 1977). Specifically, managers draw on various discursive resources to assign meanings and to make attributions and judgments about the value of organizational diversity and about those they see as different and similar to themselves (Pringle 2008, Meriläinen *et al.* 2009). These attributions are situated in norms that are used to differentiate among individuals and assign them to groups. These groups are then assumed to be homogenous. In this study, we explore how senior managers engage in such sorting in their constructions of women, gays and lesbians, and ethnic minorities and reconcile these constructions with their use of the management of diversity discourse.

Methodology

This study is part of a larger study in which we used a critical feminist approach to explore discourses that male senior managers working in nonprofit organizations use to explain their understandings of managerial work, diversity, and physicality/sport. Nonprofit organizations in the Netherlands tend to be noncommercial organizations that provide a service. Those such as public safety (police, military, and firefighting) and healthcare tend to be completely or indirectly subsidized by the state. Sports organizations at the national level are only partially funded by the state and more often through lottery funding. In previous work based on the larger project, we explored connections between constructions of managerial work and masculinities (Knoppers and Anthonissen 2005), the gendering of discourses about managerial work in sports organizations (Knoppers and Anthonissen 2008), and how managers in nonprofit organizations construct a relationship between their history of involvement with sport and managerial skills (Knoppers 2011). We attempted to collect data from a heterogeneous population. Although most Dutch senior managers tend to be white males, we purposively included ethnic minorities born in the Netherlands from Turkish, Moroccan, and Surinamese backgrounds, since much of Dutch popular debates about ethnicity focuses on these citizens who constitute the largest groups of ethnic minorities (see also Subeliani and Tsogas 2005, Siebers 2009).

We included managers from a broad range of contexts in nonprofit sectors. Both sport and public safety have been characterized as white male dominated occupations, numerically and ideologically (Messner 1988, Dick and Cassell 2002, Lapchick 2010). In contrast, healthcare has been characterized as a feminized sector since the majority of its workforce consists of women of various ethnicities, and this sector is also assumed to be ‘gay-friendly’ (Zandvliet 2002, OSA 2005). This use of a variety of organizations and

managers may reveal how discursive practices of categorization, diversity, and homogeneity manifest themselves in the nonprofit sector.

We used the snowball technique to find male senior managers in various organizational contexts. We actively sought senior male managers varying in ethnicity and sexual preference. No Dutch national sport organizations had ethnic minorities in senior management positions at the time of the study. Our sample for the current study consisted of 48 managers, of whom a little more than a quarter identified as coming from an ethnic minority and a little less than a quarter identified as belonging to a sexual minority. The ethnic minority men were born in the Netherlands and had roots in Turkey, Morocco, or Surinam. None of the ethnic minority men were identified as sexual minority. Ten ethnic majority managers in our sample self-identified as gay. In this study, we focus on the responses of senior managers to questions and discussions about diversity. The topics covered a discussion of definitions and value (if any) of social diversity, and explanations for the current demographic composition of the workforce and managers in their organization/sector.

We began by interviewing six managers since this number should be sufficient to discern possible themes (Guest *et al.* 2006). We then performed a tentative analysis of the data looking for themes, evidence, and counter-evidence. Subsequently, we interviewed another six managers and refined the themes. We continued this procedure until we had saturation in themes and had virtually exhausted the potential pool of minority senior managers willing to participate in the study. Since all were promised anonymity and confidentiality, we identify their organizations only by context as public safety, sport, and healthcare. To avoid confusion in the presentation of the results, we refer to gay and ethnic minorities as minorities and those in the majority as majority men. Where appropriate, we distinguish between ethnic and sexual minority men.

We analyzed the data using an inductive analytic method (Boeije 2010) to explore commonalities and differences in constructions used by these men to explain diversity and homogeneity. We first used a close reading to identify possible themes. Subsequently, we engaged in an iterative reading and rereading comparative process of the data to identify meaningful quotes and to group together quotes that seemed to suggest the same meaning. We continually looked for counter evidence and assumed that the resulting constructions represent ways in which these managers created and gave meanings to categorizations of the various groups and of the concept of diversity. Subsequently, we used the literature to locate these arguments in various discourses and their underlying ideologies.

Results

The results show differences and similarities in the constructions these managers used to constitute various groups and the diversity discourse and that legitimized inclusion and exclusion. Close readings of the data indicated, however, that although their constructions of gender, ethnicity, and sexual preference differed, they were situated within similar discourses. The findings were consistent across ethnicity and sexuality of these managers. Specifically, the minorities who were interviewed rarely suggested or used alternative discourses to explain the underrepresentation of women and ethnic and sexual minorities from managerial ranks.

Discursive practices of diversity: valuing difference

These senior managers all valued difference in the generic sense and constructed it as 'normal.' They felt that there was 'lots of room' for difference in their organizations

because ‘diversity adds to quality and social interactions’ (minority manager in public safety). A majority manager in healthcare exclaimed that ‘Of course you can be different; you have to work in a manner that suits you!’ while another claimed that difference is ‘something extra a person brings to the organization.’ The healthcare managers saw their sector as being more socially diverse than other sectors. An ethnic minority manager explained that social diversity is inherent in the health sector, especially in the primary activity, because ‘everyone [needing healthcare] has something wrong with them ... therefore they [managers] are used to diversity and take that into account ... This can help in recruitment so that more people in those categories apply for jobs with us.’ Respondents in healthcare also perceived work in their sector as a place where there is room for visible sexual diversity. An ethnic majority manager explained that ‘there are many homosexuals in this area; actually, noticeably many.’ Another majority manager explained how this assumption has become a self-fulfilling prophecy: ‘The fact that we have many gays and lesbians is a historical process. Perhaps they are more accepted here [in health].’ Such positive comments suggest that these managers normalized organizational diversity with the use of the business case for diversity. Diversity was described as being of organizational value because organizations were assumed to profit from it, not so much in financial terms but in terms of societal image.

Added value of minorities

Healthcare and public safety managers argued that the socio-demographic composition of the workforce had to reflect the client/population. An ethnic minority manager in healthcare argued that ‘Where possible we try to reflect the diversity in the client population.’ A majority healthcare manager echoed this argument: ‘We want to have the greatest possible diversity in our workforce and do our best to make it so.’ A majority manager contended that attention to ethnic diversity is a necessity in public safety because these organizations have a public function. Similarly, a minority manager in public safety argued that ethnic diversity

is desirable because it makes us more flexible and enhances our interactions with the population; the presence of people with different backgrounds gives everyone room to be more open and be transparent in their actions.

In general, these managers used productive logic to draw upon discursive resources that valued difference. The need to reflect the socio-demographic make-up of clients/population was assumed to make ‘good business sense.’

Added value of women

Not only did many managers use the ethnic demographics of clients/population to make the business case for diversity, but they also drew on ‘nature’ or natural difference as a positive force. They constituted women and men as inherently different arguing that this difference meant more women were needed at the managerial level to ensure complementarity. Specifically, women are needed as managers because they have qualities needed in organizations that men supposedly lack. These managers drew primarily on psychological characteristics and behaviors to make their case that the qualities of women and men complement each other. Statements similar to ‘women bring sensitivity’ and ‘men are more direct and straightforward’ were common. Majority managers in healthcare argued that ‘women have developed their intuition more while men are more rational and analytical.’ Several comments indicate that some of the public safety managers assumed women’s

presence can change the current organizational culture and that that change is sorely needed to civilize or change the undesirable behavior of men. For example, an ethnic minority manager in public safety claimed that ‘when women are part of a group you notice that the climate or culture changes; more topics are discussed than when you are with men only.’ A majority manager in the same sector contended that ‘the presence of women can curb the macho-like behavior of men; men challenge each other to see how far they can go; that needs to be tempered.’ Thus women were assumed to have inherent qualities that could add value to an organization and thus adding to organizational productivity and efficiency. By making these distinctions, the men seemed to normalize the need for the presence of both men and women at the managerial level. Yet, there were exceptions to this. Although managers in healthcare were proud of the sexual and ethnic diversity in their sector, some were hesitant about working actively to increase the number of women managers. The comment by a majority manager is illustrative when he argued that ‘an increase of women managers not only means feminization [of managerial work] but also that this sector decreases in societal standing/value.’ Such comments were scarce, however. The value of having or adding more women was generally stated in terms of managerial masculinity as the norm and women’s skills as being complementary to this.

A distinction was at times also made among women. Lesbians were especially welcome in public safety and healthcare because they were assumed to make different choices than heterosexual women. Specifically, several managers described lesbians as desirable employees because they were assumed not to have or want children. For example, a majority manager explained that:

quite a few women police officers are lesbians. It is irregular work and since few lesbians have families it is much easier for them to work such irregular hours. Thus an over-representation of lesbians has occurred in a natural way.

This assumption about differences in child-rearing choices between lesbians and heterosexual women was the sole explicit differentiation made among women by the managers. Implicitly, these comments about child-rearing suggest that the norm for the male manager is someone who is available all the time and has no major childcare responsibilities (or has assigned them to someone else) and that lesbians are not constructed as mothers or conversely that heteronormativity includes motherhood.

Added value of discriminatory experiences

Experience with discrimination was also constructed as a positive attribute. Discriminatory experiences were assumed to increase the skills/capabilities of women and minorities. For example, an ethnic minority manager asserted that ‘gays and lesbians have experienced discrimination for many years; this means they have developed toughness, just like ethnic minorities.’ Thus, personal experiences with discrimination are assumed to produce competencies that may increase the value of those who are underrepresented. This construction, and therefore the added value, of such experiences, suggests that the norm for managers is a heterosexual male who is tough and works hard.

In summary then, the answers to questions about diversity suggested that these managers drew on what has been called the business case for diversity to indicate they valued individual and group difference (Prasad *et al.* 2006). They assumed that the presence of women and ethnic and sexual minorities added value to their organization. In other words, the presence of women and ethnic minorities and a history of discriminatory experiences were constructed as marketable signifiers (Morrish and O’Mara 2011). Specifically, the management of diversity discourse made sense because its use was assumed to enhance the

reputation of the organization as representative of the population and ensured improved ability to serve clients. Individual difference was constructed as 'normal' and desirable, although implicitly the norm for managers seemed to be a heterosexual man who is tough and works hard as we show further on. The arguments shifted, however, when these managers talked about the lack of diversity in the managerial ranks.

Practicing diversity? Meritocratic selection processes

Although these managers said they valued social difference, they tempered their comments when it came to practice. They drew on discourses of meritocracy, neo-liberalism, and culture to legitimize the underrepresentation of various categorical groups. They used a meritocratic discourse to argue that they saw managers as individuals with specific skills and selected them in an unbiased way, regardless of ethnicity and gender. Sports managers, who constructed the current managerial social homogeneity in sports organizations as unimportant, made comments such as: 'you are responsible for your work and that has nothing to do with your personal characteristics' and 'Perhaps we should have more women but I cannot talk about difference because I do not look at the world that way.' This construction of selection processes and job descriptions as neutral meant these managers could discursively assume the practice of meritocracy is also neutral and could attribute the failure to advance largely to individuals themselves. These managers saw the current lack of social diversity as inevitable and as something about which they could do little. An ethnic majority and an ethnic minority public safety manager, respectively, explained:

our preference for all vacancies at the management level is for ethnic minorities or women but at the same time you have to make sure you appoint only highly qualified and competent people; this means there is not always a match between what we aspire to and our selection.

we do not have many women in higher positions . . . we try to prepare women to move up but it does not work; women who were placed in higher position through affirmative action programs and not on the basis of their skills, left those positions.

Another majority manager in public safety was more specific about the mismatch between the majority and minority culture and why affirmative action was doomed to fail. 'Ethnic minority candidates and their families often have lower education levels and therefore they are not qualified.' Similarly, a majority manager in healthcare argued that 'many ethnic minorities do not like the jobs in this area, probably because we make many demands on them they cannot meet.' In other words, the categories of ethnic minorities and women were constructed as consisting of those who lacked the necessary skills and abilities to fit organizational demands. Specific recruitment of women and minorities such as happened through affirmative action programs and recruitment was not desirable because this violated perceptions of meritocracy held by many of these managers. Affirmative action was not mentioned with respect to sexual minorities.

Two gay managers in healthcare were exceptions to these negative constructions of affirmative action. One said 'Yes we have policies to promote and enhance diversity; a woman will head a large division in the near future.' Another described how he worked hard to increase the number of women at managerial level: 'If not enough women apply for higher positions including positions on the Board of Governance we look for alternative ways to find them.' Yet such comments were rare and applied only to women.

All of the comments constructed women, gays, and ethnic minorities as fixed categorical groups that did not overlap; the managers rarely referred to men, heterosexuals, and ethnic majority as having categorical group membership. The latter constituted the invisible, assumed and privileged norm.

Devaluing difference: constructing homogeneity

Although difference was constituted as a positive force at the beginning of the interviews, in general, when these managers explained the current underrepresentation of women and minorities in the managerial ranks, they constructed difference as negative and situated it in nature (women) or culture (minorities). The norm used by these managers implicitly suggested behaviors and characteristics of majority men.

In general, reproductive capabilities were not assumed to be the cause of the underrepresentation of women but were constructed as influencing choices. Comments by a gay public safety manager such as 'Women leave because they want to be mother' and by a majority manager in the same sector that 'change with respect to women goes slowly because women drop out and so confirm the stereotype' typified the comments. While public safety managers thought (heterosexual) women's priority for parenting made them unavailable for shift work, managers in the healthcare sector assumed parenting by women resulted in lack of ambition. An ethnic majority manager in healthcare worried 'whether women have enough ambition to develop themselves further.' Similarly, an ethnic minority manager questioned whether 'the next generation of women has the ambition to take on management tasks in our area.' This was not the only way in which these managers constructed women and minorities, however.

'Culture' of the workplace and ethnic culture were used to explain the underrepresentation of ethnic minorities and at times, women and gays. Sports managers used the culture of the primary activity, that is, participation in sport, to explain the lack of women and sexual minorities as managers. For example, a majority manager argued that the absence of women in leadership positions was because 'sport has always been a world of men and will remain so.' Similarly another manager explained that 'Ten years ago gays and lesbians would not have been accepted here. . . . But now they are but it is still the world of sport where lots of jokes are made about homosexuality.' Although these managers acknowledged that the culture of the workplace may be unfriendly to minorities and women, they also constructed women and minorities as lacking the necessary skills to cope with that. A gay manager in public safety claimed that 'women leave because they cannot take sexist jokes and you have to be able to accept these jokes if you want to survive here.' This suggests that gays, lesbian, and ethnic minority managers would also have to accept homophobic and ethnocentric comments if they wish to 'survive' in these organizations. An ethnic minority manager in public safety indicated that 'the acceptance and tolerance of gay men is still a difficult question because this is such a macho world.' A majority public safety manager pointed to the invisibility of gay men. 'The police culture is quite traditional and dominated by white heterosexual men. I am sure there are gay men here but they are in the closet.' These arguments also show how these managers conflated gender and sexuality and preferred heterosexual men who practiced a desirable masculinity.

Not only the normative workplace culture but also the cultures of ethnic minorities were often constructed as a reason for underrepresentation. A majority manager in healthcare illustrated this incongruence by describing an ethnic minority woman 'whose ideas about work and psychiatric care were often different than ours. So she left.' Similarly, a majority manager in public safety argued that 'the culture of [ethnic] minorities does not fit that of the police,' while a majority firefighter contended that 'firefighting is not very attractive to women or to those from Morocco and Turkey; therefore few apply for jobs here.' This quote is an example of how the category woman was associated with majority women and how ethnic minorities were assumed to be male. Ethnic minorities were constructed as having a cultural background that did not equip them to cope with an ethnic majority heterosexual

workforce culture. It was their responsibility to change/adapt to that. These managers rarely engaged in critique of this workplace culture and did not position themselves as having power to change it. They did, however, describe what minorities and women needed to survive in these organizations. 'In the healthcare area you have to make sure you fit within a team and the team is comprised primarily of the white majority.' As we pointed out earlier, women and minorities also have to accept an unfriendly 'joking' culture in order to assimilate in the organizational culture.

An ethnic minority manager in public safety attributed the absence of ethnic minorities in higher positions of leadership to this required normalization. 'If you have blond hair and blue eyes then all goes well. The success of visible minorities depends on their work. If you do it well and do not complain, everything goes well.' Similarly, gays were accepted as long as they choose to behave in ways that make them indistinguishable from normalized (heterosexual) bodies. An ethnic minority manager in public safety described a gay man in his team who did not cause any trouble because 'we could not see he was gay.' A majority manager in healthcare argued that 'there is no problem with sexual orientation here but more with how they [gays] manifest themselves.'

Although they also wanted women managers to behave in ways that fit this implicit norm of toughness, these managers also criticized women when they conformed to this norm. A sports manager asserted that 'A woman has to be bitchy to be successful in a sport organization and very feminine to succeed in male [sport-related] networks.' We return to this contradiction in the discussion. Obviously then, although these managers thought diversity could be an asset to their organization, they wanted those whom they see as adding diversity to work in ways that make many of them indistinguishable from these managers' perceptions of ethnic majority heterosexual men. Normality, as represented by practices of ethnic majority heterosexual men, was therefore used as a discursive resource to explain the underrepresentation of minorities and women.

Discussion

The results indicate that these managers endorsed the management of diversity as an organizational value and discursively practiced it by celebrating individual difference while simultaneously legitimizing exclusion based on categorical attributions. In so doing, they used their power and privilege to construct discursive practices associated with ethnic majority heterosexual men as normal and as a neutral standard to justify exclusion (Prasad *et al.* 2006, Matus and Infante 2011). Women, however, were also expected to conform to the ways these managers defined femininity. The arguments used to legitimize the underrepresentation of women and minorities varied by organizational context and reflect arguments about the contextuality of constructions of diversity made by other scholars (such as Acker 1990, Janssens and Zanoni 2005). In contrast, the discourses that served as resources for these arguments converged in essentialism. Women were seen as different from men by nature. These differences at times were framed as complementary to the qualities men were supposed to possess. However, the choices women were assumed to make (freely) ensured they would rarely be promoted for work at the managerial level. The culture of ethnic minority men was seen as adding to the organizational image but was also seen as the source of their exclusion from the managerial ranks. Narrayan (1998) has called this cultural essentialism. Essentialist ideas based on 'nature' and on 'culture' are social constructions, however (Narrayan 1998). The use of essentialism fixes the characteristics of a group and ignores individual differences within the group. This use of essentialist discourses by these men was consistent across context. While context played a role at the

individual level in the arguments used to legitimize the underrepresentation of women and minorities, at the discursive level context mattered little. This suggests that researchers need to pay more attention to the conditions under which context plays a role in the management of diversity. In the following section, we reflect on how these managers constructed women and minorities, how they legitimized their perceptions of normalcy and difference, and how these constructions pertained to their use of the discourse of management of diversity.

Constructing women and minorities

Although these managers tended to use the business case to legitimize their use of the discourse of management of diversity, they did not draw on similar logic to argue for the presence of women or minorities at managerial level. It would seem that the arguments used to construct women and ethnic minorities as adding value to the workplace could also be used to argue for their needed presence in the managerial ranks.

These managers constructed the presence of women as adding value to their organizations. Women are assumed to civilize men and to contribute intrinsic skills to organizational communication that men seemingly lack. This added value is outweighed, however, by women's supposed inability to be like managerial men who work long hours and who have delegated caregiving responsibilities to others (see also Bu and McKeen 2000, Lyon and Woodward 2004, Ford and Collinson 2011). The managers in this study assumed the time obligations of managerial positions are fixed and that women with children choose not to engage in the normalized long hours. Presenteeism and productivity are assumed to be congruent and are seen as normal and value free. Both are situated within the discourses of meritocracy. The constructed nature of the subsequent gendered division of labor is ignored so that those with childcare responsibilities (or other responsibilities of care) are positioned as absent due to their own choices. The underrepresentation of minorities is explained in similar but also different ways. The visible organizational presence of those labeled as ethnic minorities was assumed by some of the managers to add to the credibility and ability of the organization to serve the social diversity of the client/population. Their presence is, therefore, assumed to add value to organizations but not enough to warrant promotion to managerial ranks that is attributed to lack of qualifications and the nature of 'their' culture. In contrast to the construction of women as bringing new skills into an organization but choosing caregiving, 'culture' was perceived to be responsible for a lack of interest, insufficient schooling, and inadequate skills among ethnic minorities. The current ethnic homogeneity in the senior managerial ranks was seen as a result of individuals making 'bad' choices rooted in cultures that were constructed as fixed and oppositional to 'our' culture. Although these managers attributed added value to the presence of women and ethnic minorities in the workplace but not in managerial ranks, they discursively constructed the presence of gays and lesbians as not adding value anywhere in the organization. The powerful standard of heteronormativity in these organizations marginalized sexual minorities to the extent that they were created as absent from the managerial ranks because they were rarely visible and/or not physically distinguishable. Ironically, with the exception of the added value attributed to the lack of caregiving responsibilities of lesbians, these managers tolerated or accepted gays and lesbians primarily if they behaved according to heteronormative standards (that may make them invisible). When gays and lesbians choose not to behave according to these norms, they can be excluded from managerial positions. This argument, that women and minorities make the wrong choices and therefore are responsible for their underrepresentation at managerial level, reflects the discourse of neoliberalism. This discourse

defines social problems as personal problems reflecting lack of self-care. Its use enabled these managers to defend the current ethnic homogeneity at managerial level.

We found that minority and majority men tended to draw on similar discourses to explain the underrepresentation of women and minority managers. Specifically, as we suggested earlier, they drew on essentialist discourses that suggest women and minorities are unable to change themselves because of the significant effect that culture and/or nature has had in shaping them as individuals and determining their choices. Fixed categorizations serve as a source of discursive power when managers use them in the context of efficiency and productivity of employees. They reduce ethnicity and gender to problems that are to be fixed at the individual level, that is, by individuals making choices (Janssens and Zanoni 2005, Faist 2009). Such fixed categorizations reinscribe dichotomous modes of thinking and, therein, ignore variations within the categories and the discursive power of managers to normalize and legitimize their constructions.

The minority men were rarely discursively resistant to the dominant discourses. They seemed to accept sexist, misogynist and racist comments and jokes and practices as normal. These similarities in discursive practices between majority and minority men echo those found by Wajcman (1998) in her study of managerial women and men. She found that both women and men drew on similar dominant societal discourses to describe their work. Possibly management is a site where difference from the white heterosexual male norm is disciplined so that minority men may need to discursively distance themselves from their ethnicity and/or sexuality and identify with the supposedly normalized 'neutral' manager. In addition, the lack of use of alternative discourses by these ethnic or sexual minority managers suggests the possibility that only men who draw on dominant or normalized discourses about minorities advance to positions of leadership in these organizations. In doing so, minority (and majority) men normalize and legitimize these discourses. In addition, we point out that the interview data reveal not only what the men said but also what they were able to say (Bacchi 2005). Possibly, promises of confidentiality and anonymity by the interviewers who had ethnic majority status were insufficient for those classified as minorities to articulate how their experiences were (in)congruent with dominant managerial discourses.

These managers valued difference, but a recurring discursive practice in their constructions of managers was a strong preference for qualities they associated with the white heterosexual male ethnic majority. This majority was rarely mentioned but constituted the normalcy against which these negative differences were constructed (see also Matus and Infante 2011). Lesbians were praised because they make choices like men, gay men were expected to act in heteronormative ways and not show feminized behavior, and minorities and women were expected to be tough. The ideal or normal manager has a high level of formal education, chooses work above family so he can be available every hour of the day, is ambitious, tough, and demanding, and has skills that are assumed to enable him to work well within the current organizational culture. As a category, women not only had to take on these behaviors but also at the same time had to remain 'feminine.' Fotaki (2013) has shown how this contradiction contributes to the marginalization and exclusion of women and at the same time may become common sense, forcing them to collude in this practice. The use of these discourses constructs and reproduces norms that legitimize the work habits and ideas of these heterosexual privileged men as the neutral, 'natural,' and objective managerial standard, often under the guise of meritocracy or productive logic (Janssens and Zanoni 2005). In the Netherlands the discourse of meritocracy is very popular (Heres and Benschop 2010). This discourse assumes that difference will disappear if everyone is judged according to ability and effort. The concept of meritocracy is not neutral concept however. Simpson *et al.* (2010) have pointed out that 'meritocracy is based on supposedly neutral criteria which

are already biased' (p. 199). Similar to the concept of diversity, the question is which definition of merit prevails in the workplace and whose interests that definition privileges.

The findings suggest that although the management of diversity discourse values difference and may have increased workplace diversity, it has brought relatively little change in managerial discourses cited in the literature at the start of this paper. The perceived added value of the presence of other categorical groups may not have offset the preference for ethnic majority male heteronormativity. Consequently, although these managers said they valued diversity, they practiced homogeneity by relying on perceived meritocratic discourses and on the discursive power of ethnic majority male heteronormativity. The use of the management of diversity discourse may therefore allow managers who wish to do so, to escape responsibility for organizational discrimination and systematic inequalities while at the same time constructing themselves as heroic by drawing on the popular discourse of diversity.

Constructing diversity

The results are also paradoxical, however. These managers supported the discourse of management of diversity. They all assume that 'difference' in their organization brings an added value. At the same time, they seem to consistently exclude social difference among managers and to judge others using an unquestioned and implicit norm. This paradox can be explained in several ways. Possibly, the discourse of diversity is more a discursive rhetorical device than it is a discursive practice. Embrick (2011), for example, found that senior managers and directors of Fortune 500 corporations supported and could articulate the business case for diversity but were unable to be specific about the ways this concept had been translated into practice in their company. The managers in the current study valued diversity but discursively excluded underrepresented groups such as women and minorities from the managerial ranks. Several scholars attribute this paradoxical exclusion to power. Lorbiecki and Jack (2000), for example, argued that the management of diversity discourse presents managers as 'the privileged subject who sees diversity as an object to be managed' (p. S23), creating those who manage and those who are diverse. The results of the current study substantiate this argument only in part. The managers did value diversity but not among those who manage. Similarly, Janssens and Zanoni (2005) contend that the management of diversity discourse gives managers a great deal of power in creating their version of management of diversity and how they situate it in productive logic. In other words, 'difference' may be welcomed and valued on the work floor but not at the managerial level. In this study, the use of the diversity discourse enabled these managers to exercise power by avoiding discussions of their own unmarked ethnic majority heteronormative position (see also Bell and Hartmann 2007). This avoidance suggests that they did not value difference at the managerial level and that their rhetoric served more as window dressing or as support of a management fashion than an organizational discursive practice (see also Heres and Benschop 2010). Managers who were marked as minority seemed to identify with this dominant position, possibly for reasons we discussed earlier.

Another explanation for the paradox between valuing difference and discursively practicing exclusion may be possible, however. These senior managers may have framed difference as an organizational value that pertains to individual differences among ethnic majority heterosexual men who are constructed as the norm. Such difference among these men is acceptable to them and, perhaps, reflects their conceptualization of difference not as social difference but as difference in ways of thinking and doing. They may appreciate differences in ideas among men whom they associate with the managerial norm. Specifically, they may value viewpoint diversity instead of social difference (see also Knoppers and Anthonissen 2006). This viewpoint diversity is acceptable because those

who express different viewpoints may be trusted since in other ways they fit the norm of manager. Difference with respect to categorical groups may have had other connotations for them and was not related to their articulated perceptions of desired difference. The paradox between valuing viewpoint diversity, among those who engaged in desirable masculine heteronormative practices, and the discursive practices of homogeneity with respect to those who were seen as being unable to meet this norm suggest that lack of social diversity in the managerial ranks in nonprofit organizations may be a multilayered practice that is both contextual and noncontextual and embedded in gendered, sexualized, and ethnicized relations of power through managerial rhetoric. This practice is part of a complex web of discourses that rely on norms as a technology of power to exclude those who are assumed to differ from these norms. The concept of social diversity may have become a discourse for these managers that does not include difference but has become a technology of normalization. Our focus as researchers was on social diversity and we may have assumed that our interviewees also understood it in that manner. The implicit meanings of the organizational value of managing diversity may have been quite different to ours. We began the interviews by asking about difference and diversity and not about the underrepresentation of minorities and women. Further research needs to explore how managers understand difference therefore, and how they reconcile that with social difference. More attention also needs to be paid to the values and assumptions underlying managerial work in general and how they contribute to practices of homogeneity.

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Note

1. See Harding *et al.* (2013) for a detailed history and explanation of critical feminist research in organizations.

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