

Resistance to diversity and inclusion initiatives within the Dutch Armed Forces:

A discourse analysis on resistance of military employees to diversity and inclusion initiatives based on an autobiographical case study.

Name	Irina Tziamali
Student number	S4291417
Supervisor	Dr. Marloes van Engen
2 nd Supervisor	Prof. dr. Yvonne Benschop

Abstract

In my position as the first Diversity and Inclusion Officer within the military organization, I have encountered hostility in multiple negative comments in real life, corridors at work, in my business mailbox and on social media such as LinkedIn. These outings have triggered my interests in the phenomenon of resistance to diversity and inclusion initiatives within the military organization. The link between the military and hegemonic masculinity is crucial for understanding a possible backlash to the (gendered) diversity and inclusion initiatives and the construction of a prevailing dominant discourse. For instance, resistance to diversity and inclusion initiatives is dependent of how the resistor conceptualizes these organizational changes. Contributing to the theories on resistance to diversity and inclusion initiatives, this paper increases our understanding of tensions between different perspectives on diversity and inclusion initiatives amongst resisters and how these perspectives affect the prevailing dominant discourse. Drawing on an autobiographical case study, this study presents a discourse-analysis on the discursively practices of resistance to diversity and inclusion initiatives. The tensions and paradoxes between and within practices of resistances display how these perspectives work counterproductive to the contribution to a safer and more just world. In addition, I presented how resistance to diversity and inclusion initiatives might trickle down to other organizational members, which ultimately affects the prevailing discourse.

Keywords: Resistance, Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives, Tensions, Discourse, Military Organization.

Preface

In front of you lies the thesis ‘Resistance to diversity and inclusion initiatives within the Dutch Armed Forces: A discourse analysis on resistance of military employees to diversity and inclusion initiatives based on an autobiographical case study’. This autobiographical case study is based on a wide-ranging data collection which I collected in my position as Diversity and Inclusion Officer at the Air Combat Command of the Dutch Armed Forces.

During the process, I have learned how role duality causes a burden for the researcher. For example, as I was studying the phenomenon of resistance to diversity and inclusion initiatives within the Dutch Armed Forces, I wondered more and more why I was still working on diversity and inclusion initiatives when so many colleagues were against it. I even started to have doubts about whether I still wanted to work for the military organization at all. During this study, I felt my loyalty for the organization was being stretched, which asked a lot from me mentally.

I have had one quote in mind of Rupi Kaur: *“I stand on the sacrifices of a million women before me, thinking what can I do to make this mountain taller so the women after me can see farther”*.

Although this study has asked a lot from me mentally, because of this quote, I felt the responsibility to push through. Moreover, I interpreted this study as an opportunity to create something valuable from all the comments that had left me insecure. I am overjoyed and proud I finalized my thesis and I hope this study contributes to the meaning-making process of resistance and diversity and inclusion initiatives within the military.

I would like to thank my supervisor, dr. Marloes van Engen, for her unconditional support, clear feedback and brilliant insights, which helped me to construct more depth into my findings. Next, I would like to thank my second supervisor, prof. dr. Yvonne Benschop, for her enthusiasm and in-depth knowledge about the subject matter. You have both helped me to see farther by creating this mountain of support, knowledge, and positive vibes, and I cannot thank you enough for that!

Lastly, I would like to thank drs. Jolanda Bosch, dr. Tine Molendijk, dr. Jori Kalkman and Commander Lieutenant Colonel drs. Ella van den Heuvel for supporting my position and my work from within the military organization. You have empowered me to conduct this research.

I hope you enjoy reading my thesis, as much I enjoyed writing it!

Irina Tziamali

Introduction

As an officer cadet at the Dutch Royal Military Academy, I studied how gendered norm images have a disciplinary and normalizing effect on officer cadets at the Dutch Royal Military Academy (Tziamali, 2021). This study shows that mostly (but not only) the women officer cadets experience limited social safety due to these norm images at the academy. As a result, I suggested more initiatives on behalf of diversity and inclusion at the Royal Military Academy (Tziamali, 2021). In June 2021 this study reached the front page of a national newspaper (Rosenberg & Berkhout, 2021a). Other newspapers, radio shows, TV shows and magazines followed interviewing me about this study (Rosenberg & Berkhout, 2021b; Bormans, 2021; Vullings, 2021; Koreman & van der Lende, 2021; Bijlmakers, 2021; Klaver, 2021). Also, the former Minister of Defense answered parliamentary questions regarding the findings of the study (Bijleveld-Schouten, 2021). To exploit the momentum, I was granted the possibility to start my military career as the first Diversity and Inclusion Officer within the military in August 2021. I took this opportunity in order to execute my suggested diversity and inclusion initiatives in the role of a change agent. Although I anticipated that a change agent has to inevitably cope with resistance to organizational change, I had not expected the hostility from military colleagues on beforehand. The number of negative messages and comments in real life, corridors at work, in my business mailbox and on social media were overwhelming and left me astonished. At the same time, it made me curious what different perspectives and underlying assumptions urged my colleagues to express themselves negatively towards diversity and inclusion initiatives publicly. It had been an inspiration for me to delve further into the phenomenon of resistance.

Resistance is behavior as response to change (Erwin & Garman, 2009). However, resistance itself is more complex, since it is viewed as a continuous interplay of three dimensions: (1) the behavioral dimension which involves how individuals behave to change, (2) the cognitive dimension which involves how individuals think of change and (3) the affective dimension which involves how individuals feel about the change (Erwin & Garman, 2009; Piderit, 2000). As a result, resistance can occur in different forms such as: covert, overt, active, passive, verbally or implicit; as well in daily encounters as on social media such as LinkedIn (Bovey & Hede, 2001).

The interplay between the three dimensions is dependent of how the resistor conceptualizes or thinks about change (Erwin & Garman, 2009). Constructing knowledge about topics or practices within a social environment is enacted through discourses (Foucault, 2012).

Discourses arise and evolve through daily acting, behavior and being and can be seen as a body of statements and social practices which are organized in a systematic way (Foucault, 2012). Moreover, discourses construct knowledge about topics or practices by ways of talking, forming knowledge and types of conduct associated with a particular topic or social activity (Hall, 1997; van Dijk, 1997). With the aim to understand practices of resistance, this study is based on a discourse analysis since it is the study of how meanings and meaning-making are produced, and of which meanings prevails within the organization (Oswick, 2012).

Although research shows that discourses influence the perspectives of a resisters which may lead to complexity, ambiguity and tensions within an individual resistor (Piderit, 2000), the tensions between resisters based on different perspectives and the possible implicit counteracting of those tensions seem to be understudied. Moreover, how resistance itself ultimately affects the prevailing discourse seems to be understudied as well. Therefore, this study aims to contribute to the literature on resistance to diversity and inclusion initiatives by questioning *how resistance to diversity and inclusion initiatives creates tensions amongst resisters and how this affects a prevailing discourse*.

Resistance to diversity and inclusion initiatives within the Dutch Armed Forces are examined by viewing the data as discursively practices of resistance. Resistance in interviews with colleagues, fieldnotes, notes of conversations and meetings and messages at my LinkedIn page are being collected as data and subsequently analyzed. Triangulation in the data supports credibility of the findings since resistance is examined from multiple angles (Bryman, 2016). Moreover, since the data differs greatly in character, triangulation provides insights to the different practices of resistance in different contexts. For instance, resistance to diversity and inclusion initiatives in interviews became visible in a socially safe context and closed environment, whereas resistance in messages on LinkedIn were directly visible in a public context. Moreover, messages on LinkedIn contain more elements of self-representation of the sender in which they aim to influence an imaginary audience (Paliszkievicz & Madra-Sawicka, 2016).

For understanding tensions as a result of resistance in discursive practices in a social context, relevant literature of the field of management studies, gender studies and communication studies are combined and presented in the next section of this paper. Subsequently, the underlying assumptions and perspectives of resisters are presented which indicate the possible tensions between resisters. In addition, the effects of resistance on the prevailing discourse are presented which indicate how resistance to diversity and inclusion initiatives might trickle

down to other organizational members. In the final part of the paper, the contribution to the literature regarding resistance to diversity and inclusion initiatives is presented.

Theoretical background

Resistance within organizations has always been a central and defining element in organizational change management, since resistance to organizational change is considered a main reason for the limited success rate (Erwin & Garman, 2009; Gonzalez, 2010; Lombardo & Mergaert, 2013; van Douwen et. al., 2022). To realize successful organizational change, cooperation of employees is required, because resistance is considered to be inhibitory for the change initiative (Piderit, 2000).

Resistance can occur when individuals fear a loss of privilege or expect the change to have negative consequences for them personally, such as a decrease in resources and rewards (James et. al., 2001; Wasserman, Gallegos & Ferdman, 2008). Also, resistance can occur when individuals who are not the targets of the diversity and inclusion initiatives feel excluded or even threatened (Stevens et. al., 2008). In addition, fear for change of the organizational status quo stirs up resistance (Piderit, 2000; Wasserman, Gallegos & Ferdman, 2008). As a result, individuals tend to put in substantial effort to go back to the equilibrium (Bleijenbergh, 2018; Ahmed, 2021).

Resistance can be displayed in various types of practices such as blatant sexism, cynicism and apathy or more subtle and covert (Gonzalez, 2010; Thomas & Plaut, 2008; Stevens et. al., 2008; Bovey & Hede, 2001). Examples of a passive practice of resistance is doing the minimum required, not making an effort to make sure everybody understands and support the change initiative and not cooperating in the change initiatives which ultimately, negatively affects the effectiveness of the change initiative more covertly (Erwin & Garman, 2009).

A specific type of organizational change initiatives are diversity and inclusion initiatives. Over the years, diversity and inclusion initiatives within organizations have increased, however Leslie (2019) argues that effects of these initiatives often disappoint or even work counterproductive. The limited success rate of diversity and inclusion initiatives within organizations are considered to be dependent of resistance to diversity change by organizational members (Gonzalez, 2010). Diversity and inclusion initiatives are considered personal relevant, which incites resistance to these initiatives (van Douwen et. al., 2022; Lines, 2005). For instance, diversity and inclusion initiatives can be perceived as an identity threat to a valued organizational identity, causing resistance because of fear of a loss in status (Ashcraft, 2005).

Lombardo and Mergaert (2013) argue that individuals might not see clear benefits in the interest of the organization since diversity and inclusion initiatives might target valued norms, values and goals of the organization. More specifically, when organizational members think the organization is meritocratic, diversity and inclusion initiatives are considered to negatively affect the organization, which causes resistance (Humbert, Kelan & van den Brink, 2019). Moreover, when organizational members assume that discrimination is not an issue within their organization, diversity and inclusion initiatives incite practices of resistance, since those initiatives are considered to undermine the organizational members' belief in a just world (Lombardo & Mergaert, 2013). Ultimately, resistance to diversity and inclusion initiatives within organizations can cause extensive forms of 'protecting' the organization (Ahmed, 2021).

Because of the different perspectives and considerations of organizational members regarding diversity and inclusion initiatives, which seem to be mainly unconscious (Gonzalez, 2010), practices of resistance seem to be more complex and/or ambivalent (Gonzalez, 2010; Lines, 2005; Mumby et. al., 2017). For instance, practices of resistance are dependent on the context and might not always be obvious in everyday life (Mumby et. al., 2017). Even more, the practices of resistance might not be obvious to the resisters themselves. Instead of considering themselves as resisting, some individuals consider themselves as acting in line with the organizational beliefs and values (Ford & Ford, 2010). In addition, Bovey and Hede (2001) identified that the individual's perspective of and feelings about organizational change results in irrational and ambivalent thoughts which causes resistance. Therefore, Lines (2005) argues that feelings, and behaviors towards change are not necessarily good or bad, but rather positive or negative. Lastly, Piderit (2000) argues that individuals might express feelings of excitement and fear for the unknown simultaneously, since resistance can be viewed as multi-dimensional which endorses the complexity of practices of resistance.

Resistance to diversity and inclusion initiatives occurs within the military organization due to the link between the military and hegemonic masculinity (van Douwen et. al., 2022). Gender, and in specific hegemonic masculinity, is deeply rooted within the military organizational culture since combat is considered to be one of the most masculine contexts (Carreiras, 2006; Millar & Tidy, 2017; van Douwen et. al., 2022). Within the military organization, combat roles are considered the core business and confer more power, prestige, rewards and objective possibilities to access the higher hierarchical ranks (Carreiras, 2006). At the same time, these combat roles are numerical highly male dominated and masculinized (Carreiras, 2006). The link to hegemonic masculinity is crucial for analyzing resistance to diversity and inclusion

initiatives within the military since diversity and inclusion initiatives such as a women's quota are gendered.

As a result, different practices of resistance to diversity and inclusion initiatives are shown within the military. For instance, since military necessity and readiness are considered the core tasks of the military, some military employees believe that an increment of military women might jeopardize the effectiveness of the armed forces (Carreiras, 2006). Women's physical and psychological characteristics such as physical strength, menstruation, pregnancy and ability to perform under stress, are considered limiting for military effectiveness, especially in combat functions (Carreiras, 2006; Iskra, 2007; Muhr & Sløk-Andersen, 2017; Andriessen et. al., 2017). In addition, van Douwen et. al. (2022) argue that marines consider women as too weak for combat and mentally unsuited for the job. Even more, some believe equal opportunities, which is an effect of diversity and inclusion initiatives, should not take precedence over combat effectiveness, which implies that the military is excluded to societal beliefs for gender equality (Carreiras, 2006; Iskra, 2007; van Douwen et. al., 2022). Also, women are considered a (sexual) distraction for men which might disrupt the unit cohesion and therefore hinder the operational effectiveness (Carreiras, 2006; Iskra, 2007; King, 2017), which indicates that the presence of women might affect the male bonding, and therefore jeopardize military operations (Carreiras, 2006; van Douwen et. al., 2022).

Resisting diversity and inclusion initiatives within the military might be interpreted as acting in line with organizational goals (Ford & Ford, 2010). According to Carreiras (2006), these feelings are enhanced by loyalty of military employees to the military organization. Yet, according to Iskra (2007) military employees feel hindered to voice their resistance to organizational decisions due to the possibility of adversely effects on the careers of military employees. As a result, the practices of resistance might be weaker and more covert. Nevertheless, some weaker reactions might seem to be not as detrimental but can still stall the diversity and inclusion initiatives (Gonzalez, 2010; Mumby et. al., 2017). Therefore, by discursively analyzing resistance to diversity and inclusion initiatives, prevailing discourses and perspectives within the military can be filtered, which helps for understanding how the dominant prevailing discourse is affected by resistance and how tensions amongst resisters might occur.

Methodology

Research Design

To analyze resistance to diversity and inclusion initiatives and prevailing discourses amongst military employees, a qualitative research design is conducted. A qualitative research design allows the researcher to understand how individuals perceive a specific phenomenon and the effects of such processes in an organizational context (Rynes & Gephart, 2004; Bryman, 2016). Also, a qualitative research design is well suited for understanding different perspectives of participants (Bryman, 2016). Further, an autobiographical case study design has been chosen in order to reflect on the resistance I have encountered personally in my position as Diversity and Inclusion Officer within the military organization. By using an autobiographical case study design, the particular nature and complexity of the case is conserved (Bryman, 2016). In order to understand different perspectives on diversity and inclusion initiatives in different contexts, triangulation has been applied (Mumby et. al., 2017; Bryman, 2016).

Case Study Context

After the publication of the previous study regarding the effects of gendered norm images on officer cadets at the Royal Military Academy (Tziamali, 2021). I had the opportunity to start with a function as Diversity and Inclusion Officer for the Air Combat Command. At that point, top level military colleagues in The Hague were discussing whether or not a women's quota should be implemented in order to enforce the increment of military women. Within the military organization, the so-called Gender Focal Points were introduced at different bases in order to create concrete changes in daily work. The Expertise Centre Leadership Defense (ECLD) had been developing courses in the field of diversity and inclusion. Also, some policymakers were appointed to consider the subject diversity and inclusion within policies. I had been appointed to provide more tools in terms of diversity and inclusion during the reorganization of three air bases into one command: the Air Combat Command. To do so, I worked together with the HR-department and the Chief of Staff of the Air Combat Command. Moreover, I created a research team which initially consisted of three researchers and the members of the Gender Focal Point, which I have been supervising until March 2022. Notably, as a second lieutenant, a starting officer rank, I am a complete member of the Dutch Armed Forces. I am "native" in the organization and therefore an insider researcher (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). The effects of role duality on this research will be addressed below.

Data Collection, Procedure and Instruments

The data collection consists of interviews, conversation and meeting notes, comments on LinkedIn and fieldnotes. For each type of data, I will elaborate the sampling strategy, inclusion criteria and general demographics.

Interviews

In the period of November 2021 until March 2022, all members of the research team of Volkel Air Base had conducted over twenty-five interviews with military employees of Volkel Air Base regarding diversity and inclusion initiatives within the military. These interviews covered topics such as feelings of inclusion within military units, perspectives on diversity and inclusion initiatives and perspectives on diversity and inclusion policies. Out of these interviews, twelve transcripts of interviews with military employees were selected for the data collection of this study. These twelve transcripts were selected based on three predefined criteria. Since the military is a hierarchical organization, the first criterium is diversity in ranks. Four respondents are in the rank of captain (older, experienced officer), four respondents are in the rank of lieutenant (younger, starting officer) and four respondents are in the rank of sergeant or lower (experienced non-commissioned officer or soldiers). The second criterium is the presence of at least one act of resistance to diversity and inclusion initiatives within the transcript. An outing of a respondent was marked as resistance when the respondent (1) literally puts forward an argument that indicates resistance to diversity and inclusion initiatives, (2) shows a more implicit practice of resistance such as laughing or dodging the question. To select transcript based on practices of resistance, all the transcript were read cursory and acts of resistance were marked and compared with the amount of resistance in other transcripts. Lastly, the third criterium is an equal distribution of military men and women. Therefore, the selected transcripts were from interviews with six men respondents and six women respondents. Respondents were between 22 and 50 years old and worked at least four years within the military. Nine of these interviews were conducted by me and three interviews were conducted by other members of the research team in the period of December 2021 until February 2022.

Conversation and meeting notes

In my role as Diversity and Inclusion officer at the military I attended multiple meetings and informal conversations. Meetings lasted between fifteen and ninety minutes. At every meeting and informal conversation, I made sure the other parties were informed of my role as researcher next to my role as Diversity and Inclusion Officer. In some occasions, other members of the

research team of Volkel Air Base attended meetings which addressed topics such as gender equality and/or diversity and inclusion within the military. Notes of every meeting have been shared afterwards with every colleague present. Notably, in the period of September 2021 until December 2021, before starting this study, I faced various forms of resistance in daily encounters at work. In order to find my way in the organization as the first Diversity and Inclusion Officer, I had made notes of colleagues who resisted diversity and inclusion initiatives implicitly or explicitly and colleagues who supported those initiatives as a gender equality champion or tempered radical (Kirton & Greene, 2021; Kirton, Greene & Dean, 2007). Subsequently, notes of specific outings of resistance of colleagues were included as well. In conversations with other members of the research team of Volkel Air Base, we covered the daily resistance and agreed on sharing notable observations and statements, such as resistance, during meetings with each other in a shared document. All the members of the research team checked and complemented the document. A selection has been made out of the conversation and meeting notes of all meetings in the period of August 2021 until March 2022. Out of the shared document, 29 notes have been selected based on the presence of resistance. An outing of a colleague was marked as resistance when the specific situation made me feel uncomfortable, excluded and/or socially unsafe because of my work as a Diversity and Inclusion Officer.

LinkedIn

After publishing my previous study regarding gendered norm images at the Royal Military Academy, I was also visible in the media. As a result, I encountered multiple forms of resistance via LinkedIn in the period of April 2021 until November 2022. For the data collection a selection of the data has been made based on four predefined criteria. Firstly, I selected messages which were posted publicly on my profile. Although I encountered multiple practices of resistance via direct messages in private chats, these were excluded for the data collection because respondents did not agree on cooperating to my study before sending me a resisting message in private, which for me, felt unethical. Secondly, I only included messages which were sent via LinkedIn. Other social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, contained multiple practices of resistance to the military's diversity and inclusion initiatives as well. However, only at LinkedIn I could check on profiles whether or not a respondent works within the military organization. Since this study focusses only on the Dutch Armed Forces, messages from non-military employees are excluded of the data collection. Via LinkedIn the military employees could be filtered, since the function title and other work-related experiences are present on LinkedIn profiles. This underlies the third criterium. Lasty,

only comments were selected for the data selection where I recognized resistance. Consequently, out of hundreds of messages and comments, 70 practices had been selected for the data collection.

Fieldnotes

On the second of December 2021, an article was published by Stichting Civitas Christiana (2021). They argued why the military seems to become more “woke”. The article contains five main arguments, on which the last one specifically addressed my previous study and my current work as a Diversity and Inclusion officer within the military (Stichting Civitas Christiana, 2021). A Lieutenant Colonel (higher ranked officer) shared the article with me and pointed out this has been shared widely amongst organizational members. The content of the article was included as a fieldnote in the data collection.

On the fifteenth of March 2022, the annual report of the Inspector General of the Armed Forces was published for all the employees of the Dutch Armed Forces. In the annual report, the findings after several working visits of the Inspector General within the military, were presented (Ministry of Defense, 2022a). The vision of the Inspector General regarding diversity and inclusion initiatives within the military is elaborated on page 23 of the report (Ministry of Defense, 2022a). This page was included in the data collection as a fieldnote.

Analysis

All collected data was being uploaded in the program Atlas.ti. The analysis started with reading and re-reading collected data multiple times and taking notes of significant remarks or observations (Bryman, 2016). Subsequently, the codes were reviewed and specified in categories of practices of resistance. For this, a combination of theoretical background and the obtained data was required (Straits & Singleton, 2018). Further, these codes were used to describe the descriptive narrative about the types of practices of resistance within the military. These steps of coding were included in the codebook. Lastly, the findings of the selective codes were interpreted by forging interconnections between the created codes (Bryman, 2016). Moreover, the underlying assumptions for perspectives of resisters and the way these perspectives were shared amongst military employees were interpreted and used to gain more insights in implicit and paradoxically perspectives. With this process data is processed more structured which contributed to drawing a conclusion which answered the research question.

Trustworthiness and Ethics

Throughout all the phases of the study, the trustworthiness and ethics (Bryman, 2016; Tracy, 2010) were taken into considerations extensively by using several strategies. To establish the credibility of the findings, three strategies were taken into account. Firstly, triangulation was used in the data collection (Tracy, 2010). The different characteristics per datatype accounts for the credibility of the practices of resistance to diversity and inclusion initiatives within the military. Secondly, during the data collection and analysis, the research team of Volkel Air Base peer-reviewed my interpreted findings based on the coding. Furthermore, the results of the data analysis were peer-reviewed as well in order to validate the findings. Lastly, the results were presented to Ella van den Heuvel, the Gender Advisor of the Commander of the Dutch Armed Forces in order to reflect whether I had made a representative representation of the findings in the military context.

Since it is impossible to interpret reactions and resistance objectively, confirmability is concerned with ensuring that I have acted in good faith throughout the process of the research (Bryman, 2016; Tracy, 2010). The data collection consists of open-source data, such as the annual report, the article and the LinkedIn messages. Moreover, all transcripts of the interviews were validated by the respondents.

Throughout the data collection the research team ensured the validity of the research. They attended conversations and meetings, made complementary notes of observations and statements and cross-read the overall validity throughout the writing phase.

My dual role as insider researcher and the sensitivity of the research itself, required a strategy throughout the research process to protect my position with respect to the study and to the military organization. In the period from March 2022 until June 2022 I have had five meetings with a practice nurse mental health care of Volkel Air Base regarding coping mechanisms for my feelings towards the practices of resistance. In these conversations, my position as a Diversity and Inclusion Officer within the military organization and its politics was extensively discussed. Since the practice nurse mental health care has a duty of confidentiality, I was able to in-depth discuss my feelings towards specific practices of resistance. Last but not least, I gained social and moral support of my supervisor, peers of the thesis circle and of the members of the research team of Volkel Air Base during this study.

Results

Contributing to a safer and more just world

The Dutch Armed Forces has three core tasks: protecting its own territory and that of allies; promoting the (international) legal order and stability; providing assistance in the event of disasters and crises (Constitution of the Kingdom of The Netherlands, Art. XCVII §1). These core tasks represent the contribution to a safer and more just world. Although contributing to a (socially) safer and more just world is a core aspect of diversity and inclusion initiatives as well, there seem to be a tension between military tasks and diversity and inclusion initiatives. These tensions seem to cause resistance to diversity and inclusion initiatives within the Dutch Armed Forces.

The current developments at geopolitical level, such as the battles between Ukraine and Russia are hot topics within the military. Some colleagues feel that these developments are so imminent that the Dutch Armed Forces should prepare for a possible war instead of shifting their focus to diversity and inclusion initiatives. A colleague commented on LinkedIn: “[...] *The time of finding yourself during the tea parties in the boat of gender and gay pride is over. Dare to take off those rose glasses when you look at the images from the Ukraine*” (R1, male, LinkedIn). This indicates a possible fear for war. Moreover, it seems that preparing for war is the complete opposite of implementing diversity and inclusion initiatives. From this perspective, diversity and inclusion initiatives should not get priority over military necessities and readiness. A colleague commented: “*After all, you won’t learn to fly an Apache helicopter if you don’t know how important respecting disabled transgender LGBTQI+- asylum seekers of color is*” (R2, male, LinkedIn).

A more effective use of scarce resources (such as equipment and training) seems to be necessary in order to contribute to a safer world from a military perspective. A colleague pointed out which factors should get more prioritized instead of diversity and inclusion initiatives:

There are MULTIPLE other things that are NOT right, such as: Too little personnel. Too little capacity for training. Too little parts and material. Too little ammunition. Too little equipment. Too little effort. Too little wages. So now we think: Why all this attention for this [D&I initiatives] when it should have absolutely no priority at all. (R3, male, LinkedIn)

Moreover, diversity and inclusion initiatives such as the women's quota within the military, are considered not contributing to the military tasks, and therefore, not contributing to a safer and more just world for multiple reasons. For instance, colleagues question whether a women's quota is the right strategy to fulfill the thousands of vacancies: *"A preference policy with 9000 vacancies. Very cynically I say: hire fewer men (did you just assume my gender?), then the target percentage will certainly be achieved"* (R4, male, LinkedIn). Also, the limited physical strength of women in comparison with men is a frequently used argument in practices of resistance. Stichting Civitas Christianas (2021) argue that women's strength is insufficient during training and war: *"It is a losing battle in advance to recruit many more women for the armed forces. 'Your strength', as the new women's recruitment campaign of the military repeats time and time again, is insufficient in the field"* (Fieldnote 1). In addition, the increment in diversity and inclusion initiatives seems to make daily work unnecessarily complicated. A colleague commented on LinkedIn:

We bend over backwards to provide all genders, all colors, beliefs and other different eating people with food, drinks and entertainment. It is almost impossible to go on military exercises in the fields without a group feeling wrongly treated (R5, male, LinkedIn)

Another colleague argued that the number of adjustments that are being made for women work counterproductive for the organizational output: *"So many exceptions/adjustments are made for women, that sometimes it is not even workable"* (R6, male LinkedIn). This might indicate that diversity and inclusion initiatives have adverse effects on the core tasks of the military.

Lastly, the reputation of the military organization within society is considered important for credibility and support in executing the military core tasks. Although generally, the focus on diversity and inclusion initiatives within organizations seem to create credibility and support from society, there seem to be tension within this domain as well. Since the military is a public organization which is ultimately controlled by the Dutch government, diversity and inclusion initiatives are considered to be a result of political and societal pressure instead of military need. In an interview, a colleague told me: *"This is a societal issue. So now it has been appointed by the government, we have to move along"* (R7, female, interview). A colleague commented on LinkedIn: *"With the aim to meet the societal cry for inclusiveness/gender neutrality as an organization?"* (R8, male, LinkedIn). Moreover, Stichting Civitas Christianas (2021) argued: *"Tziamali is currently 'Project Officer Diversity & Inclusion' which is in line with the politically correct agenda of the Air Force"* (Fieldnote 1). It seems that the societal and political

pressure is not in line with the need of the military organization. And, even more, negative publicity in the media regarding diversity and inclusion initiatives within the military, most likely affects the reputation and credibility of the organization. As a result, colleagues showed resistance to media appearances with my previous study. A colleague commented: “*And what are your intentions??? Sensational press or a well-founded story? There is already enough mud-throwing at the military*” (R9, female, LinkedIn). Another colleague commented: “*Yes of course, again some fodder for the media to put the military organization and its personnel in a bad light again*” (R10, male, LinkedIn). A third colleague commented: “*Tip: you should have discussed it internally and shouldn’t have made it bigger!*” (R11, female, LinkedIn). This seems to indicate that articles in the media regarding my previous study have (had) negative consequences to the organization and its societal reputation.

In conclusion, although one of the core aspects of diversity and inclusion initiatives is the contribution to a safer and more just world, it seems to contradict the military perspective on a safer and more just world. Diversity and inclusion initiatives are considered counterproductive for the preparations for war, the organizational output, the fulfillment of vacancies and the credibility and reputation of the military organization. The tensions between the core tasks of the military and diversity and inclusion initiatives seem to cause resistance, which ultimately affirms the loyalty of military personnel to the military organization and its tasks.

Different perceptions of a just organization

Although the military core task is to contribute to a safer and more just world, perceptions of a just military organization differ amongst military employees. By analyzing the resistance to diversity and inclusion initiatives, two seemingly opposing perceptions prevailed. Notably, these two perceptions both endorse the task-oriented work ethos of the military organization. However, the perceptions disagree on the equality and uniformity within the organization, which ultimately exposes the complexity of resistance to diversity and inclusion initiatives.

Green mean fighting machine

The military organization is considered a task-oriented organization since “*Combat power is our output*” (R12, male, LinkedIn). Moreover, the current developments at geopolitical level, implies that “*We need a fighting army in the short term [...]*” (R1, male, LinkedIn). This indicates a shift towards more peace-enforcing missions instead of peacekeeping, humanitarian or observation missions. Peace-enforcing missions are considered to be more masculine

because combat itself is considered a normative imagination of martial violence, which subsequently causes a normalization of military force and the masculine ideal (Millar & Tidy, 2017). By focusing on combat as the output of the military organization, some colleagues feel that everyone need to be treated completely equally because: *“Here we are all the same. We are all military employees; we wear the same uniform and the same is expected from us”*. (R13, male, interview) And a frequently used phrase is *“Within the military, we continue where others stop”* (R14, female, interview). This perspective indicates that in a just military organization, there should not be differences in (physical) requirements based on sex because it may have negative effects on the output. Therefore, everyone should be the same and, even more, is capable of pushing through where civilians would stop. The latter indicates that military employees need to be though. A colleague mentioned in an interview: *“We are an organization that is green and though, not pink with tulle you know”* (R14, female, interview). Moreover, the color green seems to symbolize the uniformity (also literally as in a green uniform). Notably, some colleagues refer to uniformity as being genderless. A female colleague told me in an interview: *“At work I am a genderless military employee and I do not categorize my colleagues based on sex”* (R7, female, interview). Similarly, another female colleague told me in an interview: *“I don’t distinguish between men and women. I do not look at their gender. I do not award or begrudge one more than the other. I just do not preference one before another”* (R15, female, interview). This indicates resistance towards a preference policy based on sex.

In addition, in multiple comments of colleagues, it appeared that an organization is being qualified as just when there is meritocracy. For instance, the article of Stichting Civitas Christiana (2021) pointed out that men feel resentment because they were passed over by women based on their sex instead of merit. A male colleague commented on LinkedIn: *“Apparently, we want to have more women in top positions. I prefer to have the most suitable person in a position.”* (R16, male, LinkedIn) Another male colleague commented:

It may be all good intentions, but we are exaggerating by increasing the number of women, members of the LHBTI community and disabled people at work. Just look at ability, ambition, and form an opinion based on equal suitability. (R17, male, LinkedIn)

Lastly, colleagues seem to connect diversity and inclusion initiatives, such as the women’s quota, to discrimination. A colleague commented on LinkedIn: *“With equal qualifications, women are promoted rather than men, based on being a woman. Isn’t that discrimination on the basis of sex?”* (R18, male, LinkedIn). In another comment, a colleague referred back to the

first article of the Constitution: *“Based on equal qualification, we should only flip a coin for a decision! Just for fun, read Art1 of our Constitution again!”* (R19, male, LinkedIn). (Positive) discrimination dishonors the belief that everybody should be only promoted based on merits.

The perspective of the green mean fighting machine displays meritocracy belief as well as a belief in a narrow definition of what the military entails (uniformity). Therefore, making a distinction on the basis of sex seem to nourish categorization and even discrimination, which ultimately damages this perspective on a just organization.

Pink and blue mean fighting machine

Paradoxically however, colleagues point out that there are differences between military men and military women that should not be ignored. For example, some colleagues point out the need to accept differences in physical strength, areas of interests and (behavioral) characteristics between military men and women.

Many interviewees stressed differences between women and men in physical strength. For instance, the differences in physical requirements for men and women are widely discussed. During an interview, a colleague pointed out: *“Should you want more women within combat units? No. And why? Would the man have benefits from a female colleague in a combat situation if she could not perform her work when it comes down to it? That’s it”* (R21, male, interview).

With respect to the differences in areas of interest, a male colleague pointed out:

[...] One organization attracts one group and the other organization attracts the other group. There are also just few women outside the Ministry of Defense who feel attracted to work in a garage. So, if you would study this phenomenon and you are getting this as a result, you just have to accept that.
(R20, male, interview)

In a similar vein, a female colleague told me in an interview: *“But I wonder, in many fields of expertise, whether it is realistic if women will work there [referring to tech units]. And I'm at peace with the fact that there are departments where there are no women at all”* (R15, female, interview). These two quotes indicate that the areas of interests of all the women in society might be a legitimacy for the lack of influx of military women. On the one hand, these quotes might reflect feelings of acceptance and acquiescence. On the other hand, these quotes might

indicate a lack of trust in policy-makers because some colleagues are questioning whether a women's quota is feasible within the military.

With respect to the differences in (behavioral) characteristics, a male colleague said in an interview: *"We men are more often though and do not pity about aches and pains. But yeah, that's assigned to men, we are completely different"* (R21, male, interview). This implies that military women might complain more easily about possible injuries, which seems to be interpreted as something that is assigned to women. Also, being a mother and being more caring seem to be assigned to women as well. A male colleague mentioned in an interview: *"The fact that she is a woman and a mother means that she has more passion for caring for a child than a man [...] that is a personal characteristic"* (R22, male, interview). This indicates a more conservative gender role based on the interpreted personal characteristics of women.

The perspective of the pink and blue mean fighting machine contains an essentialist view on fundamental differences between men and women in general. Women are considered to be less strong, less tough, less interested in masculine organizations and more passionate about raising their children (instead of working). Therefore, women are considered to be less suitable for the military organization. According to this perspective, stimulating diversity and inclusion initiatives might have negative consequences for the output of the military organization. So, in order to be a just organization, the differences between men and women need to be recognized and accepted, which may lead to a lack of influx of women within the military.

In conclusion, although military employees seem to agree on the military core tasks of contributing to a safer and just world, it seems that there are multiple perspectives on a just organization that contradict each other. On the one hand, military employees consider themselves equal and uniform (even to the extreme: genderless). On the other hand, military employees argue how men and women differ from each other from a more essentialist point of view. Although both perspectives cause resistance to diversity and inclusion initiatives, the tension between these two perspectives, might cause for (more) polarization within the military organization which ultimately has negative consequences for the military output.

Protection or privilege?

Within the military organization, women seem to gain more 'protection' because of diversity and inclusion initiatives, which causes resistance to those initiatives. A common feeling that prevails is that *"Women get more done within this organization"* (R23, female, interview). In

addition, a colleague commented on LinkedIn: *“I think the paths that can be taken as a member of a minority group are much greater”* (R24, male, LinkedIn).

The granted ‘protection’ for women was apparent in HR-processes such as inflow and throughflow of military women. For instance, recruitment used to deliberately refuse to recruit women for positions in a guard unit in order to protect them for a possible mental burden. One of the recruiters explained that:

On the one hand women often do not meet the high physical requirements during the selection, which costs an unnecessary amount of money for recruitment. On the other hand, I feel an ethical dilemma by recruiting women for positions in the guard units. The culture in these units is misogynistic, I have seen that often enough in other cases with previous military women. [...] When I recruit women for a specific unit, I want them to be happy and feel socially safe enough. The best possible outcome is that they thank me afterwards for recruiting them for this job. But at this point, I am not convinced the guard unit at Volkel Air Base should have more women and I feel responsible to protect them for the possible mental burden (Conversation/meeting note 1).

By limiting women’s roles in order to protect them, paternalism occurs, which means this act of protection restricts somebody’s liberty without her consent (Grill, 2012). In the perspective of the recruiter, it seems not only women were being protected. The credibility of the recruiter, which is based on finding the right fit between person and organization, was on stakes as well. By protecting women for a possible mental burden, recruiters seem to protect their own position as well. Notably, the mentioned guard unit is the largest unit of the Air Force and only three percent of the members is woman (Molenaar, 2022). The women’s quota states that the proportion of military women must increase to thirty percent. For recruitment this meant actively increasing the influx of women into the guard unit. Therefore, the granted ‘protection’ for women works counterproductive for the organization.

Moreover, granted ‘protection’ for military women was visible during the period of reorganization at three Dutch Air Bases. At the same time the women’s quota within the military was being proposed and this reorganization was seen as an opportunity to fulfill the quota and place more women in higher positions. However, one of the key players of this reorganization told everyone present in a dining area: *“The fact that the preference policy calls*

for a woman in certain positions instead of a man, does not matter to me at all. I don't participate in this. Can anybody show me that this is legally allowed to do at all?" (Conversation note). The keyplayer in question had set an example that day by seemingly turning against a new policy of her/his superiors publicly. These words that were being said overtly by a person with a higher officer rank, and therefore with power, might have had an impact on the perceptions of other military employees regarding diversity and inclusion policies. Therefore, this action might have caused a ripple effect. In a conversation later that day, the key player in question stated how he aimed to 'protect' women during this reorganization. The person in question explained:

In a selection for a position within the Air Combat Command, there may be three candidates; two men and one woman. Without having conducted one interview, the woman would hear constantly "You are most likely to get the position, since they want women in higher positions". Next, if I would choose her to be in this position after the interviews, others would think she cannot be trusted because the only reason she has gotten the position would be because of her sex. I feel responsible for preventing that and I want people to know that I am fully objective. (Conversation/meeting note 2)

This situation shows that resistance is not necessarily intended as an expression of recalcitrance towards policies of superiors. In this perspective, resistance is being used to protect military women and ensure their social safety during their career. Moreover, this situation reflects that a women's quota may have negative consequences for the credibility of a key player in a reorganization by being associated with a supporter of diversity and inclusion initiatives within the military. Despite having formal power, the person in question possibly felt the need to publicly protect his position as well, which endorses the complexity of the power constellation. On the other hand, these actions might cause a backlash. The granted 'protection' for (military) women seem to encourage resistance to diversity and inclusion initiatives and exclusion of women within military units. In an interview, a male colleague pointed out:

I think it is normal a woman is being excluded from the group the moment she starts taking advantage of the fact that she's a woman. Because that is also possible. It can play as a disadvantage but it can also play as an advantage. Because as women have a little more protection around them (R22, male, interview).

'Taking advantage of the fact that she is a woman' seems to draw back on the essentialist perspective of 'pink and blue mean fighting machine'. However, in this perspective, being a woman seems to grant more privileges. In an interview, a colleague explained that: *"They [women] want to play their card too often. In the sense of: I don't feel good now, it must be because I'm a woman"* (R13, male, interview). Notably, this perspective is not exclusively apparent within operational units. Colleagues of the HR department seem to share this perspective as well. In an interview with a member of the HR department, it emerged that military women seem to be more manipulative and call in sick more easily:

Women I see are quite manipulative for their own benefit. They always do things only for their own benefit... If I look at all the units, there are quite a few women here who, for whatever reason, are appointed very often for medical or legal issues or for dysfunction. Things like that. Especially you see it in reporting sick. Women have a very strong tendency, if there is something, to call in sick very quickly [...] Every HR Advisor knows what to expect from certain people. And yes, I believe that very often the women predominate in that negatively (R25, female, interview).

In a similar vein, pregnancy and maternity leave seem to be interpreted as a privilege as well. Remarkably, this perspective is also shared amongst military women. A female colleague mentioned in an interview: *"all of a sudden, the moment comes that they [pregnant women] say: 'oh yes I don't feel so good', fuck off. You can just do your work"* (R23, female, interview). She continued: *"The only thing I can think of is: Well, nice then. Amazing. Then I'd better have children too"* (R23, female, interview). Being pregnant is also interpreted as being lazy whilst burden male colleagues with your work: *"You sit on the couch all day with your lazy ass. I think it's all fine, but at some point, all the work is pushed through to the men"* (R23, female, interview). In a meeting with a HR department, a female colleague pointed out that military women do not have the same rights as all other women in the Netherlands in terms of pregnancy and maternity leave. In this meeting, a shared thought came to light:

Military women are legally not entirely free to decide to start a family, especially when they work in shifts. Irregular working hours do not match with their task of caring for their new-born. We [the HR department] have to grant them more days off and so-called deployment protection. The effect?

*Male colleagues need to work more in order to get the work done as a unit
(Conversation/meeting note 3)*

In conclusion, resistance to diversity and inclusion initiatives show a tension between the perspective of ‘protecting’ military women and the perspective of privilege women. Notably, precisely the granted ‘protection’ for women might cause a backlash for military women. Military women are considered privileged, are being excluded of units and burdened to prove their abilities before being taken seriously. Some colleagues indicate that when a woman fills a specific position, it is unclear to them whether she is actually the most suitable candidate, or whether she has been chosen because of her sex. Also, military women are considered more manipulative and taking advantage of their position within the organization. As a result, it seems that because of the diversity and inclusion initiatives and the resistance to it, trust in fellow female colleagues in a unit is declining and insecurity amongst military women is rising.

How hierarchy affects resistance

The military organization is known for its hierarchical structure. More experience within the organization gained by fulfilling multiple different positions within the organization seem to create more support for ideas and perspectives. In most of the comments on LinkedIn, colleagues mentioned how long they have been working within the military organization. It seems this strategy creates credibility amongst other readers. For example, a colleague commented: *“I’ve been working at the Ministry of Defense for almost 24 years now. And I do not identify myself with your story... Maybe you should go to the operational units and get information there”* (R26, female, LinkedIn). Notably, the importance of experience was marked by arguing my experience in the operational field is lacking. A colleague commented the following:

This nicely shows how poor your knowledge is about the company whose culture you want to change so willingly. Visit the operational fields, make sure you know what is going on and make sure that you first learn to understand the culture within the ministry of defense before you want to change it (R27, male, LinkedIn).

Another colleague commented: *“This shows how disconnected you are with the state of affairs and feeling that plays at the operational field”* (R28, male, LinkedIn). These comments seem to indicate that young and unexperienced military colleagues should not voice their findings of

a study (based on a non-operational unit) because of a lack of experience within the operational field, which causes tension. For instance, ageism (Thomas et. al., 2014) might be apparent when perspectives of young and unexperienced military colleagues are not being taken seriously because of their age and limited experience. However, although mentioning the number of years a colleague has been with the organization most likely generates more credibility, it is also likely that these years of experience represent a limited willingness to move away from an entrenched frame of reference. As a result, new perspectives on diversity and inclusion within the military organization are more likely to be dismissed by more experienced colleagues because of limited experience of younger colleagues, which itself is a practice of resistance. It raises the question whether supportive comments of a more experienced military colleague create more support for diversity and inclusion initiatives amongst other colleagues. However, it seems that military colleagues with a higher officer rank, and thus more experience, are hesitant on commenting supportive messages for diversity and inclusion initiatives publicly. Subsequently, this gives more space to air out resistance.

Resistance is also aired out publicly by higher ranked women. Notably, comments of resisting military women gained more attention, support and likes. A female senior Employability Advisor commented:

And which woman at the Ministry of Defense really wants to be a target figure? After 23 years [of working], I certainly do not! I have nothing to do with being part of a gender statistic: I'm just a hard-working employee who wants and need to be judged on her talents only (R29, female, LinkedIn).

Apart from arguing the possible negative consequences of a women's quota for women, she might have protected her own position as a woman within the military organization as well. With her comment, she received 115 likes and multiple outings of support from other military colleagues, which might have a positive effect on her position within her unit.

Because of the amount of support, this comment might have created a ripple effect: the comment could have had an indirect effect to the decrease of support for diversity and inclusion initiatives within the military. A ripple effect might not be measurable by the number of likes. Still, it is plausible that the supported comments of the military women on behalf of the women's quota, have had an indirect effect on the perceptions of other military personnel. For example, a male colleague commented:

What strikes me is when I talk to women in my (military) environment, really no woman is waiting for this policy. They want to be judged on their strength and quality as colleagues. And not on a target number. I therefore wonder, if the majority of female colleagues do not feel comfortable with this, which group initiates this? They are apparently not people who know what is going on with their female colleagues (R31, male, LinkedIn).

On social media, other male colleagues were referring back to practices of resistance of military women to the women's quota. Moreover, liking, supporting and sharing practices of resistance on social media, can affect the normative dominant discourse on diversity and inclusion initiatives within the military (Yoo et. al., 2018; Hess & Waller, 2014; Leopold et. al., 2019). Possibly, the ripple effect on LinkedIn enhanced a ripple effect in real life as well. For instance, since resistance of military women to the women's quota might have caused a prevailing discourse amongst employees, it can be to the detriment of supporting diversity and inclusion initiatives within the military in daily life.

Lastly, not only comments on LinkedIn might have caused a ripple effect, also the annual report of the Inspector General of the Armed Forces (Ministry of Defense, 2022a) might have contributed to the dominant discourse. The annual report of the Inspector General of the Armed Forces was sent to every employee of the military and is publicly available as well. Because the Inspector General of the Armed Forces has one of the highest ranks within the military, this hierarchical power inevitably enhances a ripple effect. For instance, the annual report states:

I have been approached by female employees about the fact that they were addressed separately about their position within the Ministry of Defense. Their opinion is not to treat them as a separate group, but to make the subject open to discussion in an organic context of the unit, department or management (Fieldnote 2).

Consciously or unconsciously, the mentioned quote in the annual report may have contributed to the prevailing discourse amongst employees. Moreover, the annual report of the Inspector-General of the Dutch Armed Forces states:

I also believe that the problem goes back to the basics of behavior. The behavior that unfortunately appears to be normal in society and that comes together with the military culture. That culture is in essence not wrong but

can reinforce the undesirable behavior that has become common in society
(Fieldnote 2).

The perspective that gender equality is solely a societal issue or a matter of societal behavior, seem to indicate that diversity and inclusion initiatives within the military will not be effective. Although these comments might be shared to protect the organization and its (female) personnel from possible negative consequences of diversity and inclusion initiatives, it enhances a prevailing discourse in the detriment of supporting future diversity and inclusion initiatives within the military.

Discussion, Conclusion and Reflexivity

Discussion

To advance theory on resistance to diversity and inclusion initiatives, this discourse analysis on resistance shows that resisters cannot be labelled into just one category because of contradictory perspectives amongst resisters. Moreover, this discourse analysis has shown tensions amongst and within practices of resistance, which makes the prevailing discourse more fluid instead of fixed. Tensions in practices of resistance were apparent in (1) the different perspectives on the contribution to a safer and more just world, (2) the seemingly opposing perspectives on a just organization, (3) the different perspectives on an increment of women within the military and (4) the perspectives on importance of hierarchy, experience and age within the military. Each finding will be discussed below:

The contribution to a safer and more just world

This study shows that the military perspective of how to contribute to a safer and more just world seem to contradict to the execution of diversity and inclusion initiatives in order to contribute to a (socially) safer and more just world. This indicates a discrepancy in perspectives on a safer and more just world. For example, the rising tensions between Ukraine and Russia seem to have accentuated the need for military readiness and equipment instead of diversity and inclusion initiatives, which implies that diversity and inclusion initiatives are opposing the military core tasks.

This study shows that resisters agree on the importance of the military core tasks. Some colleagues consider military women hindering the military core tasks since they are lacking strength (Carreiras, 2006; van Douwen et. al. 2022; Muhr & Sløk-Andersen, 2017). Especially

in combat units, strength and a healthy body seem to be important, which corresponds to studies of Carreiras (2006) and Arkin and Dobrofski (1978). However, physical strength seems to be a narrow perspective on what the military entails, since just a small proportion of the military workforce consists of combat positions, on which physical strength is important factor. Although a position in a combat unit grants more prestige and power (Carreiras, 2006), this is not a representative representation of the general military employee. Even more, studies show that effectiveness of a military unit is not affected by an increase in military women (Carreiras, 2006). Yet, it has not changed prevailing attitudes toward military women over years (Rosen et. al., 1996; Carreiras, 2006). In fact, Rosen et. al. (1996) argue that an increment in military women within the organization will not on itself improve the prevailing attitudes towards military women. Ultimately, this affects the perspective of contributing to a safer and more just world.

In addition, some colleagues argue that diversity and inclusion initiatives work counterproductive for filling thousands of vacancies within the military. However, research shows that by focusing on diversity and inclusion initiatives regarding a more diverse workforce, positive effects during labor shortages will be the result (Lievens & de Soete, 2011). Vacancies can be filled more easily when the pool of potential employees increases. Moreover, aiming for a more diverse workforce can reduce mutual competition amongst potential employees (Rynes & Barber, 1990), which ultimately contributes to a fairer and more just world.

Further, political and societal pressure seem to raise questions whether the needs of the military organization are being prioritized and whether my media appearances work productive or counterproductive for the reputation of the organization (Iskra, 2007; Carreiras, 2006). Keune et. al. (2020) argue that within the society an increasing pressure on the representativeness and legitimacy of organization forces organizations to focus on diversity and inclusion initiatives. In this light, the military organization seem to harm their own reputation by not prioritizing these initiatives. This study shows that colleagues seem to justify the limited reflection of society by prioritizing operational readiness instead of equality, which corresponds to findings of other scholars such as Carreiras (2006), Iskra (2007) and van Douwen et. al. (2022). However, by placing members of minority groups in certain positions, it contributes to the reflection of the social diversity within the military organization, which increases the credibility of the organization (Lievens & de Soete, 2011).

So, although contributing to a safer and more just world seem to be a noble goal, a discrepancy in perspectives causes tension, which ultimately counteracts the goal. By focusing on the similarities between the different perspectives, the gap can be closed which might result in a more efficient contribution to a safer and just world.

Two seemingly opposing perspectives on a just organization

This study shows that military employees desire a just organization since the organization contributes to a safer and more just world. Perspectives on what a 'just organization' is, seem to differ among colleagues. The first perspective is based on 'green mean fighting machine' and represents uniformity, masculinity and combat power as output. Some colleagues pointed out that uniformity should include seeing the military employee as 'genderless'. Godfrey et. al. (2012) present how the military body is first and foremost masculine, which contradicts with the perspective of 'genderless'. According to Godfrey et. al. (2012), the feminine body, however, is frequently employed as a gauge against which the masculine is measured. Notably, the colleagues who mentioned the perspective of being genderless were military women who worked in an operational unit. Possibly, hegemonic masculinity within the military caused these women to renounce their femininity and gender.

The perspective of the 'pink and blue mean fighting machine' represents the essentialist differences between men and women on societal level. This perspective aims to justify the lack of inflow of women by the differences in areas of interest, (behavioral) characteristics and physical strength, which corresponds to the findings of multiple scholars, such as: Carreiras (2006), Iskra (2007), Muhr & Sløk-Andersen (2017) and Andriessen et. al. (2017). Carreiras (2006) argues that in no other area the links between biology and social behavior have been so exploited and abused as in the military context.

The similarity between the two presented perspectives, is the focus on combat power. Notably, combat power itself and examples such as physical threats and attacks can be ascribed as masculine (Millar & Tidy, 2017; Carreiras, 2006; Kronsell, 2011; King, 2017). However, for the military organization, future challenges are not solely based on kinetic warfare, since the Defense Vision 2035 had presented a broader spectrum of possible threats. For example, due to climate change and climate-related risks, the military organization expects more humanitarian missions instead of peace-enforcing missions (Ministry of Defense, 2020). Moreover, due to the technological developments within the domain of intelligence, the military organization expects to deal with an increment in cyber-attacks instead of kinetic attacks (Ministry of Defense, 2020). These global developments force the military organization to be

more adaptive instead of solely focused on kinetic warfare, which means that the traditional masculinity and (extreme) uniformity may be outdated for future threats. Ultimately, a more diverse spectrum of possible future threats asks for a more diverse workforce to deal with more complex decision-making in the future.

Impossible deadlock for military women

Although a more diverse workforce seems to be important for the military organization, this study shows that women seem to find themselves in an impossible deadlock. Due to the diversity and inclusion initiatives, such as the women's quota, military women seem to gain more 'protection' by other colleagues. This study addressed granted 'protection' in the throughflow and inflow of women. At the same time, colleagues indicate that military women seem to take advantage of their position within the organization precisely because of this protection, which seemed to result in distrust and resistance.

The complexity of social dynamics caused by resistance to diversity and inclusion initiatives became more apparent in this deadlock for military women. By 'protecting' military women, resisters seemed to grant credibility for their own position. Moreover, the resisters did not consider themselves as resisting, but as doing the good thing for their colleagues (Ford & Ford, 2010). However, by limiting women's roles in order to protect them, paternalism occurs (Grill, 2012). Also, by deliberately not allowing women to apply for positions in guard units because they need to be protected for possible mental burden, benevolent sexism and benevolent discrimination seem to be apparent (Mallett & Monteith, 2019; Romani et. al., 2019), which works counterproductive for military women.

Moreover, the thought of military women utilizing their position within the military organization seem to enhance feelings of unfairness and discrimination. Positive discrimination contradicts the first perspective on a just and meritocratic organization where everybody should be treated equal and should be selected solely based on merits (Humbert et. al., 2018; Zanoni et. al., 2009). However, Zanoni et. al. (2009) argue that organizations are not meritocratic since inequality is imbedded in organizations and its underlying mechanisms. For example, technical core competencies are constructed masculine to exclude women (Zanoni et. al., 2009). Therefore, the perspective of the 'green mean fighting machine' might be a utopia.

Hierarchy, experience and age

This study shows that within the military organization rank, experience and age seem to be important in order to get support for ideas and perspectives. As a result, new ideas and

perspectives of younger unexperienced military employees are likely to be dismissed, which causes tension. However, van Douwen et. al. (2022) argue that military hierarchy is not solely based on experience and rank. Hierarchy within the military is dynamic and conflict ridden instead of static (van Douwen et. al., 2022). Military employees seem to construct informal hierarchies which are based on an interplay of age, rank, gender, race, military branch and occupation (van Douwen et. al., 2022; Duncanson, 2009), which means that conditions for creating support for ideas and perspectives seem to be more complex instead of age and years of experience within the organization.

Also, this study shows that higher ranked officers out their resistance to diversity and inclusion initiatives publicly on LinkedIn. By doing so, they seem to affect the prevailing discourses more strongly because of their network and power within the military organization. This study shows that LinkedIn was used to speak out against diversity and inclusion initiatives by military employees. According to Leopold et. al. (2019) resistance on LinkedIn may have occurred with the aim to end diversity and inclusion initiatives or to communicate disapproval. This study revealed that the practices of resistance of higher ranked officers may have caused a ripple effect within the military, which means that these social interactions might have negatively affected prevailing ideas regarding diversity and inclusion initiatives; online as in real life. The ripple effect can be apparent on social media by liking and sharing comments of resisters (Yoo et. al., 2018; Hess & Waller, 2014; Leopold et. al., 2019). Subsequently, the ripple effect which is created on LinkedIn might shift to social encounters in daily life. Effects of online behavior can move to an offline environment, causing a movement of resistance (Gallardo, 2017; Leopold et. al., 2019; Hess & Waller, 2014).

It seems complicated to weaken a ripple effect within the military organization. Çelik (2018) argues that within the Dutch public sector, employees are highly involved in the organization and less inclined to leave, which indicates a strong employee loyalty. Carreiras (2006) argues that loyalty of members of the military organization is strongly associated with maintaining the status quo. It implies a power constellation in which military employees are less likely to decline perspectives of experienced higher ranked officers by supporting diversity and inclusion initiatives. In a similar vein, this study has shown that higher ranked officers were more hesitant to show their support to diversity and inclusion initiatives, which might have contributed to the prevailing dominant discourse in the detriment of support for diversity and inclusion initiatives.

Practical implications and recommendation

Not focusing on diversity and inclusion initiatives may have negative consequences for the military organization. The organization is a reduced reflection of society, which leads to a decrease in credibility and support from society. Moreover, not focusing on diversity and inclusion initiatives may negatively affect the execution of the military core tasks indirectly. For instance, vacancies cannot be filled, leading to personnel problems. In addition, the complexity and diversity in future threats for the military organization, as stated in the Defense Vision 2035 (Ministry of Defense, 2020), asks for more diverse teams and creative decision-making. As a result, the State Secretary of Defense stated in his letter to the parliament that every military unit has the responsibility to create and implement its own diversity and inclusion plan (Ministry of Defense, 2022b). Moreover, the Second Action Line of the Defense Note of 2022 states that diversity and inclusion initiatives will be stimulated (Ministry of Defense, 2022d).

However, the different perspectives on diversity and inclusion initiatives amongst employees and tension between these perspectives might create (more) polarization within the military organization, which negatively affects the efficient execution of the military core tasks. Therefore, in order to write and implement a plan on diversity and inclusion within a military unit, these tensions should be taken into account. By understanding the different perspectives of colleagues regarding resistance to diversity and inclusion initiatives and the possible polarization as a result, more awareness can be created. For instance, the perspective of the green mean fighting machine and the perspective of pink and blue mean fighting machine agree on the importance of combat power, military necessities and military readiness. By stimulating the importance of (cognitive) diversity with respect to the complexity of future military threats a shift towards more acceptance for diversity and inclusion initiatives can be created. Also, accentuating the shift from a solely combat-oriented military organization to a more adaptive organization, as stated in the Defense Vision 2035, and the importance of diversity and inclusion might contribute to (more in-depth) discussions and awareness, which ultimately contributes to a just organization and a safer and more just world.

Still, some unit commanders might need more handles to create more acceptance for diversity and inclusion initiatives within their own unit. To meet this, the Expertise Center for Leadership in Defense (ECLD) provides multiple courses on diversity and inclusion and leadership (Ministry of Defense, 2022c), which can be used for meaning-making of diverse perspectives within specific units.

Future research

This study aims to understand resistance to diversity and inclusion initiatives by examining underlying assumptions, perspectives and discourses. Moreover, this study illustrates how hierarchy, experience and age are important for the spreading of resistance to diversity and inclusion initiatives across organizational members. Since every individual practice of resistance online can indirectly cause a ripple effect and a movement of resistance in real life, the question arises how this ripple effect can be used to gain support for future diversity and inclusion initiatives. Therefore, I suggest research on how the ripple effect can be used to maximize the increment in support for diversity and inclusion initiatives. For this type of research, a network analysis can be used in a more experimental manner. By creating a team of ‘military influencers’ who frequently support diversity and inclusion initiatives publicly, the effects of a positive ripple effect can be measured.

In addition, this study shows a dominant prevailing discourse within the military organization with respect to diversity and inclusion initiatives based on resistance. However, Resistance to diversity and inclusion initiatives might not necessarily be the dominant prevailing attitude within the organization. Future research should show what dominant prevailing discourses are amongst non-resistors in order to provide a more complete analysis of the military organization. Even more, in order to determine the dominant prevailing attitudes within the military organization, it might be useful to focus on the silenced voices amongst resistors and non-resistors. Possibly the largest group among military employees restrains themselves from expressing any form of resistance or support. Understanding the considerations and perspectives of the silenced voices helps us to unravel how many military employees are supporting the initiatives (in silence) and to what extent these silenced supporters are aware of each other’s existence.

Limitations

Role duality

This study is based on an autobiographical case study. Throughout the data collection, data analysis and the meaning-making process of the findings, there may be some concern about my dual role as insider researcher with respect to an autobiographical case study (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). The resistance I encountered was meant directly to me, my position and/or

topics I am passionate about. Since it is impossible to interpret reactions and resistance objectively, this has undoubtedly influenced the constructed findings. However, this is not insurmountable a case of adverse bias. Instead, Brannick and Coghlan (2007) argue that the epistemological and ontological perspective of the researcher is decisive. A subjectivist epistemological perspective is very suitable for an insider researcher (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). The insider researcher has access to more data and has a preunderstanding of the culture, norms, shared values and jargon of the organization (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). Yet, the limitations such as the effects of role duality and the organizational politics should be taken into consideration. To do so, reflexivity will be discussed in the last section of this paper.

Universal statements

Next, I draw on a wide-ranging data collection. However, the sources are also unrepresentative, since I have only focused on resistance. Resistance to diversity and inclusion initiatives might not necessarily be the dominant prevailing attitude within the organization. Moreover, I have made a selection for the data collection based on the presence of resistance. This means that my perception on resistance was decisive for the exclusion and inclusion of data in the data collection, and therefore biased. The autobiographical and military context I have studied is unique. It is uncertain whether findings hold in another context or in the same context in another timeframe. As a result, this autobiographical case study does not provide a basis for making universal statements about the Dutch Armed Forces. In addition, those who publicly write their (negative) opinions on diversity and inclusion initiatives, for instance as a comment on LinkedIn, generally have very strong feelings about the subject matter (Iskra, 2007). This means the LinkedIn comments on itself cannot be interpreted as indicative of prevalent attitudes. Yet, by using triangulation, a common institutional pattern was encountered which can be supportive for meaning-making of resistance to diversity and inclusion initiatives in general.

Anonymity

Further, an ethical aspect of this research to take into consideration is the anonymity of the respondents. Informal conversations and meetings were not recorded. In every situation however, everybody was aware of my role as Diversity and Inclusion Officer and my role as researcher on this topic. Despite sharing conversation notes and fieldnotes with the research team for validity, respondents themselves did not have the possibility to adjust the notes to their wishing afterwards. It would be unethical to use participant's names or function title in this research, because of the limited power granted to participants. The same considerations were made for the participants who practiced resistance publicly on LinkedIn. Since the data used

from LinkedIn is all open-source available, it might be easy to find out who had typed specific comments, which might affect the anonymity. Notably, on LinkedIn, I have checked every profile behind every practice of resistance in order to find out whether or not this person is a military employee. I included and excluded practices of resistance on LinkedIn based on profile information. Although the profiles of used data gave the indication the person in question was a military employee, I cannot fully guarantee that has been the case with every single profile since people are free to share incorrect information on their profiles. Moreover, my interest for this research was not to publicly shame individual resisting military colleagues. Instead, I use their practices of resistance for meaning-making of the various perspectives in order to understand resistance to diversity and inclusion initiatives within the military organization in general. Also, publicly shaming my colleagues, might have adverse effects on my own further career within the organization, which has everything to do with my dual role as insider researcher.

Conclusion

In this study, a discourse analysis was conducted on resistance to diversity and inclusion initiatives within the Dutch Armed Forces. ‘The military as a mean fighting machine’ seemed to be the prevailing discourse with respect to diversity and inclusion initiatives within the military organization. As a result, combat power, military necessities and military readiness, which can be ascribed as masculine, prevail above diversity and inclusion initiatives. Some discourse practices reinforce the prevailing dominant discourse. For instance, resisters show that diversity and inclusion initiatives are opposing the (extreme) uniformity and equality within the military which works counterproductive for the execution of the military core tasks. Moreover, diversity and inclusion initiatives undermine ‘the security of the country’ and unfairly accentuate ‘the protection of military women’. Resistance to diversity and inclusion initiatives is shown to attenuate these initiatives in order to ‘protect’ the military organization for possible adverse consequences of diversity and inclusion initiatives.

However, this study shows that resistance is layered and more complex because of different perspectives of military employees on the subject matter. Within the discourse practices tension is apparent, which paradoxically, works counterproductive for the contribution to a safer and more just world. For example, for military women these discourses cause an impossible deadlock: on the one hand, women are being ‘protected’ and on the other hand are being considered taking advantage of their position because of the granted ‘protection’. The (implicit)

burden on military women has a negative effect on mutual trust within a unit, which consequently might negatively affect the output of the mean fighting machine.

As a possible solution, I want to end this thesis with the aspiration to change the ‘green mean fighting machine’ into ‘all possible shades of green’ instead of just one equal color.

Reflexivity

Throughout this study, my dual role as insider researcher gave me the opportunity to collect rich data on resistance to diversity and inclusion initiatives. I became a second lieutenant after a four-year officer’s training at the Royal Military Academy. In my experience, starting officers are being categorized in those who have completed a one-year training at the academy and those who have completed a four-year training, whereby the latter are seen as more capable and credible military officers, which might have worked in my favor. Also, as a second lieutenant, I might have created a safer and trusted environment for colleagues to talk about their perspectives on diversity and inclusion initiatives because I am ‘one of them’.

On the other hand, some higher ranked colleagues might have interpreted me as inexperienced and therefore did not take me or my work seriously. My age and level of experience might have affected the outcomes of this study, since it is plausible that a higher ranked Diversity and Inclusion Officer would not encounter daily practices of resistance because of the military hierarchy.

However, despite of my position as a junior officer, there might have been an opposing power relation with my higher ranked colleagues. I recall having a conversation with one of the higher ranked officers at Volkel Air Base after I had a meeting with the former State Secretary of Defense in The Hague. He told me that I might be ‘just a second lieutenant’ but because of my reputation within the military organization and my network within top-level officers of the Air Force and the Dutch Armed Forces in general, I am more powerful. At that point, I took it as a compliment. Later on, I realized it might have created a power constellation whereby other colleagues not felt free enough to speak openly about their resistance to diversity and inclusion initiatives. In addition, my connection to diversity and inclusion initiatives and my knowledge about the subject matter possibly made colleagues hesitant to freely talk about resisting diversity and inclusion initiatives as well. As an example, one of my colleagues mentioned it during an interview:

You are at the department as well and you have a lot of background in diversity and inclusion. Of course, it is more difficult to express your opinion and discuss it when somebody is very into the subject matter and even does research. You have more knowledge about it. And it is always easier to moan about or to discuss something if you are all at the same level of knowledge

With respect to analyzing and interpreting the data, I undoubtedly have been biased. The resistance was addressed to me, my work and/or the subjects I am passionate about, which led to feelings of insecurity, sadness and stress. I interpreted this study as an opportunity to create something valuable from all the comments that had left me insecure. Therefore, I may have included the most painful comments into the data collection unconsciously whereas other resisting comments were left out (despite being valuable).

During the part of writing the results, discussion and conclusion, I felt a burden. As an insider researcher, I continuously was in the middle of the hierarchical structure and power constellation of the organization. I had to keep my position and future career in mind while writing about my colleagues who were all more experienced, and most of the time higher ranked than me. Also, I have thought a lot about the possible adverse effects of this study on the organization and my future career when this study would get media attention such as the previous study.

To cope with these feelings of insecurity, sadness and stress, I have had frequent¹ meetings with the practice nurse mental health care of Volkel Air Base, in the period from March 2022 until June 2022. Because the practice nurse has a duty of confidentiality, I took the opportunity to extensively discuss my feelings towards the practices of resistance, the power constellation and my (future) position within the military organization. These meetings helped me taking care of my mental health throughout the study and gave me the possibility to interpret the data more rationally, and from a bigger distance, instead of solely emotionally.

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¹ Every two to three weeks

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