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Desired diversity and symptomatic anxiety: Theorising failed diversity as Lacanian lack

Abstract

This paper conceptualises organisational diversity as constituted by psychoanalytic lack. Empirically, we show how diversity as Lacanian lack is understood as nothing in or of itself, but as an empty signifier with no signified. The lack of diversity becomes a catalyst for desiring particular ideas of diversity that, however, constantly change due to the empty form of diversity. Anxiety manifests itself in the obsession of unobtainable idealised forms of diversity as well as in the uncertainty associated with the traumatic experience of always falling short of what is desired in an object – the experience of failed diversity. Conclusively, we discuss the productive potential of the power of lack. The impossibility of diversity is what, at once, conditions the possibility of diversity. We therefore suggest that the symptomatic anxiety provoked by the lack should be enjoyed in order to engage with new meaningful desires and fantasies of organisational diversity.

Keywords

Anxiety, desire, diversity management, Lacan, lack, psychoanalysis

Introduction

Certain groups (e.g. women and ethnic minorities) remain underrepresented in management positions, on boards of directors and in certain occupationsⁱ (Al Ariss et al. 2012; Al Ariss and Syed 2011; Ashcraft 2013; Benschop et al. 2015; Ghorashi and Sabelis 2013; Zanoni and Janssens 2015). To increase the number of ‘minorities’, tools and initiatives like sensitivity training, networks, mentoring and ‘minority only’ programmes have been developed and implemented in many organisations (e.g. Clarke 2011; Holck et al. 2016; Kossek et al. 2006; Özbilgin et al. 2011). Although they are often based on large quantitative studies, most of these practices have not led to the results intended (Hasmath 2012; Holck and Muhr 2017; Kalev et al. 2006; Stahl et al. 2010). They have, instead,

provided inadequate – sometimes even counterproductive – guidelines for practitioners (Dover et al. 2016; Ng and Burke 2005; Schwabenland and Tomlinson 2015), leaving them in a vacuum: knowing they need to do something, but not knowing what to do or what will work. The numbers of women and minorities in managerial positions are, as a result, stagnating in Denmark (which is the empirical context of this present study) as well as in most other so-called Western countries (e.g. Larsen et al. 2015). Management remains mainly white, middle-class, male and heterosexual.

Attempting to explain the ineffectiveness of diversity management practices, critical scholars have recently shown that traditional diversity management practices, as well as studies of these, are guided by functionalistic, generalised, decontextualised and depoliticised HRM practices (Banerjee and Linstead 2001; Janssens and Zanoni 2014; Jonsen et al. 2011; Oswick and Noon 2014; Tatli and Özbilgin 2009; Özkazanc-Pan 2008), which do not capture the complexities of the diversity issues that organisations have to deal with. Often taking its point of departure in the methods of critical management studies (Alvesson and Deetz 2000; Alvesson and Wilmott 1992), this criticism has successfully exposed problematic underlying norms and ideological beliefs, which form specific gendered, raced, classed and sexed perceptions – and expectations – of people (e.g. Ahonen et al. 2014; Ashcraft 2013; Cohen and El-Sawad 2007; Janssens and Zanoni 2014; Muhr and Salem 2013; Muhr and Sullivan 2013; Nkomo and Hoobler 2014). Such perceptions are found to obstruct the successful implementation of the very diversity practices that were meant to overcome them (Klarsfeld et al. 2012; Muhr 2011; Schwabenland and Tomlinson 2015; Tatli 2011).

It was with this critical approach to diversity in mind that one of the authors of this paper embarked on a study of how diversity is understood and managed among 37 Danish organisations that all explicitly work with diversity programmes. While these organisations – due to their explicit focus on diversity as well as their willingness to take part in the study to talk about it – can be assumed to be among the organisations in Denmark with the most knowledge about and experience of diversity management, a curious empirical paradox occurred early on in the study: diversity itself as a concept caused problems. Diversity was idealised as something very specific, yet turned out in

practice to be impossible both to define and to evaluate, which made the management of it constantly break down. Consequently, the desired ideal of being a diverse organisation always seemed to collapse, because any absolute definition of diversity always failed. This empirical paradox, combined with the theoretical backdrop of critical diversity management studies, formed the basis of the present paper's research question:

Why is the notion of diversity impossible to define in practice, and how does this character of impossibility influence both the way organisational diversity is attempted managed, and the people who seek to implement it?

At the core of these questions lies a desire for the impossible. Thus, to answer the questions, we turn to Lacanian theory in order to address the psychoanalytic mechanisms that not only determine the impossibility of defining diversity, but simultaneously also create the desire for that which is impossible. More specifically, to capture the simultaneousness of the impossibility of and the desire for diversity, we will theorise diversity as constitutively lacking. Lack, in this regard, derives its meaning from Lacanian psychoanalysis and refers to the void in the concept of diversity itself. We theorise diversity as lack through an organisational reading of Lacan (see e.g. Bicknell and Liefoghe 2010; Böhm and Batta 2010; Driver 2013; Hoedemakers 2010; Johnsen and Guldmand-Høyer 2010; Muhr and Kirkegaard 2013; Wozniak 2010). From this perspective, diversity is characterised not by any given quality or quantity. It is, on the contrary, characterised by emptiness; a constitutive lack that leaves it for others to assign meaning and value to it in order to give it form. Diversity is effectively turned from nothing into something, not unlike the onion metaphor that Lacan (1991, 171) uses to illustrate the successive layers of identification that constitute the subject (see also Verhaeghe 1998). This onion can be peeled, but without ever arriving at any 'true' core or essence. When you are through the ascribed, often socio-demographic attributing layers of meaning, there is simply no diversity left. Thus, the position of this paper is that diversity schemes in organisations are obstructed due to the way in which diversity managers – and mainstream diversity scholars – conceptualise diversity, or rather the way in which they fail to do so. Accordingly, the focal point of the analysis is how diversity

as a concept is created as an ideal, which becomes the very lack that organisational subjects experience.

By investigating the way in which the concept of diversity breaks down, we build on the work of Schwabenland and Tomlinson (2015) in particular, but extend this by scrutinising the psychoanalytical dynamics that underlie the processes with which diversity as a concept is constructed and understood around a fundamental lack. The paper's contributions are threefold, as we show 1) how organisational diversity is constructed around a psychoanalytic lack, 2) how the endless desire for diversity produces organisational anxiety as a symptom of that lack, and 3) how it then obstructs (the desired) productive work with diversity. Each contribution is discussed in turn towards the end of the paper, where we – going back to Driver's (2013) notion of the power of lack – discuss the productive powers of diversity as lack and how anxiety can be mobilised to open up for such productivity rather than shut it down. This is the final part of the paper. Ahead of this discussion, we demonstrate all three contributions empirically in the analytical section; however, to do so, we begin with a brief presentation of Lacan's theoretical framework, which we then relate to the critical diversity literature before elaborating on the anxieties associated with our theorising of diversity as lack.

Theorising diversity as lack

The field of diversity management has long been characterised by a lack of consensus among scholars regarding what constitutes an appropriate framework for managing diversity (e.g. similarity/attraction, decision-making or social categorisation) (Williams and O'Reilly 1998). The incongruence extends to academic debates on applicable data and methods of measuring diversity management (e.g. lab or naturalistic 'real world' studies) as well as what outcomes to look for when measuring (e.g. process or end results) (Holck et al. 2016). Consequently, there is no definitive answer to what counts as diversity, or to the question of whether diversity at work is an asset or a liability – both seem to be true depending on what study is referenced, jeopardising the operationalisation and generalisability of the concept of diversity in organisations.

This can, according to Lorbiecki and Jack's (2000) analysis of the evolution of diversity management, be explained by the fact that there has been too much focus on the usability and exploitation of diversity, i.e. the business case, in which management becomes the subject, diversity its object and the organisation, although not necessarily intended, the main beneficiary. Or, as Lorbiecki and Jack (2000, 28) succinctly put it: "The belief that diversity management is do-able rests on a fantasy that it is possible to imagine a clean slate on which the memories of privilege and subordination leave no mark." Building on such a view, Zannoni and Janssens (2004) establish how there can be no true understanding of diversity, nor one best practice of it. Thus, there can be no *one* way to accurately manage diversity – whether it is in order to tame or to activate it. A single managerial solution would simply leave out an alternative one and therefore always be a solution following certain premises.

As Schwabenland and Tomlinson (2015) show, the distance between an assumed objective concept and the attempt to manage it rationally, and the actual subjective and volatile nature of the concept, makes it incredibly difficult to manage and often creates an inability to act rather than the desired successful harnessing of human differences. Despite good clear managerial intentions, diversity in practice is ever-changing and unstable, and, because of this, it easily slips out of the control of managers, leaving the original strategic objectives obsolete or at least with a different outcome than intended (Dover et al. 2016; Ng and Burke 2005). The inability to understand and comprehend diversity seems, however, to lead managers to 'mismanage' diversity (Knights and Omanovic 2016) in what appears like an eternal hunt for a precise, as in fully exhaustive, definition of diversity – one that would lead them to the desired successful harvesting of the benefits of organisational diversity. However, the problem that occurs is that since diversity is ever-changing, socially constructed and thereby in a sense an empty concept, the hunt for the 'right' combination of differences is doomed to remain an illusion – a 'phantasmagoria' in the words of Schwabenland and Tomlinson (2015). Any attempt at controlling for diversity attributes is in this regard in vain, because these attributes are, if anything, changeable and unreliable and for the same reason inapplicable as controllable entities. Consequently – and quite ironically – diversity becomes a concept that dissolves, but remains imagined and desired nonetheless.

As such, this development lays the ground for our theorisation of diversity as lack, in which we mobilise Lacanian psychoanalysis in order to explain what happens when a concept like diversity is empty of signifiers, but remains imagined and desired as if it did contain signifiers nonetheless (e.g. Jones and Spicer 2005). The premise for conceptualising diversity as no more (and no less) than a psychoanalytic lack is the Lacanian 'triad', consisting of the three registers of the Symbolic, the Imaginary and the Real, which broadly correspond to discourse, identification and failure respectively (Hoedemaekers and Keegan 2010). The meaning of diversity is found in the relationship of signifiers that make up the field of discourse, i.e. the Symbolic order. The unconscious, however, remains radically exterior to us, since it exists in language, insofar as we are not aware of its structuring effects. Hence, diversity is something that escapes us. This 'something' can thus be investigated through a Lacanian lens of unconscious determinations in organisational settings.

In the Symbolic world of an organisation, the subject is never anything other than a function of language (Arnaud 2002). In this world of signifiers, humans are structured by discourse as an external agency. The unconscious is an effect of the signifying chains that make up language. Put differently: the unconscious is the discourse of the big Other (Arnaud and Vanheule 2007), or, in Lacan's (2006, 690) own words: "Man's desire is the Other's desire." In *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989), Žižek pushes this understanding of being a subject of the Symbolic to its extreme:

Today, it is commonplace that the Lacanian subject is divided, crossed-out, identical to a lack in a signifying chain. However, the most radical dimension of Lacanian theory lies not in recognising this fact but in realising that the big Other, the symbolic order itself, is also *barré*, crossed-out, by a fundamental impossibility, structured around an impossible/traumatic kernel, around a central lack (Žižek 1989, 137).

What Žižek is arguing is that subjects of language are constitutively split. They will never be whole, since there is always something missing. That lack gives birth to an insatiable

desire, not for more, but for something else, something different. The lack, in other words, functions as a catalyst for an endless quest for identification (Laustsen 2005), as the insatiability of the lack initiates an ongoing transition from one signifier to another.

Diversity as the object of an organisation is thus never desired in itself. The object-cause of desire – the *objet petit a* – is what is *more* in an object than the object itself (Cederström and Spicer 2014). If an organisation were to obtain this unobtainable object, it would simply turn into something else, as “what desire desires is desire itself” (Jones and Spicer 2005, 237): the very process of desiring something, meaning that that something is really nothing, since it is contingent and can thus be anything. According to Žižek (1997, 39), this Lacanian formula tells us that the *raison d’être* of desire is not to realise its goal, to find full satisfaction, but rather to “reproduce itself as desire”. It is therefore the very process of working towards a goal of becoming ever more diverse that is desired and not diversity itself. Once that goal is reached, the desire is redirected towards an-Other goal. The empirical significations of diversity presented in this study should therefore be understood not as desire per se but as *semblances* of desire. Theoretically, desire remains the same, namely the *objet petit a* – that is, the object-cause of desire – meaning desire is elusive to the organisational subjects. The same is true of the semblances of desire. They, too, remain elusive to the desiring subject. Yet, the semblances of desire can – and are – signified empirically and may as such have the appearance of the *objet petit a* without ever being identical to it.

Žižek (1989) adds that it is not only your desire that is the Other’s desire; the Other’s desire is also that of the Other. The practical implication of this is that you can never ask what is desired of you, because the Other would simply not know. The Other is not even anyone, but a system of knowledge (possibly reflected in/by someone), which is also part of the reason why we can scale up an otherwise clinical and individual-oriented psychoanalytic practice to a macro level. Psychoanalysis is already an analysis of the social in that the unconscious is shared collectively, given that the Other is also desiring the Other’s desire due to its own lacking essence. A psychoanalytic interpretation of conscious phenomena would therefore be to view them as concealed expressions of the unconscious (Gabriel and Carr 2002; Jalan et al. 2014).

One way in which anxiety arises due to the lack in diversity is related to the Imaginary. This is not what is imagined, but how we are constituted through others' images of us (Jones and Spicer 2005), so the Other's recognition comes to hold power over us, and how we see and shape our selves in accordance with these images due to our lacking identities. The images, or fantasies, teach us how to desire to become whole in conscious efforts to cover up for the unconscious lack (Driver 2009). Fantasy, as Lacan (2006, 532) writes, "is the means by which the subject maintains himself at the level of his vanishing desire, vanishing inasmuch as the very satisfaction of demand deprives him of his object". The image, that is equal to our selves, is thus mediated by the gaze of the Other, which then becomes the guarantor of our selves (Homer 2005, 22–26). Lacking diversity is an anxious position to be in when diversity, as an object of desire, holds promises of becoming whole by filling in the constitutive lack that causes desire. Anxiety can for the same reason also relate to failed organisational diversity, which can be explained by means of the Real.

The Real is not to be confused with social reality, but is rather that part of social reality that we can never truly understand, grasp or explain. It is that which is forever cut off from symbolisation (Catlaw 2006) – that which drives us, but can never be totally understood, because the Real is the precise point at which the signifying chain fails (Hoedemaekers and Keegan 2010). The Real is as such the theoretical explanation as to why diversity can be conceptualised as lack – and why it only makes sense to approach diversity as such. For the Real renders real the limits to representation, as its empty form is what prevents the discursive Symbolic from reaching any closure and from becoming identical with itself (Cederström and Spicer 2014). In summary: the Real is the very unknown at the edge of our socio-symbolic universe (Homer 2005, 81).

The Real is therefore the limit of not only the Symbolic, but also the Imaginary – that is, the limitation to both discourse and to identification. The Real not only complicates our understanding and systematisation of the world; it also obscures the way we give substance to our self-understanding within this world. The Real is that which is 'more' in the Symbolic and the Imaginary than what they are in themselves and is for that reason beyond our comprehension. The implication is that we are speaking of something that is

unspeakable, and the importance of the Real to this paper lies exactly with this quality of impossibility. The Real can never be absorbed into the Symbolic, because it is that extra that we can sense, but don't have the language for. Not having (proper) words for it means that any encounter with the Real would be an anxious experience, because the Real denies symbolisation and hence exists outside the language that we have at our disposal to make sense of the world. But it is the impossibility of the Real that makes it possible for us to take into account Lacan's notion of enjoyment – the experience of *jouissance* that the interviewees have in the absence of tangible results of organisational diversity.

Back to diversity

Extending the extant critical literature as presented above, we will argue that diversity is nothing in and of itself. Schwabenland and Tomlinson (2015) capture this vantage point when describing diversity as a phantasmagoria: confusing, strange, almost dreamlike, because it always seems to change in odd ways. Diversity is in that sense not manageable, because the lack, the very non-essence at the non-existing 'core' of the notion, produces numerous empirical paradoxes. In the context of this paper, we characterise paradox along a Derridian aporia (Derrida 1993; see e.g. also 2000; 2005 on hospitality), where diversity is diversity because it at the same time is *not* diversity. The impossibility of diversity is what, at once, conditions the possibility of diversity. What we have come to realise through years of preoccupation with organisational diversity is that diversity in contemporary organisations has become a 'lost' object-cause of desire that management wants to (re)conquer in order to become whole. The workforce is, as a result, always-already not diverse enough. By 'lost' we do not want to imply that organisations were at some point in possession of the diversity they are now searching for and that they can somehow reclaim it, but simply that the object of diversity is – to them – missing and always will be due to the elusiveness of the concept, prompted by the lack.

The lack in diversity makes the notion volatile. It is, if anything, contingent, characterised only – in a Lacanian sense – by an antagonistic kernel, which to us represents the very power relations that mainstream diversity management is criticised for neglecting. What we get depends on how we make sense of it, how we assign meaning to diversity and not least who gets to claim hegemony to otherwise contested ideas of diversity. That insight

calls for significant changes to how diversity is 'managed' in contemporary organisations. If we realise the paradoxical 'truth' that there is no diversity per se, then we will start seeing that we cannot manage it – we can only manage *our* selves and our own approaches to diversity.

Anxiety as the symptom of lacking diversity

If Lacanian lack is the psychoanalytic diagnosis of failed diversity as a problem, anxiety becomes a symptom of that problem. The symptomatic anxiety that emerges as a product of the lack in diversity is ambiguous, as it stems from the constant dissolvment of the concept, but also from the fact that the lack can no longer be desired, should a desired form of diversity ever be achieved – hence, the coupling of anxiety and lack. We cannot *not* lack diversity. That would be the equivalent of symbolic completeness, which would deny us our desire(s) and leave us with the only option left: the anxious position of always falling short of what we desire in order to keep desiring and cover up the lack.

As Dickson (2011, 320) argues, anxiety in relation to “symbolic completeness” is experienced when lack itself is lacking, i.e. the anxious subject position – granted by the Other – of lacking lack, thereby being cut off from desire as well as from *jouissance*. The lack in organisational diversity, as will be exemplified in the analysis, creates such anxiety because the *jouissance* of ‘juggling differences’ in the organisations represented turns out not to be what is desired at all. The categorical (re)presentations of diversity are semblances of desire, i.e. sequential significations of difference with no consistently corresponding signified. So each signifier resembles something signified, but there is no consistency to the signified diversity, which as a result becomes formless. The interviewees are, consequently, left with a feeling of emptiness while chasing new answers to their diversity dilemmas. When introducing the concept of diversity, the organisations simultaneously introduce a lack and hence a desire too. The fantasy of becoming ever more diverse fills in the symbolic space that is the desire, meaning that semblance of desire for diversity, paradoxically, becomes the symbolic solution to restoring the lack that it itself causes. Simultaneously, we may view the semblance of desire for particular forms of diversity as a symbolic death drive, because if we ever were to enjoy what we desire, this distinctive side to diversity can no longer be desired. With a

nod to our Derridian conception of paradox, we can boil down the theoretical insights to the following statement: diversity is what it is not.

Methodology

The empirical material for this paper consists of interviews conducted in 37 organisations in Denmark. It was initiated as an open-ended study about diversity work among Danish organisations that had signed the Charter for More Women in Management. The charter was an initiative introduced by the minister for equality. By signing the charter, which was done voluntarily, the organisations committed themselves to submitting to the ministry an annual baseline report that addressed the current status of women in management positions, the goals for increasing that number and how those goals should be reached. Of the 110 organisations that signed this charter (Kvinder i Ledelse 2013), 37 volunteered to be part of the study by granting us one or two interviews with top management. Since they volunteered, one could assume that these 37 organisations were also the ones with the best results. However, very few organisations had seen any real results from their initiatives, and in some the CEO/HR director could not even remember having signed the charter.

Data collection

The purpose of the qualitative analysis was to get an insight into concrete experiences and motivational factors, i.e. personal stories and narratives (e.g. Czarniawska 2000) of the interviewee, rather than getting knowledge about the structures and programmes in the organisation. To access these personal accounts, the interview style was open and structured only minimally following the assertion that opinions and underlying norms surface more easily in a conversation if the respondents are allowed to articulate the issues they find relevant (e.g. Kvale 1996). For that reason, the interviewer did not follow an interview guide with an exhaustive list of predefined questions. Rather, the principal task of the interviewer was to demonstrate the ability to ask about the issues that became topical. Each interview therefore started out with a general question about the background and previous career steps of the interviewee. Despite the open format, the interviewer was still tasked with guiding the respondent through the following themes: 1) personal information, including background, leadership style, competences, work-life

balance, values and attitude towards diversity; and 2) company-specific information, including talent management, diversity schemes/programmes, employee development, organisational culture, subcultures and values.

We conducted 1–2 interviews in each of the 37 organisations – 45 interviews in total. The interviewees were all top managers, and for almost half of the organisations, one respondent was the administrative director/CEO. When possible, both a man and a woman were interviewed. In total 23 men and 22 women were interviewed. The interviews lasted between 1 and 2.5 hours. All interviews (with the exception of four that, for logistical reasons, were conducted over the phone) were conducted personally at the office of the respondent or in a meeting room and were recorded and transcribed. For the purposes of anonymity, none of the extracts that are used in the analysis mention any names. Only gender and, in certain instances where relevant, the type of organisation are stated in the quotes. The citations have been edited for empty words, spoken language and detached clauses, but otherwise appear in full, as expressed by the interviewees.

Data analysis

As all interviews had the Charter for More Women in Management as their common denominator, gender diversity was naturally cast as central to the discussion. However, the interviews were not solely about gender diversity, but about diversity more generally. Gender diversity – along with ethnic diversity – is the typical contextual translation of diversity in Denmark. The former is likely to be associated with women's access to top management (Romani et al. 2016), whereas the latter was adopted due to perceived integration needs as a direct response to recent immigration waves (Holck and Muhr 2017). In our case, as the conversation matured, the specific gender focus was replaced by a broader and more general discussion about diversity.

Following the idea of El-Sawad et al. (2004) about contradictory 'doublethink', where mutually exclusive understandings of diversity seem to apply at the same time as unconscious processes, we initially grouped all excerpts in which the interviewees were struggling to come to terms with the ontology of diversity in their respective organisations. Thus, in our first-level coding, we were sensitive towards moments of self-

contradiction and the emergence of paradoxes. These were then, as part of the second-level coding, grouped and regrouped into categories that in different, yet related, ways all pointed in the direction of a lacking, i.e. incomplete, conceptualisation of diversity. The structure of the analysis reflects these coded categories for lack. The subsequent discussion problematises the symptomatic presence of anxiety as a consequence of the lack in diversity. The psychoanalytic diagnosis of diversity as lack means that the interviewees in this study, as we shall see, fall short of their dreams of organisational diversity. One type of anxiety was not caught on tape, but was revealed when the recorder was turned off, as several interviewees expressed relief that the interview had come to an end. They had been anxious for the entire duration of the interview that they were to be corrected in their opinions about and approaches to diversity issues.

Failed diversity: An analysis

While these overt expressions of anxiety were heuristic to our approach to and understanding of the data, the contribution of this paper lies with a more tacit form of anxiety that is linked with lacking tangible results due to failing diversity programmes. With 'tacit' we want to distinguish this Lacanian form of anxiety from the example mentioned above, which could be coded as a somewhat 'common-sense' manifestation of anxiety due to its apparent expression. Hence, organisational anxiety as presented in this analysis is to be viewed as a symptom of the lack in diversity and not as a product of what is actually done. The point is that this distinct form of anxiety is the emotional expression of experiencing first-hand that out of something (i.e. signing the charter) comes nothing, or at least not necessarily what was desired in the first place. The anxiety instantiates the organisations' failed diversity management practices. The companies that took part in the study generally experienced a lack of results from their gender diversity programmes. As expressed by one of our interviewees:

I've been responsible for the company's work on diversity and equality for many years and the state of affairs is that not much has changed. In fact, nothing's happened.

Despite good intentions backed up by concrete efforts and allocation of resources for the promotion of organisational diversity, very few organisations experience results from their diversity efforts. Still, for most of the organisations, diversity management remains high on the agenda:

It's important to address diversity for several reasons. First, if you believe that your company has a social responsibility, which we do, then I think you ought to reflect the society we live in. There has to be room for, and a fair treatment of, all of us, no matter who we are. Second come all the advantages in making room for diversity, as we may need to attract certain competences and bring out the best in our employees. And they become much better at their job if they can just be who they are.

Diversity becomes a question of ensuring that the organisation does not work against people who are supposed to have this specificity. In other words, diversity is also about avoiding the fact that people are discriminated against on the grounds of their perceived differences. It is, for the same reason, impossible to reap the fruits of the work, as the criterion for success necessarily must be to have prevented something from happening. Paradoxically, it seems, the only way to make the results known would be to discontinue the efforts. Quite ironically, the tangible results reveal themselves only the moment we cease to produce any, and even then, there is no way of knowing the causality – which effect produces what outcome, or what outcome has which effect.

The combination of perceiving diversity as important and not seeing any results leaves the organisations in a sort of vacuum. This vacuum, we argue, is constructed not only from the fact that they see little results, but also by the fact that they do not really know how to define what it is they desire results from. It is therefore not only organisational diversity programmes that collapse, but also the very idea and definition of diversity. Still, since this is a political agenda, and as such is likely to present itself as a desirable agenda too, diversity remains topical even though the results seem to slip through the fingers of the interviewees. This is not to suggest that desirability automatically follows the political, but simply to acknowledge that subjects may experience a political issue as a desire of the

Other. In the remainder of the analysis, we argue that in order to understand the lack of results, we first need to focus on what results are desired, i.e. the signified semblance of desire and how this construction influences the possibilities for the organisations to manage diversity. Thus, we take a step back and focus on how the organisations construct the diversity they desire, how they make sense of not achieving the desired results, why and how they keep desiring diversity as an organisational goal, and what this means for their ability to actually manage diversity.

In order to show the many and multifaceted ways in which diversity emerges as a psychoanalytic lack, we have structured the analysis around five subsections, each forming a part of our argument that the lack in diversity leads to organisational anxiety, as discussed in the continuation of the analysis. The respective analytical subsections address 1) the struggle to make diversity about demography and hence the innumerable measures that may count as diversity and 2) how diversity therefore comes to depend on the meaning assigned to it by the respondents. We then 3) go from women in management to diversity, and back again, to show 4) the disappearance of diversity as well as 5) a desire–diversity incongruity, before moving on to a discussion of how diversity may attract the attention of management even without any ontological backing due to it representing nothing more than a psychoanalytic lack. Put differently, diversity is the cause *and* the object of organisational desires and therefore also the possibility *and* the limitation to *jouissance* and the related experiences of anxiety.

The struggle to make diversity about demography

Although diversity is desired, it is for most interviewees very difficult to explain what ‘kind of’ diversity they are looking for. One reason for this is the difficulty around explaining how different people should be in order to compose the ‘right’ mix of diversity. One example is the one below from a director in a ministry. Prior to the extract in the quote, he has stressed how they, in his ministry, are always on the lookout for young talented people who can think differently and out of the box. He struggles, however, to explain how different they ideally should (or are allowed to) be:

It's not like you're not allowed to have your own professional opinion, but it's best if you say the right things. You should not start sounding too much like an NGO representative during a meeting with the minister. Well, the ministry has room for differences, but it's [swearing] difficult, because it disturbs our otherwise systematic way of working. My point is, if you're a real prima donna and think your opinion is better than that of others, then you're not material for a ministry that's very hierarchical.

Thus, although they are looking for people with different mindsets, these people should not be too independent. Nor should they be too diverse in their mindset, as the ministry still needs people to align themselves and respect formal hierarchies. Note how diversity becomes conformity, because the ministry in question only welcomes diversity as long as it does not challenge current organisational functioning. As another respondent expresses it:

As I see it, we'd like to be more international, but with a Danish mindset.

In other words, we should be different, but all think alike. Heterodoxy in professional opinion is thought to pose a threat to the systemic forms of conduct in the organisation and is thus appreciated only when it is the 'right' form of heterodoxy. Diversity is therefore assimilated into being diverse on the organisation's premises. However, the problem here is that the premises are not known, and the 'right' form of diversity is therefore doomed to be something that one can only have an idea about, but never fulfil: a lack. Moreover, the understanding of diversity as a set of different opinions waters down the idea of what comes to count as diverse, perhaps best illustrated in a follow-up comment from the same interviewee when describing his work team:

The best part is that we're a team of Danes and other people from Scandinavia and then one Spaniard just for the sake of diversity.

Thus, even though he spends a lot of time explaining how important diversity is, because he cannot seem to define it in any absolute sense (as the quote above shows), he ends up

making a joke about how diversity in reality is that they have employed one “Spaniard”. The conceptual precision in diversity is watered down.

Because of this need to have concrete parameters for diversity (to not see it dilute and disappear), many respondents end up seeking help in ‘popular’ diversity categories, such as gender, ethnicity and (dis)ability, when going from general talk about how important diversity is to actually explaining what it is and how they manage it in their organisation.

To cover the full range of diversity, we’ve tried to come up with a lot of descriptive words for it and came to the conclusion that what’s important to us is to have young as well as older employees, different nationalities, and both women and men.

Another respondent easily points out gender, age and ethnicity as – using his words – the “typical three diversity aspects”. He, however, “cannot decide if disabled should be included too”.

No matter how diversity is defined, however, it is important for the respondents that it is understood as a way of thinking and as bringing different competencies to the table. It is in this sense explicitly linked to the business-case argument for diversity. It needs to be linked to value:

I’ve taken chances and hired new employees who had slightly different profiles compared to previous candidates. This approach has brought valuable diversity to the team and goes beyond gender, as it also considers industrial and educational backgrounds, nationality, and so on.

Because the focus is on value, and this cannot be linked directly to the diversity categories, diversity comes to mean anything and therefore nothing, as further exemplified in another response:

We're a very diverse organisation. We have both skilled and non-skilled workers, clerks, lawyers, biologists, engineers, academics, and people with a more technical background. We have a very broad spectrum of people on different collective agreements represented here.

When asked why he finds it important for the organisation to be diverse, he adds that it is “not solely about gender balance, but more a question of having access to the right set of competences”.

So, in an attempt to become ever more diversified, the organisations add ever more attributes and can, in theory, present infinite dimensions that may count as diversity. The criterion for what is judged as diverse is getting so broad that basically anything is about diversity. But if everything is diverse, then is anything really diverse at all? The lack that the diversity focus installs in the organisations also gives birth to a desire for obtaining diversity. What diversity is, however, depends on how the respondents fantasise about diversity, as these fantasies teach them how to desire. Once a certain aspect of diversity is perceived as realised – as in the case of having more women in management – the interviewees get the sensation that that was not it; there has to be more to diversity than just women or, to give another example, the ethnic composition of the workforce. Consequently, the respondents never get to enjoy diversity in full and thus find themselves in an anxious position where their anxiousness grows as they – in the words of Dickson (2011, 321, italics in original) – “are constantly let down by the *jouissance*”, since it is never satisfying. The implication is that the respondents are cheated *not* of their *jouissance*, but of what they assume the *jouissance* signifies. The lack of diversity is thereby exposed, and to cover up this lack, more and more layers of diversity are added, which is a form of conceptual stretching that dilutes the understanding of the phenomenon.

Diversity therefore depends

Because of this difficulty in labelling diversity – and at the same time also what seems like a very strong need for such a label – there is, in theory, but also empirically, it seems, no limit to what socio-demographic attributes may fall under the diversity umbrella. Which variables may count are limited only by imagination – or fantasy, to be more precise. Yet,

the radical contingency of social categories allows for some 'differences' to be more visible than others. These visible diversity markers, e.g. man/woman, are, due to their visibility, more likely to be chosen as indicators of diversity, as is also evident in our data set:

When I think about diversity in management, I have a broader focus in mind than gender balance between men and women. But it's just the easiest thing to spot.

As the sex ratio in an organisation gets ever more balanced, other parameters will, in the place of gender, offer themselves as viable means for defining differences between organisational subjects. If diversity is a question of having an equal number of men and women throughout the organisation, then a gender-balanced workforce will present itself as symbolic completeness, which in return will put the subject in the anxious position of lacking lack – the very catalyst for the semblance of desire. The point being that if the organisation were to achieve an equal representation of women and men, the next thing appears as the object of desire, as a semblance of desire. So desire as it were remains the same, the elusive object-cause of desire, whereas semblances of desire – while also elusive – are different in the sense that they can be signified. This precarious situation of lacking lack, as we shall see, is avoided by turning diversity into something else, into a different semblance of desire. Thus, what gets to constitute diversity depends. We can for that reason never be diverse in any absolute sense of the word; it is a continuous effort and perhaps for that reason better described as something one does, not something one is, since diversity becomes the very unconscious process of desiring the *objet petit a*. This is illustrated in the following scenario:

It was the first time that I was part of a team where it was almost 50/50 between men and women. I can remember that at some point I had to hire a couple of new employees, and at first I hired a man, because he was best qualified. But next I found myself in a situation where I had two candidates – a man and a woman – and both were equally qualified, so I ended up employing the woman because she would help maintain the diversity.

The arbitrariness of the diversity concept becomes even clearer when, later on, the same interviewee talks about how they report on diversity in his organisation: by counting the number of women overall, and women in management in particular.

We are sometimes accused of being too homogenous. That's just not the case. We are, in fact, a very diverse company because [company name] as a workplace has two very different professional groups represented. And if we take a closer look at the one pillar, then women make up roughly 50 per cent of our staff. We've also got a rather large share of women managers in this part of the organisation. I totally get that we're not doing quite as well if we zoom in on the other professional pillar. But sometimes you just have to see the full picture.

The full picture, of course, being the first pillar only, according to the interviewee, since this pillar alone represents the diversity picture that he refers to. This ambiguity in diversity as a concept furthermore drives him to benchmark his organisation, which is a public institution, against private companies that appear to enjoy exactly the kind of diversity that he does not.

You have to keep in mind that when accounting for the number of women in management, we've got quite a challenge as regards how we define management. Our managers are defined as the head of sections. But you have an entirely different management structure in many private companies, and if we were to copy that structure, the number of women with management responsibilities in our organisation would automatically go up.

Private companies, not having to comply with the formal bureaucratic structures of public institutions, thus emerge as an Other that appears to rob the interviewee of his *jouissance*, given that the Other is always ascribed with possessing the *objet petit a* – as is also evident in the quote where the private companies are thought to enjoy a greater number of women in management and hence are found to be more diverse for that reason. The respondent's perception of the Other forms a negative ideal, which he and the organisation he represents are excluded from. The ideal, however, presents an unpleasant

reality nonetheless, because the private companies seem to enjoy it at the cost of the interviewee. That diversity, in other words, keeps the interviewee in a lacking position where he may never obtain the kind of diversity that is the cause of his desire. For if he did, the notion of diversity would simply change, which we now elaborate further.

From women in management to diversity – and back again

While the interviewee in the quote above seems aware of the contingency in diversity – that its meaning and what it signifies varies and may change depending on context – she fails to realise her own role in making this change. If desiring a certain form of diversity, one easily risks – in the quest to obtain this object-cause of desire – making that particular form of diversity part of the socio-ideological world that shapes the corporate reality. As we shall see in the following quotes, this process of making sense of diversity tends to determine what comes to represent diversity and, more importantly, what is not signified in the term.

The reason why we're working with diversity and more women in management is that we need to attract the best managers. That's the overall agenda and how we should talk about diversity. It would be wrong to say that we need more equality and for that reason need to have some more women on board. That's not the right message for our company. The right message would be that we want the best managers in order for us to meet our business targets. And when that is the case, it only makes sense to source talent from either sex, because the skills we are looking for are equally distributed among men and women.

Women are in this quote paradoxically cast as non-diverse (diversity *and* more women) while being the only diversity focus of the company. The political construction of diversity becomes even clearer when another interviewee explains how they are currently, in her company, discussing whether to include women in management in their diversity focus or if the lack of women managers should be an issue of its own. "The one does not exclude the other", as the interviewee remarks. Still, women come to embody diversity in the organisation – a process that gives birth to certain feelings of anxiety among men, who may roam unnoticed, yet come to constitute the counterparty to a diverse organisation.

Consequently, an illusion of reversed discrimination may also roam freely, because men come to realise that they in their embodiment of the 'wrong' gender are no longer the *objet petit a*. Men's desire, like everybody else's desire, is, however, desire itself, meaning all they desire is to be desired by the big Other, which in this case would be the organisation they work for, as is illustrated in the next quote, where some men oppose a women-only approach to diversity.

When I was in charge of diversity and equality, we now and then succeeded in providing training for groups of women. But this practice was very rare. I think we did it twice and were in both instances told to stop even before we had started, because a lot of men got angry about us granting women special treatment.

Women of the Danish private and public companies represented in this study therefore, in many cases, come to denote diversity. And diversity, as a result, signifies women. The interest that these organisations take in diversity rests on a dichotomous premise where being male is the norm, against which women appear as exotic, different and diverse beings. The inclusion of more women in management positions in that regard comes down to a question of 'otherness', i.e. of diversity as difference being valued over 'more of the same', as eloquently expressed by one of the interviewees when she states that they "do not want too many Huey, Dewey and Louies" ⁱⁱ in her organisation. Another interviewee puts it this way:

A few years back we actually shifted our focus from more women in management to diversity, because the agenda of having more women in management has kind of expired. What we wish to achieve with more women in management is really equal opportunities for all. If we had that, we would also automatically see more women in management positions as well as more ethnic minorities, people with a different sexual orientation, and so on. That is also why I reacted when you [the interviewer] mentioned women's breakfast ... we have sort of overcome that approach and are now more into the world of diversity, right?

Women in management are, if taking the statement above at face value, just one of many symbolic expressions of diversity. Interestingly, however, the interviewee discloses his uncertainty as to whether diversity – as the new focal point of the organisation – can encompass women in management too. When exploring the dynamics of identification with Lacan, a phrase such as ‘right’, as seen at the very end of the quote, becomes a moment in which the interviewee calls for the interviewer as the Other to, in this case, confirm the answer given (Hoedemaekers 2010). Since the respondent’s desire is the Other’s desire, he simply does not know if his object-cause of desire is to have more women in management positions or merely more diversity per se. Of course, the Other would not know either, since the Other’s desire is also that of the Other. That is to say, the Other is not another subject that one can demand answers from, but is to be understood as the Symbolic order of language as discourse, where the unconscious is found. Therefore, another plausible interpretation of the term ‘right’ could be that the interviewee is unconsciously agreeing with himself, as the question mark changes to an exclamation mark. No matter what, the object-cause of desire remains elusive to the interviewee. The semblance of desire expressed in the quote is elusive too, but can, as is evident from the quote, be signified as women in management or ethnic minorities or different sexual orientations.

The disappearance of diversity

Exactly what is desired in diversity is, as we have shown in our examples so far, an empirical question, and the lack in diversity – the fact that diversity becomes an empty signifier with no signified – allows our interviewees to mould it in accordance with their fantasies of having either more women in management; *or* more ethnic minorities; *or* different educational backgrounds, skills and competences; *or* a bit of everything. A Lacanian reading of diversity turns the concept into a capitalised Signifier by which we deduce that diversity, as a Signifier, denotes not ‘its’ signified, but another Signifier (Lacan 2006, 412–419). In other words, there is a barrier to meaning, a division that will not allow our interviewees – or us as researchers for that matter – to arrive at any fixed or stable signification, hence diversity as lack. Moreover, the “retroactive character of the effect of signification with respect to the signifier” (Žižek 1989, 112) tells us that the effect of meaning is always produced backwards. By this we understand that determination of

meaning happens retroactively. The implication of this insight is that there is no diversity *per se*. What gives substance to diversity is the interviewees' continuous effort to, for instance, have more women leaders, in which case diversity becomes all about that particular effort.

Therefore, the way in which diversity disappears is when the concept is created as an ideal that the organisations lack, which is also why the interviewees' semblances of desire can be directed towards diversity that, as the *objet petit a*, remains unobtainable. If having more women managers is the ideal, it is also what is currently lacking. So to include and make room for diverse ways of being, the organisations initially exclude diversity as being different. Diversity is thus marginalised as being inherently different, and it is essentialised – that is, made innate through socio-demographic categories such as 'women'. It is as such a suspension that exposes belonging, as fleshed out in the following quote, where the interviewee relies on the man/woman binary to make sense of diversity as difference, since she would otherwise have to acknowledge that diversity is nothing in or of itself:

Men and women are different. It's as simple as that. And we do things in different ways. That you can see when making decisions. When I talk to other women about this, it's a common feature that men come to a decision faster than women do. Let's take recruitment as an example: men already know what type of employee they want. They have a quick look at the field of applicants, decide which one they want, and then they choose him. Whereas my experience with women is that they perhaps are a little more thorough in the preparation phase; they consult the people who will work with the new employee and perhaps even have them join the interview as well as the decision-making process. Those are two very different ways of hiring. And they are, as I see it, related to gender.

What happens in the quote above, however, is that women's differences become alike. Women as a group are expected all to be the same. A paradox, which also presents itself when another interviewee talks about equality and diversity without making any distinction between the two:

So I worked with equality and diversity and a whole lot else. That year we had a few cases that caught the interest of the media. One was about ethnic minorities. Another one was about our internal investigation of offensive behaviour towards women. God knows the report didn't show the best results, but we were prepared and got the right media coverage.

Equality and diversity seem to go hand in hand, meaning diversity can signify both difference *and* sameness at the same time. Moreover, in the quote we also learn how diversity can take the form of a facade or even a masquerade to present a certain image, in this case to the media. The mask that the organisation wears when confronted with diversity issues is, in other words, false pretence, because if we were to search for the secret behind the mask we would find none – or at least a different story than the one told in the press.

In a Lacanian perspective, this image of diversity is the very organisation-ideal that the organisation strives towards, meaning it is not 'there' but merely a desired place to be; the point at which one allegedly will become whole. The following quote, which is from a representative of a trade union, highlights the importance of diversity as a desired ideal.

Previously we had campaigns against nuclear power, against the war in Vietnam, or to boycott South African products due to apartheid. Now we're running campaigns for women in management and against discrimination. It's a question of values. I believe that diversity will bring about a better world, but that we don't know for sure. So we just have to believe in it as a core value.

The trade union, as a value-/interest organisation, is dependent on its own construction of diversity as an ideal, without which it would be lacking lack and thereby also desire. The organisation-ideal, in the meantime, installs a lack and sets in motion the desire for diversity. Diversity thus comes to hold the promise of *jouissance* while guaranteeing the symbolic existence of the organisation, which in its striving towards heterogeneity can understand itself in dialectical opposition to homogeneity.

A desire–diversity incongruity

The analysis so far more than suggests that there is incongruence between what is desired in diversity and what one gets to enjoy in diversity. This is, we argue, due to the lack in diversity that, however, also makes diversity a desired object for the interviewees for several reasons. One is that the lack equips diversity with the quality of an empty signifier, meaning it can always be different from what it seems to be.

Our issue is not really equality; it's the lack of diverse perspectives. Well, those two issues are connected somehow, right? But we've got a lot of white men with similar experiences in life. So it's more about personality than it is about gender, right? There's of course also a cultural aspect to it.

However, the interviewees not only struggle with the ontological understanding of *what* diversity is and hence also how they are to approach diversity; they also struggle to argue *why* diversity can materialise as an object-cause of desire.

Diversity to me, besides having competent employees, is all about the societies in which we do business. If we're not diverse, we're out of sync with the reality that we live in.

Thus, diversity becomes a safeguard against missed business opportunities, which the next quote will elaborate further:

I don't find diversity important. It is our core activities that are important. So I prefer not to measure, say, the percentage of ethnic minorities among our staff. I'd rather just focus on the core services and the competences we need to provide those services. With that said, the citizens that we provide services to are diverse, so it is quite natural that our employees have to be diverse too.

The interviewee does not want to measure the diversity in her organisation in any numeric sense. Yet, that is exactly what management in her organisation committed itself

to do when it signed the charter for more women managers. Diversity is relevant to the organisation only insofar as it is relevant to core business. This so-called business case in diversity, however, can be self-refuting, as we shall see below, leaving the respondents with only the lack in diversity.

We usually say that we need to mirror our customers and the people that we trade with. Well, 80 per cent of those we do business with are men.

So where is the value-add in gender diversity? The interviewee continues arguing along the lines that more women in the organisation would, so to say, spice things up. Because his diversity focus is as such he, however, fails to see how organisational culture may conventionalise people (women) who might initially have been 'diverse' but need to downplay any heterogeneity to better fit the norms for being a good employee and/or manager.

I'm not saying that a company could be successful merely because it employs 50 dumb blondes. But I think it's outright wrong that when I look down the hallway, everybody's wearing the same suit as me, and the same white shirt. Well, mine is the latest fashion (laughing), but Christ that's boring to look at! And I don't get why it has to be that way. Maybe in some companies it makes sense that we all look alike – it's a tough nut to crack.

The lack in diversity allows the interviewee to stretch the concept and make it about dress code or even (hetero)sexual attraction. The conceptual stretching makes it impossible for the respondent to settle and enjoy what diversity is. Instead, he can only enjoy the symptom (anxiety) that is the semblances of desire for what diversity may become.

Concluding discussion

As other literature has also shown, diversity as a concept has developed into an ever-dissolving, yet desirable idea (of a fantasy) (Lorbiecki and Jack 2000; Schwabenland and Tomlinson 2015; Zanoni and Janssens 2004). Building on this paradoxical finding, we have illustrated empirically how the concept of diversity empties of signifiers, but

remains imagined and desired as if it did contain signifiers. The concept should as such be understood not as a thing in itself, but rather as similar to Lacan's reading of Freud's "das Ding" (Lacan 2006, 550) – that is, a signifier with no signified, and hence, to an extent, some-thing beyond signification that escapes us. Our theoretical contribution, then, lies with the unfolding of the paradox in diversity studies by means of psychoanalytical theory, in particular Lacan's concepts of desire and lack, whose heuristic applicability has helped us explain *how* diversity can remain desired while constantly (unknowingly) dissolving into no-thing. In doing this, the conclusions to this paper are threefold, as we have theorised and illustrated 1) the way organisational diversity is constructed around a psychoanalytic lack, 2) how the endless desire for diversity produces organisational anxiety as a symptom of that lack, and 3) how it then obstructs (the desired) productive work with diversity. Below, we will elaborate on and discuss each contribution in turn and, eventually, give our thoughts as to how to appreciate the 'openness' of diversity that the lack–desire relationship gives birth to.

Firstly, building on critical diversity studies and in particular Schwabenland and Tomlinson's (2015) analysis of diversity as phantasmagoria, we have investigated the way the concept of diversity is impossible to define in any absolute sense, and hence impossible to evaluate too, because it is always-already in the process of becoming something else. Indeed, it is not just impossible to define; impossibility is what determines diversity as lack. We have extended this discussion by diving deeper into the psychoanalytical dynamics of the ways in which diversity as a concept is constructed and understood around a fundamental lack. By conceptualising diversity as constituted by lack, we have therefore expanded the knowledge of how and why diversity can be perceived as phantasmagorical.

Whereas Schwabenland and Tomlinson (2015, 1930) develop "a greater understanding of the emotional experiences that accompany the practice of diversity management", we have been able to take a step behind the emotional displays per se, to explain how unconscious processes turn diversity into a lacking chain of signifiers with no signifieds, and how this lacking property sets in motion an insatiable desire, not for more, but for something else, something different. Diversity as the object of an organisation is thus

never desired in itself. The object of diversity is somehow missing to our respondents and always will be due to the elusiveness of the concept, prompted by the lack. The empirical significations in the analysis are thus presented not as expressions of desire, but rather as *semblances* of desire, to better grasp how the interviewees anxiously hop from signifier to signifier in an attempt to fill in the lack.

Second, our analysis has revealed how lack, as central to diversity, must necessarily bring about a sensation of anxiety that is symptomatic of the constitutively empty form of diversity. Anxiety is therefore related to the uncertainty associated with the traumatic experience of always falling short of what is desired in an object – in this case, the experience of failed diversity due to the conceptual stretching, which dilutes the idea of diversity while it remains imagined and hence desired nonetheless. Accordingly, we have presented organisational anxiety as a symptom of that issue.

Importantly, the symptomatic anxiety, which emerges as a product of the lack in diversity, is ambiguous, as it stems from the continuous emptying of the signifying chain in relation to the concept. The experiences of anxiety in diversity as a concept being given only by a psychoanalytic lack are twofold. By conceptualising diversity as psychoanalytic we wish to convey a negative ontology that purports an emptiness or absence as the structuring function at the centre of the diversity concept. One state of anxiousness in this regard is found in the incongruence between what is desired in diversity and what one actually gets to enjoy in it. From Lacan we understand that there is always more to diversity as the object-cause of desire than what can possibly be expressed symbolically in any organisational context. In fact, what is desired is desire itself, so as soon as a certain symbolisation of diversity, i.e. a specific semblance of desire, seems to be realised, our interviewees do not experience *jouissance*, since diversity then changes into something else. At least, they do not get to enjoy what they assume *jouissance* to signify. The moment of enjoyment is for that reason as much a moment of loathing, because of the perceived discrepancy between what (we think) we desire and what we get. Diversity is always lacking, and it will as a result never reach any symbolic closure. It is, as also noted by Jones and Spicer (2005, 237), an object-cause of desire only insofar as we never achieve it, for if we do, it collapses, falls apart, and is changed inexplicably into a “gift of shit” (see also

Lacan 1977, 268). The alternative, however, is symbolic completeness, which would give – albeit only momentarily – a sensation of lacking the lack in diversity, in which case the organisation would come to falsely believe it had already arrived at the one true meaning of the concept, only to realise shortly after that that was not it either. Lacking lack keeps one from desiring, and, therefore, from the very process of becoming whole as a diverse organisation. Thus, the only option left is for the interviewees to enjoy the ride, i.e. enjoy the symptom that is their desire and the anxiety that follows.

Third, one cannot *not* lack diversity, since that would be the equivalent of symbolic completeness, which would deny us our desire(s). This insight leaves us with only one option: the anxious position of always falling short of what is desired in order to keep desiring and cover up the lack. If not complete symbolically, the organisation will, by inference, be incomplete. In the interviews presented there is a limit to representation due to the conceptual stretching of diversity, which is possible, as the lack turns diversity into an empty signifier with no corresponding signified. Anxiety is, in this connection, found in-between the Imaginary, i.e. the fantasies that teach the interviewees what to desire in diversity, and the Real, which renders real that not everything in diversity can be symbolised. From a Lacanian point of view, our interviewees are, despite continuous efforts, never to enjoy diversity in any absolute sense, as the desire then would reveal itself as a death drive. So *either* they never obtain the *objet petit a*, in which case they keep fantasising to animate the object-cause of their desire; *or* they actually do reach what they think they desire in the object of diversity, instantaneously realising that it could not make them whole – that this kind of diversity was a fantasy all along, which only moments after is replaced with another fantasy driving the semblances of desire for (an-)other (un)obtainable idea(s) of diversity. Simply not desiring at all is not an option.

Some of the respondents represented in this study seem to know that what they are doing is somehow falling short of what they want to do in terms of diversity. Yet, they are still doing it. They show signs of being aware that their current efforts alone do not grant them the object-cause of their desire, which is – as one interviewee also explains – but one reason why they have agreed to take part in the study in the first place. They hope that the interviewer as the big Other can tell them exactly what is expected of them – that is,

precisely what to desire in diversity, not to mention how it ought to be managed. In the meantime, they keep acting as if they were completely unaware of the limitations of existing diversity initiatives, meaning the illusion is not necessarily in their lack of knowledge but, as Žižek (2012, 315–316) would formulate it, in the social reality that their activities bring about.

Conclusively, we would therefore like to suggest further investigation of these organisational realities with the aim of rejecting the symptom treatment that is the existing management practices of organising diversity. Anxiety is not the problem; it is merely a symptom of a problem. The problem, or what can be problematised, is the failure of current diversity programmes. And the lack in diversity is the psychoanalytic diagnosis of that problem. Maybe it is time to replace symptom management with symptom enjoyment. By doing this, we turn anxiety into excitement by appreciating what Driver (2013, 419) calls “the ever-present emancipatory potential of the power of lack”. Although keeping the organisations from arriving at a positive form of diversity, it is, in fact, the power of lack that ensures the continued attraction of diversity issues in spite of difficulties with living the dream of being a diverse organisation. We argue that a move from symptom management to enjoyment would mean that one may come to terms with the loathing side to *jouissance* when working with diversity in a way that also acknowledges the intricacy of power and identity, which might provoke and challenge the status quo – in other words, unleash the emancipatory power of lack (Driver 2013, 418). As we have fleshed out in the analysis, doing something just to alleviate feelings of anxiety risks falling short of what is intended. Enjoying the symptomatic anxiety that the lack of diversity brings about may grant new meaningful desires and fantasies of organisational diversity.

Our advocacy for exploring the power of lack should, however, not blindfold us as scholars or as practitioners to the fact that the consequences of non-diverse organisations are material. For the managers we interviewed – who were, by and large, white, middle-aged and heterosexual and who, in terms of income, decision-making power and political clout, belonged to an ‘elite’ class – it is clearly a privilege that they can choose whether or not (and in what way) to engage with diversity issues. By this we mean to acknowledge how

the option of embracing the emancipatory power of lack assumes a position of (white, elite) privilege that is reinforced by the fact that diversity can even appear as lack to the managers. Marginalised employees, i.e. the ones who become the attraction of the managers' desires, have diversity imposed upon them – marked on their bodies, as they become diverse in this gaze of the other (see Özkazanc-Pan 2008 for an excellent analysis of how difference is constructed as a result of the constructed distinction between “the West and the rest of the world”). They are as such always-already engaged whether they want to be or not.

Ultimately, and comparably to both Driver (2013) and Schwabenland and Tomlinsson (2015), we do *not* see diversity as lack and the anxiety it produces as inherently or exclusively negative. One way of relating to the detrimental effects of lack that we spell out in the analysis is to let work with diversity languish in its own conditions of (im)possibility. Another way is to allow the lack to engender constructive and possibly transformative change. This perspective, however, entails that one enjoys our analytical presentation of the several and ambiguous meanings of diversity – and disregards the idea of there being one solution or a ‘quick fix’ in the pursuit of short-term gains. It is exactly this impossibility – that diversity is what it is not – that, at once, conditions the possibility of diversity. The lack of diversity opens our respondents' eyes to the ‘becomingness’ of diversity, which, to us, suggests that an organisation cannot be diverse *per se*, but that expressions of diversity are fantasies of a desired place to be – a dream scenario. The concept can therefore be heuristic as a travelling companion for a (diversity) manager to (re)discover alternative approaches to organisational diversity. To critical diversity scholars, such a companionship would entail revisiting the literature on diversity, focusing on diversity *both* as a concept *and* as an object of empirical inquiry.

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ⁱ When considered in a so-called Western context.

ⁱⁱ The 'Huey, Dewey and Louie effect' (in Danish *Rip, Rap og Rup-effekten*) is a common phrase used in Denmark to denote the tendency among (male) leaders to hire people similar to themselves, especially for management positions, to the detriment of women, who remain underrepresented (see e.g. the Danish online dictionary: <http://ordnet.dk/ddo/ordbog?query=Rip-Rap-Rup-effekt>).