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Gender Interventions in the Dutch Police Force: Resistance as a Tool for Change?

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\textbf{ABSTRACT}

Previous studies have documented strong resistance towards gender interventions. By contributing to theories on gender change, this paper increases our understanding of the reasons for this resistance and looks at how this resistance can be made productive in gendered interventions. Drawing on a case study in the Dutch Police force, the authors use case reconstructions of appointments to examine the introduction and reception of gender quota. They show how radical interventions such as quota can help to uncover the subtlety of gender inequality practices and make persistent and implicit stereotypes visible and discussable; they also show how radical interventions can trigger the reflexivity of actors. They conclude that the resistance against the interventions can be made productive because it allows for alternative construction of values. An analysis of resistance to gender interventions can contribute to diagnosing problems in the strategising and implementation of these interventions.

\textbf{KEYWORDS}

Gender; quota; radical interventions; inequality

\section*{Introduction}

How to change gender inequalities has been the focus of feminist organisation scholars for many years (Calás & Smircich, 2009; Eriksson-Zetterquist & Renemark, 2016; Nentwich, 2006; Williams, Muller, & Kilanski, 2012). Organisations are increasingly devoting more time, energy and money to the issue of gender equality; however, planned gender interventions have had very little effect (Kalev, Dobbin, & Kelly, 2006). This has been partly attributed to multiple stakeholders resisting these gender equality change interventions (Lee-Gosselin, Briere, & Ann, 2010; Lombardo & Mergaert, 2013; Wasserman, Gallegos, & Ferdman, 2008). This resistance can be implicit, such as paying lip service to gender equality policies, but also failing to act (Hoobler, 2005; Hoque & Noon, 2004). For instance, Wahl and Holgersson (2003) show that managers often express positive attitudes toward gender equality and diversity as principles but predominantly resist when it comes to actual actions to change the gender order. Gender equality plans often have objectives that are difficult to assess and may therefore remain free of actual obligation. These policies then merely operate as a ‘salve to the organisation conscience’ (Knight & Pritchard, 2004).
Resistance can also be expressed more explicitly by, for example, trivialising gender equality or denying the need for gender change (Benschop & Verloo, 2006; Lombardo & Mergaert, 2013).

Studies on gender interventions predominantly frame resistance as something to be avoided and overcome. Resistance would impede the effectiveness of interventions and create antagonists for the change project. However, to understand why so little progress has been made, it is interesting to examine how people experience change projects and to understand why people resist these interventions (Van den Brink, 2015; Bergqvist, Bjarngård, & Zetterberg, 2013). As Connell (2005) puts it: ‘[our task] is to recognize the reasons for resistance to gender equality, to find answers to the arguments advanced by opponents, and to find better solutions to the underlying social concerns that find expression through resistance to gender equality’ (p. 1803). In addition, the authors argue that there is a need for a better understanding of the potential productive role of resistance in gender and diversity organisational change. The authors therefore frame resistance as an expression of the complexities and challenges of diversity and exclusion efforts, rather than as a force to be silenced (Wasserman et al., 2008).

This paper aims to contribute to the literature on gender interventions by identifying resistance to a radical intervention and the authors explore how resistance can be made productive for the realisation of change. They draw on an empirical study on controversial, radical intervention strategies in the Dutch police force. They have investigated the responses to the controversial interventions based on a multiple case study of six appointment procedures for top management. Inspired by recent developments in theories on resistance in organisations that claim that resistance can be made productive for organisational change (Courpasson, Dany, & Clegg, 2012; Ford, Ford, & D’Amelio, 2008; Thomas & Hardy, 2011), the authors investigate how resistance can be more than a negative force in gender and diversity change interventions and how it can also be a driving force to delegitimise, destabilise and increase the visibility of gender inequalities. The authors examine whether radical interventions can help to uncover the subtlety of gender practices and make persistent and implicit stereotypes visible and discussable, and how radical interventions may trigger the reflexivity of actors and spur them into action.

In the first section of this paper, the authors review the recent literature on gender interventions and discuss the way this literature deals with resistance in change projects. The second section focuses on the research method and the third section presents the data. The analysis of the responses to the interventions shows that the change agents and the resisting subjects invoke the same values to legitimise and resist the interventions. The authors find that the core values of quality, fairness and transparency are intertwined with positions and interests, and these must be taken into account in efforts to change organisations towards greater equality. In the final part of the paper, the authors reflect on the contributions to the literature on gender interventions and organisational change.

**Gender Change in Organisations**

**Resistance Towards Gender Interventions**

While an ever-growing literature has addressed questions of gender in organisations over the years and the dynamics of gender inequality at work have been well
documented, much less is known about how to bring about effective gender change in organisations. Feminist interventions aim to accomplish gender change through social interactions and associated discourses that can reduce, dismantle, disrupt and challenge gender inequalities (Acker, 2000; Britton, 2000; Eriksson-Zetterquist & Renemark, 2016). However, the transition from analysis to effective intervention is not so easy, as illustrated by the different strategies for organisational change that have been developed since the 1970s. The literature shows that such strategies encounter many fundamental and practical hindrances (Walby, 2005) and do not always succeed. Different conceptualisations of goals (equal opportunity, gender neutrality or gender equality) and different diagnoses of the core problem (unequal treatment, lack of access to resources or gendered organisational processes) are among the fundamental problems (Benschop & Verloo, 2006). The most familiar practical problems are the fragmentation of interventions, their superficiality, their poor implementation and the fact that they address women only (Acker, 2000; Benschop & Verloo, 2006; Eriksson-Zetterquist & Renemark, 2016). However, an understudied problem is the persistent resistance to gender equality initiatives (Van den Brink, 2015; Bergqvist et al., 2013; Connell, 2005).

Studies of gender change report extensive resistance, a resistance that comes in many shapes and forms (Thomas & Plaut, 2008). Examples include men who resist women’s entry into previously masculine domains, challenges to the authority of women managers, the denial of problems with gender within the organisation (Connell, 2006; Kelly, Ammons, Chermark, & Moen, 2010; Martin, 2006), requests for research or training in order to avoid action (Eriksson-Zetterquist & Renemark, 2016) and attempts to escape involvement in gender change efforts (Benschop & Verloo, 2006; Lombardo & Mergaert, 2013). The literature shows that privileged groups are less in favour of gender interventions. Privileged professional men may resist the perceived loss of control (Ashcraft, 2005) over the allocation of those positions and refuse to accept their diminished chances to land such positions. Professional women may also resist the interventions as they want to be granted top positions because of their qualities, not because of their sex (Agocs & Burr, 1996; Heilman, Block, & Stathatos, 1997; Van den Brink & Stobbe, 2014). These arguments show that positions, interests and values are important triggers of resistance.

Resistance to change is typically strong when an organisation’s cultural norms, beliefs, attitudes and values are the target of change efforts. This is certainly the case with projects that target gender inequalities in organisational routines (Benschop & Verloo, 2006). Kirton and Greene (2015) label these interventions as ‘radical’ because they do not stop at ensuring equal opportunities, but aim at equality of outcome, even if direct interventions are needed to ensure this objective. This strategy acknowledges that some social groups face systematic discrimination from dominant groups and have to fight stereotypes and prejudice about their merits, abilities and skills at work that seriously impede their advancement to positions of power. Furthermore, the radical approach questions the neutrality of notions such as ‘skill’, ‘talent’ and ‘merit’, emphasising the socially constructed character of these notions and their effects on the organisational positions of minority groups. These questions lead to contested and political measures such as preferential selection and quotas to ensure a fair proportional representation and equal outcomes (Jewson & Mason, 1986).
Radical gender change initiatives, such as quota, are particularly likely to trigger unique reactions, emotions and behaviours in favour and against them (Benschop & Van den Brink, 2014; Glastra, 1999; Thomas & Plaut, 2008). Because of their radical nature, quota interventions are widely debated (Tienari, Holgersson, Merilainen, & Hook, 2009) and often meet hidden or open resistance or backlash (Krook, 2016). In the quota strategy, resistance is intrinsic, as it aims at disturbing the status quo and does not rely on consensus in the entire organisation. A quota is a (legal) tool to increase the numbers of under-represented groups in organisations or governments to correct historical underrepresentation. Quotas for women mean that they must constitute a certain number or percentage of the members of a body, whether it is a parliamentary assembly, a committee or a board of directors (Dahlerup, 2007). There has also been criticism: inviting more women to participate in existing organisations as workers or even as leaders, while maintaining existing values and ways of working, ‘will not equalize the inequitable impact of organizations on the lives of women and men’ (Rao, Stuart, & Kelleher, 1999, p. 11).

Avoiding Resistance

The underlying assumption is that resistance needs to be avoided. Some studies explicitly engaged with the issue of resistance and examined how to avoid resistance in gender change projects. For instance, Meyerson and Scully (1995) coin the notion of tempered radicals and Meyerson and Fletcher (2000) theorise effective gender change as ‘small wins’. These ideas emphasise the importance of gradual, incremental, even evolutionary change of gender in organisations and as such are contrasted with the radical revolutionary actions of the women’s movement against women’s subordination. Change is initiated from within the organisation, not by social movements outside the organisation. Tempered radicals are internal change agents with ambivalent identities as they identify with and are committed to their organisations and want to transform them at the same time (Meyerson & Scully, 1995, p. 586). Tempered radicals are well positioned to launch small wins by pursuing changes to make the workplace more equitable and inclusive without upsetting the organisation (Meyerson & Scully, 1995). The small wins approach is advocated because of its ability to prevent resistance against the changes. In these studies, resistance is seen as a barrier to change, as a hindrance and not as an intrinsic, or as the authors shall argue below even a productive, part of organisational change.

Productive Resistance?

Resistance is a key issue for organisation and management researchers who use critical perspectives; they have broadened the conceptualisation of resistance from formal organised opposition against the exercise of power (Kärreman & Alvesson, 2009; Pina e Cunha, Clegg, Rego, & Story, 2013; Prasad & Prasad, 2000), to more informal, routinised forms of resistance in everyday practice that are inherent in exercising power (Thomas & Davies, 2005), and power and resistance as co-constitutive, diffuse and multidimensional (Thomas, Sargent, & Hardy, 2011). Resistance is a form of power, implies agency and is likely to be expressed in a multitude of mundane actions and behaviours at the workplace (Prasad & Prasad, 2000, p. 388). Recent theories of resistance underscore the dialectical and discursive nature of resistance, highlighting local practices and the blurring of control and
resistance (Mumby, 2005). These theories emphasise how the meanings of power–resistance relations are negotiated in organisational change (Thomas & Hardy, 2011; Thomas et al., 2011). Furthermore, several authors have commented on the centrality of the change agent who was the one to label resistance as resistance (Ford et al., 2008; Piderit, 2000) and the portrayal of resistance as an adversarial and antagonistic process (Courpasson et al., 2012).

A recent strand of research argued that resistance can contribute productively to successful organisational change, as a reaction to the demonising of resistance as something to be avoided (Ford & Ford, 2010; Ford et al., 2008; Thomas & Hardy, 2011). For instance, Courpasson et al. (2012) show in their article on a bank in France that resisting activities can influence top management to achieve significant organisational change. Resistance is likely to be productive when it is couched as a challenge to normal power relations and founded in established, specific and legitimate power relations (p. 814). The authors adhere to this new development in theories on resistance in organisations and frame resistance as an expression of the complexities and challenges of diversity and exclusion efforts, rather than as a force to be silenced (Wasserman et al., 2008).

To sum up, the authors will investigate the responses to a controversial intervention – a quota – in the appointment procedures for top management. They will also investigate why this intervention is resisted and how it can also be a driving force to delegitimise, destabilise and increase the visibility of gender inequalities.

Methods

Data Collection

A research project on the role of gender and diversity in the current practices for the recruitment and selection of top police officers was commissioned by a project organisation to reconstruct the crucial decision moments and the crucial players. Six cases were selected in close consultation with the Police organisation. In all six cases, the project organisation had intervened in the process, with variable results. Criteria for selection were the level of the position (top management), the presence of an intervention by the task force and the appointment of a male/female candidate. All procedures were completed and the candidates appointed by the Queen as is customary for top police officers; most of the selected procedures were at the start of the intervention programme. For reasons of possible recognition due to their tokenism, no cases with ethnic minority candidates were selected.

For each case, five actors were interviewed about their view on the process and the intervention, including the candidate and members of the selection committee. Furthermore, the authors conducted a number of interviews with involved actors from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Management Development of the Police and the project organisation. The interviewees were asked to voice their opinion on the intervention and to identify the crucial moments in the process and the most influential actors, and highlight the arguments and criteria used to explain the choice of the nominated candidate. In total, the authors interviewed 29 police men and women. The interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, were recorded and fully transcribed. To validate the transcribed text, the interviews were sent back to the respondents for verification.
The authors analysed the data by combining information from different sources (documents and interviews). They employed the technique of content analysis to analyse the interview data (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). This method enabled them to reveal the different experiences with and opinions about the interventions. The primary approach was to code and analyse the data into key categories of interest, themes and terms. This first round of analysis revealed two central themes: how the project organisation intervened in selection processes and how these interventions targeted selection criteria for top positions. Second, the authors looked for patterns of variation within these themes. Interviewees’ discursive accounts are often ambiguous and conflicting rather than logical and coherent. In the analysis, the authors paid attention to what is said in a text, in what context it is said and whether variation occurs in a text. When dealing with the inconsistencies in and between texts, the authors discovered three different but related values: quality, fairness and transparency.

Radical Interventions

The Case of the Dutch Police Force

The Dutch police force has been actively engaged in gender and diversity management initiatives since the 1980s, but to little effect (Çankaya, 2015; Kop & Van der Wal, 2006). To force more visible and rapid change, the Minister of Internal Affairs introduced gender and diversity quota and made arrangements with the top management to raise the number of women and ethnic minorities to 25% in 2011 by marking special positions for minority groups. The rationale for this intervention was the bad track record of diversity in the Dutch police top and the aim of the Minister of Internal Affairs to realise the change in the period 2008–2011. This intervention concerns a collaboration project that is concerned with the inflow, career perspectives and retention of women and/or ethnic minorities in the police force and (inter)national career opportunities for the current top. The most radical and controversial part of the strategy concerns the 50% quota of women and/or ethnic minority among new hires for vacant top positions. The intervention strategy comprises concrete agreements with the police organisation about which functions are eligible for diversity candidates and a temporary project organisation that actively intervenes in recruitment and selection procedures, by suggesting suitable candidates, advising decision-makers through all stages of the process and monitoring the progress made. The project organisation is given the power to intervene in various stages of recruitment and selection procedures which go against the strictly regulated and complex appointment practices for top procedures. The interventions not only target the recruitment and selection procedures but also pertain to career opportunities for the current police top and to the development of leadership strategies for diversity.

The authors noticed a lot of material and immaterial support and political will from the top to realise the project’s goals. Crucial for the power dynamics in this case is the strong positioning of the Minister of Internal Affairs. Ultimately, the Minister had the final say and she held the police organisation responsible and accountable to actively search for and select diversity candidates. The project organisation was also equipped with ample resources in terms of staff, money and support to enable them to make a difference in the police organisation. As a result, women and ethnic minorities take up half of the
top appointments between 2008 and 2011, whereas earlier attempts to change the inclusiveness of the police culture did not result in a change in numbers.

Exploring the Responses to Gender Interventions

Most of the interviewees were positive about diversity management: respondents believed that diversity is a pivotal point of attention in the police force, both for the quality of law enforcement and for their legitimacy in society. Diversity management was said to be an important issue on the strategy agenda, and many police managers the authors interviewed talked about various examples of women or ethnic minority managers in their local police organisations to stress their compliance with and the success of the current policies.

The diversity of people – women, ethnic minorities – people from different sectors who put forward ideas, who look differently at certain issues. Someone from outside, who takes a look at specific procedures and says ‘what rubbish, we can do it differently’. People will say ‘yes, but this is the way we always do it’. Diversity creates a culture shock that stimulates thinking outside the box. (Michael, senior officer)

Despite the general support for diversity in the police force, only a few respondents explicitly applauded the radical interventions. These ‘champions’ for diversity argued that they want to make progress and go beyond good intentions and state that it takes unorthodox actions and special attention to realise gender and diversity change. For instance, Johan and Bruno refer to the long history of attempts to realise this kind of change in the police organisation, attempts that were not very successful as white men were appointed to the top time and again, and a quantitative change at the top level was never achieved.

I support the government’s policy. I believe that sometimes you have to make agreements and say: we’re going to do this, come hell or high water. Things will never change while we continue to hire only white men to senior positions within the force. (Johan, police officer)

If we don’t formulate quantitative objectives for the top positions, we’ll never go beyond good intentions. (Bruno, police officer)

Apart from a few proponents, the majority of respondents expressed their concerns with the intervention strategy of the project organisation, some of them even received the strategy with scepticism and hostility. The resistance against it was strong and did not resemble the subtle and covert disagreement shown in many diversity management programmes (Kirton, Greene, & Dean, 2007; Thomas & Plaut, 2008), but was rather an open and quite antagonistic political opposition. The authors recorded high levels of opposition to the interventions by the same respondents who support equality as a goal. The authors identified different manifestations of resistance towards gender interventions, such as concerns about the challenge to quality, the decrease of men’s career possibilities and the ‘violation’ of meticulous and transparent procedures. These concerns can be analysed as concerns about the interventions breaching three core values: quality, fairness and transparency.

Quality Challenge

The first and foremost objection against the interventions was based on the quality argument: to have gender and ethnicity play a role would violate the meritocratic principle as
positions should be obtained by merit alone. In this line of argument, the interventions 
were considered as initiatives to help women and ethnic minorities who are not able to 
succeed on their own merits (see also Benschop & Van den Brink, 2014). There was a 
general concern that the police would suffer quality loss because of the quota, and this 
was articulated repeatedly both in the interviews and in the public debate. People 
believed that the interventions would lead to the appointment of lesser qualified police 
managers and would even lead to the appointment of police managers who were not 
capable at all.

At the end of the day, you want to appoint people who are capable of doing the job, who can 
handle it. Regardless of their sex or ethnicity. These are demanding positions, and you want 
the best candidate. A programme like this shouldn’t force you to make wrong decisions 
because you want to meet the government’s target figures. The organisation will suffer as a 
result of this. (Victor, police officer)

In line with Victor, the majority of respondents stressed that quality should be the first cri-
terion for selection and that selecting the best candidate is about quality and not about 
social categories such as gender, class, sexuality or race. They argued that because of 
the interventions, better qualified white men need to make way for lesser qualified 
women and/or minority candidates so that the police force loses out on quality. Quality 
is presented as a core value and the decisive criterion for any candidate to be appointed. 
According to the respondents, not only the organisation would suffer from the interven-
tions, as Victor explained, but also women candidates themselves would suffer from these 
interventions.

A disadvantage of these interventions is that you aren’t doing justice to the quality of the can-
didates. These candidates will have to prove themselves twice as hard, as people within and 
outside the organisation will think she only made it because she’s a woman. This doesn’t serve 
the cause. [...] Priority should always be given to quality so that less qualified women do not 
get positions that would otherwise have been given to better qualified men. (Ben, senior 
officer)

Ben’s line of argument was only backed up by one of the female candidates inter-
viewed in the study. The majority of female candidates did applaud the intervention 
and argued that it was the only way to make progress. However, the majority of 
male respondents argued that quality has nothing to do with gender or ethnicity 
and that quality can and should be assessed without reference to gender and ethnicity. 
In their opinion, the interventions which identified specific groups violated the under-
lying value that all potential candidates should be treated as individuals without refer-
ence to their sex or ethnicity.

What remains unchallenged in this debate is the assumption that the current system is 
a fair one, one in which those who get the positions – mainly white men – achieve this 
solely on merit, and the ones who fail – mostly women and ethnic minorities – lack this 
merit. The authors note that people who generally adhere to the goal of diversity in 
order to add quality see diversity as lacking when it comes to scarce and coveted top pos-
tions. For instance, part of the qualities that a top police officer should have is ‘prominent 
dominance’, a quality that bears a strong reference to the masculine body. Gender blind-
ness and colour blindness in the assessment of quality are claimed as virtues of neutrality 
but are actually reproducing inequalities (e.g. Acker, 2000; Bell & Nkomo, 2003; Konrad,
Prasad, & Pringle, 2006). Quality is always based on the criteria set by those with power and a degree of subjectivity is always involved, even when the criteria seem to be accepted and advocated by a number of people at a given time and place.

However, some respondents started to question whether traditional candidates are indeed better qualified, given that selection committees are not always able to detach quality from the person embodying it and are prone to systematically underestimate the qualities of non-traditional candidates. There were discussions on quality criteria, especially about criteria concerning executive experience, ‘prominent dominance’ and part-time work.

[it is common sense that] you’re only qualified if you have worn out five trousers, five blue trousers. Can you explain why your trousers [which are not blue] also qualify you for the job? And what are you going to do to get the experience? […] They can show what they have to offer if you give them the chance. (Ben, senior officer)

Ben reflects on the dominant norm that senior managers need to have (executive) experience, meaning that they have worked for the police force for a long time and know what it is like to work on the street. Ben challenges this norm by arguing that people who come from outside the police force might bring additional competencies that people might be lacking in the police force. This is also pointed out by Carla, a female candidate:

My boss was unable to give me an adequate response, but says: ‘yes, yes that’s fine, but your experience, you still need a minimum of 8 years’ experience’. I say: ‘yes, of course, but I’ve almost got 8 years’ experience, don’t get me writing reports as that’s something I can’t do’, I say ‘yes, but in the area of management in a police organisation. And what do I have to do in this job? Strategic thinking and management and I don’t have to be able to write reports, so what’s this really about?’ (Carla, candidate, senior position)

A second criterion that was scrutinised during the intervention programme was the masculine criteria of a strong ‘prominent dominance’.

At that point someone said: ‘You need to make yourself more prominent and more dominant’. And my response to all that testosterone in the meeting where only men were present, ‘Do I have to fight my way through this again?’ I say: ‘This isn’t the way I react’. […] ‘With all respect, but everyone does this in his or her own way don’t they, make their presence felt and figure prominently?’ I say: ‘You can also do this by sitting back quietly and making a comment at the right moment, you don’t have to …’. (Denise, candidate, senior position)

Denise questions whether recruiting top managers on the basis of a dominant presence would benefit the police organisation. She questions the monoculture of dominant personalities in the top level of the police force and argues that ‘her own way’ of doing management would complement the current team. The last criterion that was debated concerned availability:

This woman has been promoted to head of the division. A lot of comments about this [from colleagues] as she works three days a week, and ‘how can you manage a division of 170 people?’ ‘No accessibility, she is not competent’. And I said: we’re going to appoint her anyway, and the comments have died down, it is normalised and she has also opened up new possibilities for others [to work part-time]. (Johan, senior police officer)

In Johan’s division, it opened up the discussion about the availability of top managers (see also Dick & Hyde, 2006). These quotes show how the intervention has given them the
opportunity to have a discussion with their division about the ‘right’ qualifications for police officers. The gender blind construction of quality is confronted with a different construction of quality that takes into account the social and historical significance of gender differences that leads to the underestimation of the qualities of diversity candidates. It is also interesting that in all cases researched where there was scepticism about the appointment of a female candidate through interference of the project organisations, both the management and staff were very satisfied with her performance in her current position. Apparently, it is necessary to get to know the candidate and work with her before her skills are appreciated.

**Fairness Challenge**

A second but related objection against the interventions stems from the reversed discrimination they would entail. Concerns were voiced about the diminishing career opportunities of white men who were awaiting their turn to be promoted to the top of the police force and were discriminated against solely because of their sex and ethnicity. The interventions violate this implicit order and thus evoke a fear of personal loss, a fear that is particularly salient for members of the traditionally dominant group. In the interviews, it became clear that the interventions generated hostility since women were seen to be beneficiaries of ‘preferential treatment’. Below, these sentiments are voiced by Edward:

A number of people have said to me: ‘the door for guys to be appointed in this country has been closed lately, and you, you were the last one!’ (Edward, senior officer)

This means that male candidates, who thought that their turn would come one day, are passed over now. And, of course, they voice that in their environment. Some say that they don’t have any chances because all the women go first now. (Cynthia, senior officer)

Men were less likely to support the intervention because they were more likely to view the intervention as a threat to their careers. It should be noted that the interviews were held at a specific point in time and that these concerns were particularly strong at that moment. This became very obvious about a year after the interventions, when few results were obtained (15% of new hires, statistics January 2009). The Minister then decided to stall the appointment of another white man, a controversial action that made headline news. This signalled that she was serious about the change and would act upon it.

You can apply for a job endlessly, but in the end, they are still going to hire a woman or ethnic minority. If they were to ask me, I would accept this kind of position tomorrow! (Interview in national newspaper with former male police officer)

For those who thought that they were next in line, the interventions felt unfair and arguments that this was temporary did not ease the pain. The values of fairness and non-discrimination are invoked to resist the interventions. These values are called upon now, at the moment when the privileges of the members of a traditionally dominant group are at stake. Studies have indicated that privileged professional men may resist the perceived loss of control over the allocation of those positions and refuse to accept their diminished chances to land such positions. Members of the dominant group wish to preserve the impression of having earned their positions legitimately (Crosby, Iyer, &
Sincharoen, 2006). Police managers were most likely to believe that meritocracy operates in their field, and most tended to think that equality interventions undermine fair decisions. Male police managers hardly ever acknowledged their privileged position and the structural advantages that they had received as a group. The loss of privilege is seen as a deprivation of fair claims of individual men to top positions.

In some instances, the opposition against the intervention opened up a reflection on the situation of unequal opportunities for women and minorities. This construction of fairness as a correction for historically rooted inequalities was confronted with a construction of fairness as the exact same treatment of all without distinction.

Recently I spoke to a man from my previous force who was very angry as he had the qualifications to become inspector, but wasn’t allowed to attend the training course as it was reserved for women. [...] He said: ‘I understand why now. I understand why it’s necessary and we must make this intervention’. And this is what we’re up against, the anger and frustration of people who now have to deal with this. There are also men who say: ‘the men mustn’t complain as for a long time they have taken all the best jobs and so it’s not such a bad thing that this has come to an end’. (Sara, candidate, senior position)

Sara describes the process of a male colleague who first called the intervention ‘unfair’ but understood the reasons and the approach of the intervention. She also notes that there are male colleagues who understand the mechanism of ‘male privilege’ that has impeded women’s chances of upward mobility within the force for a long time. These colleagues also point to the fact that the majority of senior appointments are still white men. In relation to this, Bruno argues that the discussion on fairness should be less emotional and more backed up by the facts.

It’s caused a lot of tension. They say: don’t men have any opportunities anymore? But look at the number of managers, I say, they are still 80% male, so how can you say no opportunities, not even in the short term. [...] I’ve got a cast-iron story, if you look at the content I’ve got a cast-iron story. (Bruno, police officer)

Both Sara and Bruno talk about managing emotions and sentiments. Radical interventions will always lead to feelings of unfairness. Bruno emphasises the statistics: the majority of all appointments to top positions are still white men. Of the 48 top managers, 29 were men and 19 were women, of whom 3 were minority women and 1 minority man (statistics May 2010). This shows the importance of the rhetoric or stories that accompany change interventions. As Wasserman et al. (2008, p. 4) put it: ‘failed change efforts are less about resistance itself and more about the story that is told about it in the inner dialogue of the organisation’.

Transparency Challenge

The procedures for the top positions are elaborate and involve many actors, rules and regulations (Benschop & Van den Brink, 2009). The interventions contravened these elaborate procedures to make sure that female candidates were taken into consideration, for instance by pushing women forward as candidates in procedures that are underway, by nominating a single candidate or by stalling procedures and taking time to search for female or minority candidates even when there are qualified men available. The data show that there is a strong resistance against the recommendation of just one candidate.
Respondents have the feeling that a minority candidate is forced upon them. This is particularly true when qualified male candidates are not taken into consideration, excluded from the recruitment process or when the search for minority candidates slows down the process.

I took my responsibility and I said ‘dear friends, I really want to do everything to get more women into the organisation, but only within the rules as we know them. And by no other means’. (Frederik, mayor)

Now it is stated that we are only going to search among the target group. This didn’t happen at first. That’s the difference between then and now. If you want to influence the outcome, you have to do it at the start, and you have to say at the start no, we’re only going to look for women. Then you are clear, and you aren’t fooling anyone. Now we intervene right at the very start and sometimes we involve the Minister if the top manager says no I don’t want to restrict it to the target group […] I’m fine with it, but don’t change the rules halfway through the game. (Eric, MD consultant)

I won’t apply for this position because it’s a woman-only position, I won’t be used as cannon fodder. Please save me from ever having to compete with a minority candidate in a procedure where the preferred candidate is a diversity candidate. I won’t do it. I won’t let them harm me, and I certainly won’t be involved purely as decoration. (Edward, senior officer)

Respondents Frederik, Eric and Edward argue that the interventions are sometimes at odds with careful Human Resource Management policies and with transparency in the procedures. They resist the interventions because they breach protocols. Female and minority candidates are considered to get preferential treatment and male candidates are sidelined or kept on hold, sometimes even without being notified that diversity candidates are favoured. The interventions are controversial because they bypass and dodge the rules and regulations. They are seen as negligent or inappropriate procedures and are problematic because they breach transparency that is particularly salient when it comes to the coveted top positions. For these top positions, proper procedures are deemed important. Frederik explains:

Look, I get annoyed sometimes too. When I see that they are trying to put women first in an unconventional way, … I think, this is understandable, but not acceptable. This will immediately cause problems, and diminishes the support for these policies. People will say: ‘she was allowed to do that, and I wasn’t’. Then your authority as a manager is questioned immediately. And this woman has to prove herself twice as hard. (Frederik, mayor, our emphasis)

Frederik claims that a breach of transparency has an impact on the perception of the candidate that is appointed in a questionable procedure. The authors noticed that the rules and regulations are employed rigidly when diversity candidates are involved. It seems that decision-makers want to make sure that transparent procedures are followed to avoid any appearance of favouritism.

In the case of ‘transparency’, the intervention also triggered a discussion on the transparency of ‘normal’ or ‘former’ procedures. Although most of the procedures where the project organisations intervened were considered non-transparent, respondents argue that they actually never are. Many respondents reflect on the specific police community where everyone knows each other and how networks might have impacted previous decisions. Social capital does not work for female and culturally diverse candidates in the same way as for male candidates, who can access networks with decision-makers
more easily. The lack of social capital is sometimes a handicap for female entrants because they do not have the information and social support of the informal networks. These forms of exclusion are therefore more difficult to break through because they involve subtle, informal organisational processes, of which selection committees are often not explicitly aware.

The analysis shows that the resistance centres around three core values that are considered incongruent with the state of affairs in the interventions. However, with this articulation of the resistance, the positions and interests are becoming clearer and the floor is opened to a political contestation of values that were previously taken for granted. The authors therefore argue that resistance can be used to illuminate the conflict between the different constructions of the values and open a dialogue about these differences.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to contribute to the knowledge on gender change interventions. The authors attempt to do this in two ways. First, the authors reflect on the reasons for resistance against gender equality interventions. Second, they develop a better understanding of the potential productive role of resistance in gender and diversity organisational change. In this concluding section, they discuss the main findings with respect to both types of contribution.

First, the insight into the main reasons why organisational members resist the radical interventions can contribute to diagnosing problems in the implementation of gender equality interventions (see also Lombardo & Mergaert, 2013). The analysis sheds light on when policy interventions are resisted, opposed and result in ‘failure’ or ‘success’ (see also Bergqvist et al., 2013). The analysis shows that resistance centres around three core values that are considered incongruent with the state of affairs in the interventions. The challenges to quality, fairness and transparency are put forward as problems of values. The findings show how people frame their concerns about the intervention as a violation of these abstract values that matter to the organisation as a whole. Concerns are seldom explicitly presented in terms of challenges to people’s individual positions and interests. If resistance explicitly stemmed from personal interests, it would be easier to disregard as a matter of self-interest. With the appeal to general values, resistance becomes more relevant and powerful to block the implementation of the change agenda. Furthermore, respondents who criticise the interventions as lacking quality, fairness and transparency often do not scrutinise the regular recruitment and selection processes in the same way. They show little awareness that regular recruitment and selection processes may not be exemplars for quality, fairness and transparency either. It seems that for some actors the interventions are to be held to higher standards.

Second, previous studies on gender and diversity change have largely advocated avoiding resistance during gender change projects (Lombardo & Mergaert, 2013; Thomas & Plaut, 2008; Tienari et al., 2009; Wahl & Holgersson, 2003) as resistance would impede the effectiveness of change interventions. The authors contribute to this literature by arguing that radical interventions such as gender quota provoke a resistance that can be made productive in organisational change strategies. Resistance involves the reification and reproduction of that which is being resisted, by legitimising and privileging it as an arena for political contest (Thomas & Davies, 2005, p. 700). In the study, the authors
were able to show how the implementation of quota invoked political contest on prevailing norms and values relating to gender and diversity at work, and specifically in recruitment and selection. The radical intervention opened up a debate on values that hitherto had remained unquestioned: on what exactly constituted quality, fairness and transparency within the process of selecting top managers. This debate about values made persistent and implicit stereotypes visible and revealed the subtlety of gender practices at work (Martin, 2003), bringing practices of discrimination and inequalities to the surface. For instance, some respondents started to question whether ‘traditional’ candidates are indeed better qualified, given that the selection committees are not always able to detach quality from the person embodying it and are prone to systematically underestimate the qualities of non-traditional candidates. This example shows how the gender blind construction of quality (see also Wilson, 1996) was confronted with an alternative construction of quality that takes into account the social and historical significance of gender differences leading to the underestimation of the qualities of female candidates. Because resistance invites the articulation of multiple constructions of quality, fairness and transparency, it delegitimises inequality practices. This can trigger the reflexivity of actors and can generate resistance against the interventions productive for change.

The implications of this study for future theorising on gender interventions are that research should rethink the function and nature of resistance in change projects. Instead of advocating the seductive discourses of ‘happy diversity’ (Hoobler, 2005) and the business case for diversity presenting interventions as palatable to all (Nkomo & Hoobler, 2014), invoking resistance by radical interventions might spur agents into action. The practical implications are that it is crucial that policy-makers and diversity professionals take resistance into account when designing diversity policies. ‘When resistance is ignored or addressed ineffectively, it becomes a negative force that can threaten change. When leaders expect, acknowledge and embrace change, it becomes a powerful instrument for change’ (Wasserman et al., 2008). With Wasserman et al., the authors emphasise the importance of leaders ‘managing’ resistance during change projects by setting a narrative about the interventions and their effects. For example, the claims that no white man can expect to be appointed anymore need to be countered, and it matter who does the countering. How managers deal with resistance is a key issue in the success or failure of gender interventions.

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