

# **Let's do diversity**

Appendix Chapter 2:  
Under the surface of an egalitarian  
University: everyday exclusions

Report of the  
University of Amsterdam  
Diversity Commission

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This appendix, belonging to chapter 2 in the report, deals with Paradigm III research and microaggressions.

## **§1. Introduction**

We supply additional information on chapter 2 of the report in this appendix, because not everybody is familiar with the methodology of paradigm III research. For people accustomed to paradigm I (quantitative research) and paradigm II (qualitative research) or accustomed to the discussion about the six scientific styles<sup>1</sup> (Kwa, 2014)<sup>2</sup>, lack of knowledge about paradigm III research produces uncertainty.

This research starts from a broad definition of diversity and it deals with questions of racism, ethnicity, gender, sexism, LGBTQIA+, queerphobia, emancipation, classism, religion, islamophobia, imperialism, ableism, ageism, socio-economic background and so on. One can find the 'hidden' assumptions and values about those issues in the stories that students and staff members tell, in the texts on the website of the UvA, in the curriculum and in the study materials, in the literature the staff use, in the research activities of the UvA *and* in the buildings of the UvA.

Our research is a part of a full body research<sup>3</sup>, showing our turn to affect<sup>4</sup>. Paradigm III research is a research variant in the framework of diversity of thinking and researching. During the research activities we ask ourselves all the time: *How is it that we come to know what we know, and what are the underlying assumptions of this pursuit? What is our process of inquiry?* We engage in close, often intimate connections to the lived experiences of the diversity in the UvA and we try to produce the clearest and most informed understanding of that topic.

We encounter deeply personal, emotional intimacies and various subjectivities from our participants all the time and we avoid that they are bracketed away. Subjectivity and reality interact between the stories/image and the 'producer'/viewer/listener.

We choose certain interview fragments over others to bring life to our research story. In the narratives, we verbally zoom and pan, taking the reader of this report down one path chosen from among others. We keep in mind the epistemological assumptions and rigors regarding how to collect valuable information<sup>5</sup>. However, we did not choose the grounded theory approach of qualitative empiricism<sup>6</sup>, for example. For us there is not one global epistemology. That is why we use reflexive epistemologies in our research (Stanczak, 2007).

## **§2. Research Design**

The research team is among other things focused on the collection of 'characteristic' stories of students and staff that make explicit that the UvA at this moment does not pay enough attention to diversity and that some students and staff members are hurt in this

situation. For the collection of stories we use a narrative technique (Wengraf, 2001). The respondents were selected out of the UvA population, after a call on the UvA Website and an email to all, a group of students and staff members mailed us that they had a story to tell. A part of the interviews is used as example (*vignette* or quotation<sup>7</sup>) of situations in the UvA in the framework of 'diversity management' (Tarekgn & Jerusalem, 2012) and we used another part of the interviews to analyze some patterns in the UvA narratives, showing the way in which some of the staff members and students at the UvA are dealing with the praxis of diversity. For the (narrative) analysis of the interview texts we used several directions. As amplification of the collection, analyzing and deconstruction of interview texts we have collected, analyzed and deconstructed images of situations inside and outside the buildings of the UvA to assess the accessibility of those buildings and to inquire about the way students and staff feel at home in those buildings. The deconstruction of the images is based on ideas of Visual Anthropology, Image-based Research and a/r/tography<sup>8</sup>.

For our paradigm III research we used the '*Code of Ethics for Research in the Social and Behavioral Sciences Involving Human Participants as accepted by the Deans of Social Sciences in the Netherlands*' (January 2016). We know that we need '*... deeper investigation ... [and] ... the interaction with and the consent of ... individuals, especially if individual images [and texts] are to be used as illustrations in reports or publications for which consent is needed.*' (ibid., 125). We used the technique of a member check, anonymized all the interview texts, asked the respondents permission for using their utterances, and we have signed a contract pleading confidentiality.

### **§3. Paradigm III Research**

Paradigm III research deals with time in another way than paradigm I and II: rejecting linearity and proportionality. Time is experienced time and not the time of a metronome. Predictability and generalization are not intended outcomes of the research. Paradigm III research is adaptive, personal and situational. Paradigm III research claims that narrativity is an exclusive social human activity: the social uniqueness of the 'dialogic'. This appendix focuses on microaggressions (microassaults, microinsults and microinvalidations) at the UvA, since this a concept that is relatively little-known.

The 'Big Five' areas for the reorientation of the UvA in the framework of diversity are gender, race, age, disability, and sexual orientation (the *GRADS categories*) and ask among other things for the expanded inclusion of women, students of color, physically challenged individuals and non-traditional students, i.e., those older than thirty, in academic programs (Winbush, 2004). In universities we see various forms of microaggressions.

## §4. Microaggressions

Microaggressions are the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, communicating hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon marginalized group membership (Sue, 2010a). The 'friendly' perpetrators communicate that those target persons (often people of color, woman, lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgendered people - LGBTQIA+s - those with disabilities/restrictions, religious minorities, and so on) are lesser human beings, suggest that they do not belong to the majority group, threaten and intimidate, or relegate them to inferior status and treatment (Sue, 2010b). In the UvA we see racial microaggressions<sup>9</sup>, gender microaggressions and sexual orientation microaggressions (hidden messages and contradictory metacommunications).

We see (often covered) forms of oppression (through imposition or deprivation) in the UvA from direct/concrete nature to more symbolic or psychological manifestations, from being consciously perpetrated to being unintentional, indirect, and subtle. Sue (2010b) distinguishes between microassaults<sup>10</sup>, microinsults<sup>11</sup>, and microinvalidations<sup>12</sup>. He identifies four major psychological dilemmas or dynamics created by microaggressions directed toward racial groups: (1) the clash of realities between the dominant group and socially devalued group members, (2) the invisibility of unintentional bias and discrimination, (3) the perceived minimal harm of microaggressions, and (4) the catch-22<sup>13</sup> of responding.

We see in the UvA subtle forms of discrimination (focused on issues of race and gender). We even see hate crimes: physical assaults, hate mail, threatening phone calls and vandalism (Nadal, Rivera & Corpus, 2010). And we see overt behavioral expression of sexual stigma, similar to the 'old-fashioned' heterosexism (hate crimes and deliberately use of hurtful words to insult a LGBTQIA+ person). Microaggressions toward transgender individuals are most of the time not openly addressed or discussed. Nadal, Rivera and Corpus (ibid.) mention four categories of assaulting transgender people: (1) second-class citizen, (2) traditional gender role prejudicing and stereotyping, (3) use of sexist/heterosexist language, and (4) assumption of abnormality. Transgender microaggressions will often intersect with racial, ethnic, and gender microaggressions

The needs, experiences, hopes, and aspirations of people with disabilities (PWDs) are relatively unknown, unrecognized, and underestimated. Negative attitudes and behaviors toward PDWs still exist, but they operate in a much more subtle, secretive, and covert manner, often outside the level of awareness of well-intentioned perpetrators. Some people (staff, administrators and fellow students) treat PWDs like a child and appear to be invested in avoiding PWDs or wish that they are invisible (their experiential reality is being denied and invalidated). The 'innocent' perpetrators are uncomfortable with the fact that disabilities/restrictions are visible and they chose to ignore the situation. One can identify patterns of manifestations of microaggressive

experiences (subtle discrimination) of people with disabilities within the UvA. The perpetrators show that the limitation of one functional area leads to limitations in other functional areas. For example, people speak loudly when communicating with a blind person or people in wheelchairs are ignored because the perpetrators speak only with the companion of the wheeler (as a part of a process of infantilism) (Keller & Galgay, 2010).

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<sup>1</sup> Styles of scientific thinking in the European tradition: (1) deductive, (2) experimental, (3) hypothetical-analogical, (4) taxonomical, (5) statistical, and (6) historical-evolutionary.

<sup>2</sup> See for the comparison of paradigm I, II and III: Jansen (2009c, 193-207 and 249-252).

<sup>3</sup> Paradigm III research is not just observing and testing people, 'collecting' evidences, executing objective and empirical work. 'Discovery is open-ended and fundamental research cannot predict what it will find or when.' (Nowotny, 2016, vii). The paradigm III researcher is not keeping 'distance', but every part of the body is involved. In this framework an interview is '... an embodiment, and it is not just words, but the body is vibrating the telling.' (Syed & Boje, 2011, 55).

<sup>4</sup> See Harris (2015); Meltzer (2013); Moisi (2009/2015); Nicolai (2016).

<sup>5</sup> See Kincheloe (2003/2004; 2005; 2010); Kincheloe & Berry (2004); Steinberg & Kincheloe (1998).

<sup>6</sup> See Clarke (2005); Glaser & Strauss (1967/2008); Van den Hoonaard (1997); Strauss & Corbin (1990).

<sup>7</sup> Anonymized interview texts, approved by the respondents.

<sup>8</sup> See Bauer & Gaskell (2000); Borgdorff & Bakker (2003); Bresler (2007a; 2007b); Collier & Collier (1986); Emmison & Smith (2000); Greene (2000); Irwin & De Cosson (2004); Prosser (1998); Sanders-Bustle (2003); Sullivan (2005); Springgay, Irwin, Leggo & Gouzouasis (2008).

<sup>9</sup> Johnston and Nadal (2010) tell us that for racial identification there are 57 possible multiple-race identities based off 6 main racial categories.

<sup>10</sup> Microassaults are conscious biased beliefs or attitudes that are held by individuals and intentionally expressed or acted out overtly or covertly toward a marginalized person or socially devalued group.

<sup>11</sup> Microinsults likely occur outside the level of conscious awareness of the perpetrator. We see interpersonal interactions (verbal/nonverbal) and environmental cues that communicate rudeness, insensitivity, slights, and insults.

<sup>12</sup> Microinvalidations generally occur outside the level of conscious awareness of perpetrators, but it is the most insidious, damaging, and harmful form of microaggressions. Microinvalidations attack or deny the experiential realities of socially devalued groups



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(interpersonal and environmental cues that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and experiences of the target group). Color blindness belongs to this category.

<sup>13</sup> See [https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catch-22\\_%28logica%29](https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catch-22_%28logica%29); <https://www.catch-22.org.uk/work-us/equality-diversity/> for more information.