Summary

Limits to unity

Perceptions and appreciation of diversity and inclusiveness by Defence personnel

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Summary

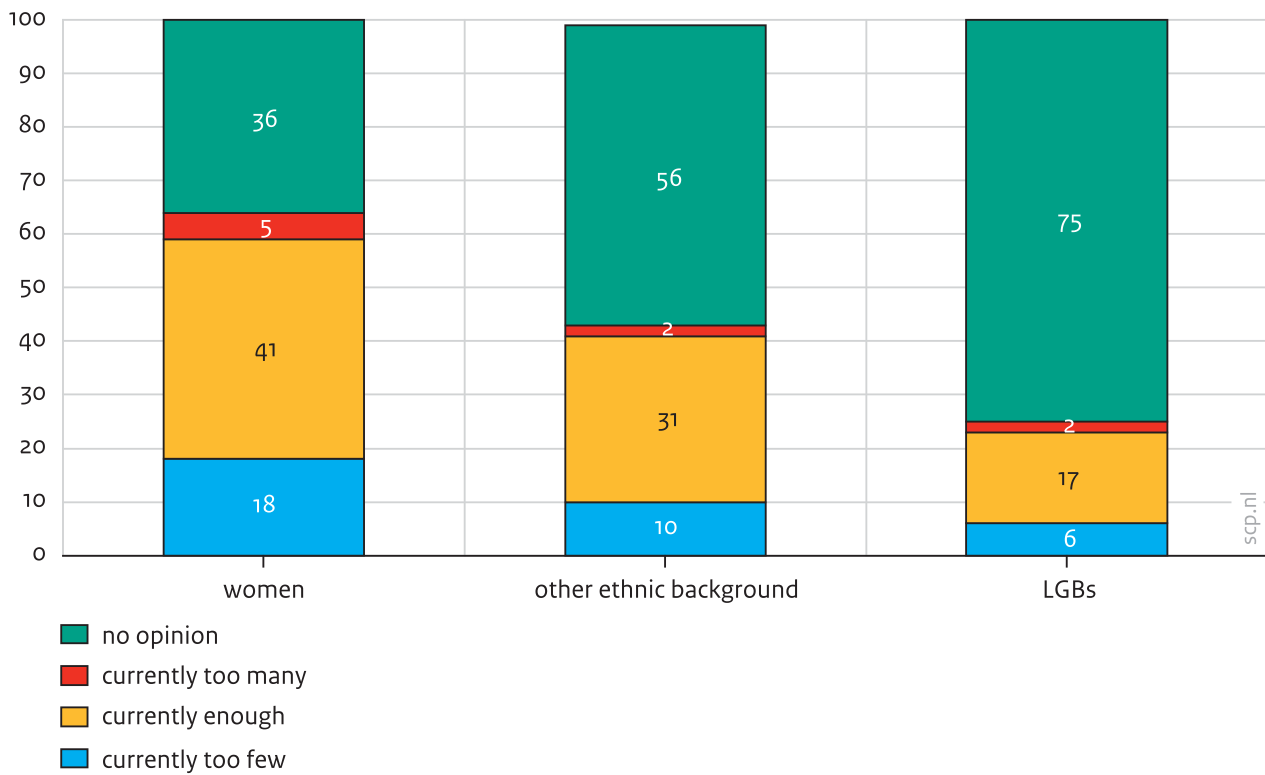
S.1 Introduction

The Dutch Ministry of Defence is committed to increasing diversity within the armed forces organisation. Diversity is felt to have strategic benefits (e.g. with regard to operational deployment), and is also expected to have a positive influence on the culture of the organisation. The diversity policy is targeted specifically at women and at members of ethnic and sexual minorities. This study looks on the one hand at how diversity and inclusiveness are appreciated and perceived by Defence personnel in a broad sense, and on the other at the experiences of members of the three policy target groups. We therefore do not offer an evaluation of the past or present policy pursued by the Ministry, but rather look at the way in which Defence personnel experience the current levels of diversity and inclusiveness and whether they support their expansion. As well as describing the general climate in relation to diversity, it was also our explicit intention to present the views of the minority groups. We therefore opted for a combination of quantitative research among Defence personnel as a whole, supplemented with qualitative research among members of the minority groups concerned.

S.1.1 Limited support for increased diversity

Taken as an average, Defence personnel have a positive attitude towards female colleagues and colleagues with different ethnic backgrounds and sexual orientations. Only a small proportion have an explicit negative attitude; for example, 5% say that women and personnel with a different ethnic background (2%) or lesbian, gay or bisexual persons (LGBs) (3%) are unsuitable for employment as Defence personnel.
The 'integration and learning' perspective on diversity argues that people who are members of a specific group have developed insights, skills and experiences that can be valuable for the output of an organisation (Ely & Thomas 2001). Defence personnel expect a small amount of diversity to have a positive impact in their unit/department, for example when it comes to acquiring new skills or the ability to deliver better services. However, the preference is for a limited amount of diversity with a view to achieving positive effects at the workplace.
Most employees report that they work in relatively homogeneous units/departments in terms of gender (82%) and ethnic background (92%) Support for increasing the diversity in terms of the groups studied here is not widespread (Figure S.1). Just under one in five employees would like to see more women in their unit/department because they feel there are currently too few. One in ten would support an increase in ethnic diversity, and 6% feel there are currently too few LGB personnel working in their department and would like to see more diversity in terms of sexual orientation.

Figure S.1
Opinions of staff on increasing the diversity of Defence personnel, 2015 (in percentages)



Source: SCP (DED'15), weighted data

At the time of writing this report (2016), a campaign is under way aimed specifically at recruiting women. However, there is no widespread support among personnel for a specific policy to recruit more women: across the organisation, 17% are in favour and 83% against. There is also no strong support among Defence personnel for specific policy aimed at recruiting more people with different ethnic backgrounds or more LGB persons: 86% are against such a specific policy for these groups.
Defence personnel thus take a positive view of colleagues from different minority groups, but are not avid supporters of specific campaigns and policy to increase diversity, and do not see diversity as an automatic added value.

S.1.2 Assimilation culture?

Defence personnel feel a strong sense of community within their unit or department, and this is seen as an attractive feature of working for the organisation: an atmosphere in which people need to work together to get the job done and have to be able to count on each other. This sense of community and unity is also seen as serving a functional purpose, as an important factor in achieving a joint goal as efficiently as possible. Military training is accordingly focused among other things on promoting a sense of unity among personnel; wearing a uniform is a symbolic expression of this.
Personnel feel there is a high degree of respect, openness and honesty in decisions.
Despite this, half the personnel believe that there is occasional discrimination, and three in

ten say that intimidation occasionally takes place within their unit/department. Half of Defence personnel have had a negative experience in the last twelve months, including bullying (15%), being ignored (20%), gossip (45%), intimidation (13%), unwanted sexual attention (4%) or physical violence (1%). Certain groups are more vulnerable to this behaviour: younger personnel, operational personnel and personnel in lower ranks or pay scales. Almost two-thirds of personnel aged 17-24 years have had at least one negative experience during the past twelve months.
Interestingly, the most frequently cited reason for undergoing a negative experience is 'because of my opinions/ideas' (29%). Soeters et al. (2003) describe how personnel within military cultures are socialised towards behaving in a way that is consistent and predictable (appropriate to the specific culture of their unit). Non-conforming behaviour is punished in the form of reputational damage, sanctions or being passed over for promotion or other benefits (Soeters et al. 2003: 250). This could indicate that there is an *assimilation* culture in the Defence organisation (Shore et al. 2011). Characteristic of such a culture is that personnel are seen as insiders in their unit/department if they conform to the dominant culture and subordinate their own individuality to it. This applies to all personnel, not specifically to members of visible minority groups, such as women or ethnic minorities, or invisible minority groups such as LGB persons. Members of the 'norm' group (white, heterosexual men) are also susceptible to sanctions if they do not conform to the dominant culture in their unit/department. The focus on unity and a culture of togetherness thus means on the one hand that personnel are strongly embedded within the organisation; at the same time, this tight-knit community leads to a strong inward focus and a concomitant strict exclusion of outsiders. People who for whatever reason find themselves on the outside can therefore find life very difficult.

S.1.3 High affective engagement and satisfaction

Affective engagement is a measure of the emotional bond that an employee has with their organisation: the extent to which he or she values, identifies with and feels attached to the organisation (Celik et al. 2011). Defence personnel have a strong affective bond with the organisation: around three out of four have a strong sense of being part of the organisation and also feel strongly attached to it. In short, the organisation means a lot to them. One in ten feel this bond to a lesser extent or not at all.
Job satisfaction is also high. A large majority of Defence personnel say they are satisfied or very satisfied with the relationship they have with their colleagues (89%) and their superior (80%), their job content (80%) and the atmosphere in their unit or department (80%). Against this, a third say they are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their salary, and one in ten are unhappy about the ability to combine their work and personal lives.
The fact that the affective attachment and job satisfaction is so high despite the negative experiences of some personnel may be precisely due to the fact that the group culture – which partly lies at the basis of the negative experiences – is highly valued. For many respondents in the interviews, working for the Defence organisation provides them with precisely what they expected and hoped for when they chose this career. They are accord-

ingly satisfied with the atmosphere and culture in the organisation. The team spirit among personnel, the comradeship and the atmosphere of everyone pulling together was cited by many interviewees as something special and something that makes the difference for them compared with other jobs. At the same time, that same group culture demands conformity through informal group norms and can lead to social sanctions for non-conforming behaviour. Our conclusion was that the Defence culture is more of an assimilation culture than an inclusive culture. In an inclusive culture, the need to belong is successfully combined with the ability to retain one's individuality. In an assimilation culture, people only really belong together when they conform to the dominant culture. If people have to give up too much of their individuality to achieve this, this can lead to emotional exhaustion (Shore et al. 2011).

S.2 Women in the Defence organisation

Women are a definite minority in the Defence organisation, accounting for 14% of the entire workforce. Half the female personnel are civilian staff, the remainder are military personnel. Since most of the workforce consists of military personnel, this is where the underrepresentation of women is greatest: 9% of the military personnel are female, compared with a quarter of the civilian staff (Defensie 2016).
A large majority of Defence personnel take a positive view of female colleagues. Almost one in ten say they work just as hard for a female superior, and eight out of ten disagree with the statement that most female colleagues are not really suitable to work for the Defence organisation. At the same time, there is relatively strong support for the statement that the presence of women sometimes has a detrimental effect on the relationship between colleagues: more than one in six Defence personnel endorse this view. In other words, the idea of female colleagues is not fully embraced. This view is also reflected in the frequency with which jokes are made about women: 86% of staff report that this occurs, and according to one in eight it occurs frequently or very frequently.

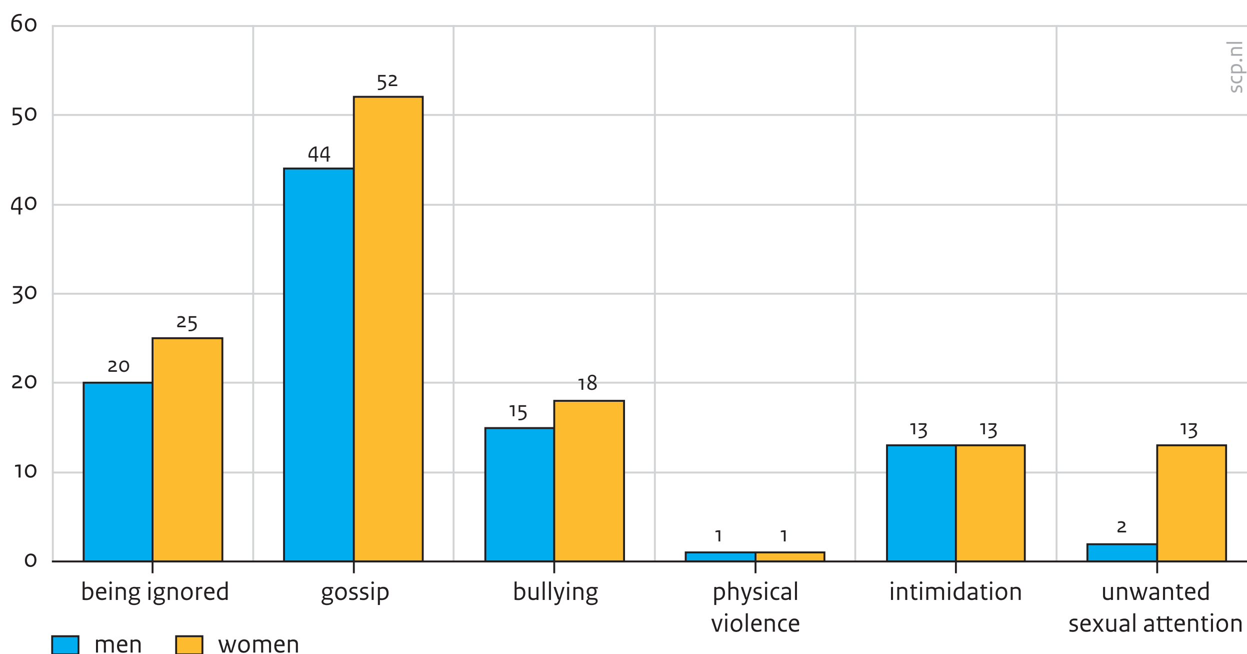
S.2.1 High job satisfaction among female Defence personnel

The general job satisfaction is also very high among female defence personnel. The ability to combine work with looking after children or other family members is an important factor in the job satisfaction of women in particular. This is because women often (and more often than men) make concessions in their work and career in order to perform care tasks. Female Defence personnel are more satisfied than their male counterparts with the ability to combine their work and personal lives In the interviews, women with children frequently expressed their satisfaction with the opportunities for flexible working hours, or the ability to pop home briefly during quiet spells at work in order to pick up the children from school or give them their lunch, or to look after a sick child. However, it also emerged from the interviews that women are not always keen to use the opportunities created specifically for women with young children, because they do not like the separate status this gives them.

S.2.2 Deviation from the norm

The experiences of female Defence staff make clear that the male-dominated environment makes this an unusual place for women to work. Masculinity is the norm in this environment. Some women have faced negative stereotyping because of their gender: one in ten feel they are taken less seriously than men, for example, while 37% report that they are the subject of jokes because of their gender.
Female Defence staff are more susceptible to negative experiences (Figure S.2). More than half the women interviewed have been the subject of gossip in the last twelve months (compared with just over four out of ten men). The differences between men and women are especially wide when it comes to unwanted sexual attention: one in eight female Defence staff have encountered unwanted sexual attention during the last twelve months. That is a relatively high proportion: the chapter on violence in the most recent Emancipation Monitor (*Emancipatiemonitor*) (Van Noije et al. 2016) reports that 3% of female employees in the Netherlands have encountered unwanted sexual attention during the past twelve months. Women in a traditionally 'male' work setting are more likely to encounter inappropriate sexual behaviour. This is supported by the very high incidence of sexual harassment that is also faced by females working for the police (17%, see Schouten & Nelissen 2016). The Defence organisation also brings together a combination of risk factors: it is a male-dominated working environment in terms of both numbers and power relations. Particularly for military personnel on postings or internally, the boundaries between work and personal life are occasionally blurred and in some sections of the organisation there is a culture in which jokes and pranks (sometimes with sexual overtones) and informal interaction between colleagues are widely accepted (Glick & Fiske 2007).

Figure S.2
Defence personnel who have personally had a negative experience during the last twelve months, by type of experience and gender, 2015 (in percentages)



Source: SCP (DED'15)

It emerged from the interviews with female Defence personal that there is a great deal of everyday sexism in units/departments in the form of ostensibly joking comments made to or about female colleagues. Flirting may also occur, to see whether a new female colleague is open to sexual advances. Young women who are relatively new to the service appear to be particularly vulnerable to this (see also De Haas & Van Berlo 2008). The confrontation with this culture is seen as a sort of 'rite of passage': the female interviewees regarded this as something that they have to be able to take if they wish to work in the Defence organisation. Women who have progressed higher up the organisation say they no longer encounter this; they put this down to their age, their higher rank and above all the fact that they have learned how best to respond to such comments and jokes. We encountered several coping strategies during the interviews:

- Not taking it seriously: the unwanted sexual attention is trivialised, rendered less important, for example by dismissing it as a 'joke' or citing mitigating circumstances.
- Adaptation: women adapt to the Defence culture in which masculinity is the norm and therefore try to underplay their femininity as far as possible.
- Performing as well as men: women want to be equal to their male colleagues; they work harder to show that they can perform their duties just as well as a man. Women in civilian posts adopt a 'masculine' (businesslike, hard) approach, while female military personnel try to equal or surpass their male colleagues in performing physical tasks.
- Downplaying femininity: camouflaging their femininity as far as possible, for example by not dressing or behaving in too a feminine a way.

- The ‘queen bee’ effect is a coping strategy used by staff who, because of the low status of the group to which they belong, are impeded in their personal upward mobility and who attach little value at work to that aspect of their identity, i.e. the fact that they are a woman (Derks et al. 2011, 2015). The presence of this effect is thus entirely due to the fact that Defence is a male-dominated environment, which means that successful women in the organisation do not automatically function as a role model for other women and may not be willing to use the esteem they have gained to help improve the position of women in the organisation.
- Setting boundaries: giving the offender a piece of their mind when dirty jokes or unpleasant comments are made.
- Not reporting incidents: women are reticent to seek help from higher up the organisation following unpleasant incidents, because of fear of damaging their career and anxiety about the social consequences. This in fact also applies to other categories of personnel.

S.3 Ethnic minorities

Generally speaking, Defence personnel take a positive view of colleagues with a Western (non-Dutch) or non-Western background. According to Defence personnel, superiors almost never show any sign of disapproval of having staff with a Western or non-Western background in their unit/department. This is important because it can set the tone for the rest of the unit/department. Despite this, 8% of Defence personnel report that this occasionally happens. In addition, making jokes about people with a different ethnic background is more the rule than the exception: no fewer than 83% of staff report that this happens, and according to 11% it happens often or very often. Our interviews also showed that there is a culture, especially among military personnel, of making frequent references to people’s ethnic background. These include referring to negative stereotypes about the group in which someone is classified, for example references to criminality or terrorism in the case of personnel with a Moroccan background.
Experiences with forms of exclusion are more commonly found among personnel with a non-Western background. To a greater extent than personnel with a Western background, the behaviour of their colleagues sometimes makes them feel that they do not belong in the Defence organisation. They are also often subjected to jokes and comments that refer to their ethnic background. The interviews also revealed that the loyalty of military personnel with a non-Western background is sometimes questioned. Another form of perceived exclusion is subtyping, in which negative comments are made about the ethnic group to which a person is assumed to belong or with which they identify themselves, and the individual themselves is then treated as ‘the exception’ (‘that doesn’t apply to you; you’re different’).
Personnel members with a non-Western background have negative experiences more often (60%) than native Dutch colleagues (49%). Gossip, bullying, being ignored, intimidation, physical violence or unwanted sexual attention are more common experiences for

those with a non-Western background. Whilst male employees related negative experiences to their ethnic background, female staff members mainly related them to their gender. Their experiences were much closer to those of the other women we interviewed. Women from ethnic minority groups almost never mentioned their ethnic background in relation to any negative experiences they may have had. This suggests that the prevailing norm among Defence personnel is first and foremost 'male' and then 'white'.

Despite the greater susceptibility of staff with a non-Western background, we found no differences based on ethnic background in the degree to which personnel are satisfied with their work: personnel with a non-Western background are also very satisfied. There is one exception to this, namely the relationships with colleagues: Defence personnel with a non-Western background are less satisfied on this point than colleagues with a Dutch or other Western background. The culture referred to earlier, for example of making jokes or demanding explicit loyalty, may play a role here.

In the interviews, we asked respondents how they deal with negative experiences that relate to their ethnic background (coping). In addition to not taking it seriously, acceptance was also cited as an emotion-focused coping strategy. This strategy involves those concerned trying to manage the emotions elicited by the negative behaviour internally, whilst maintaining an outward appearance of not being affected by it. Problem-focused coping strategies cited by personnel with different ethnic backgrounds included directly challenging the offender, reporting the incident and giving back as good as they got. This latter strategy is a form of seeking revenge, in which the offender is sanctioned in some way for the inappropriate behaviour. Once again we found that, despite the extensive infrastructure to facilitate this, personnel do not readily report negative behaviour. One reason cited for this was the culture of solving one's own problems, in which seeking help from others is regarded as a sign of weakness. Another reason for not reporting such behaviour is that this can be seen as breaking the code of group solidarity; that can lead to sanctions from the rest of the group. In addition, expectations are low regarding the consequences of reporting incidents; the likelihood that the inappropriate behaviour will stop is regarded as small, while the negative social consequences for the person concerned are seen as considerable.

S.4 LGB Defence personnel

Defence personnel generally have a positive attitude towards LGB colleagues. This is supported by research carried out in 2006 by the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP). in which negative experiences of LGB personnel were related to the masculinity norm in the Defence organisation (Adolfsen & Keuzenkamp 2006). This study confirms that hypothesis. Certain groups do however take a more negative stance towards LGB colleagues: men, young personnel (17-24 years) and people with a low or intermediate education level take a less positive view than women, older colleagues and personnel with a higher education level.

Proportionally, there are more lesbian women than homosexual men working in the Defence organisation than in the general population. Lesbian Defence personnel are also more often open about their sexual orientation than gay men. It may be that lesbian women were overrepresented in our survey, because men were less open about their sexual orientation.
Based on our interviews with LGB personnel, we conclude that the experience of working for the Defence organisation is different for men and women. This is due to the masculinity norm and the everyday sexism reported earlier (chapter 3). For lesbian women, their sexual identity appears to create a kind of buffer to help them deal with their male colleagues. Openly lesbian women are more likely to be seen as 'one of the boys'. They regard the behaviour of their male colleagues as gender stereotyping, but not as upsetting or negative.
Gay and bisexual men appear to find it more difficult to cope with the stringent application of the masculinity norm. They are much less likely to come out, and if they do, they do so selectively to just a handful of trusted colleagues. Support from superiors and colleagues appears to be a necessary condition for coming out. As long as they behave like 'real men', inclusion is possible. Gender-deviant behaviour is penalised, however, for example by bullying. Their coping strategies therefore involve remaining silent about their sexual orientation and/or modifying their gender behaviour.
LGB personnel also face gossip and bullying. Remaining in the closet leads to gossip, whilst after coming out they are often subjected to bullying. As a result, the impact of outing is considerably greater for gay and bisexual men than for lesbian women. Reporting negative experiences is made more difficult by the fact that those affected do not always know for certain that their sexual orientation was the reason for the negative experience, or find this difficult to prove.
LGB personnel themselves also do not always feel the need for a specific policy aimed at inclusion; many of them do not want to demand special treatment but realise that specific policy attention for the needs of LGB persons is important for visibility and raising awareness.

S.5 Discussion: limits to unity?

In their study of the position of LGB Defence personnel, Adolfsen and Keuzenkamp (2006) described it as likely that the masculinity norm within the Defence organisation has negative effects not just for gay men, but also for heterosexual women. In this report we came to the conclusion that 'masculinity' is indeed the dominant norm. Among military personnel, characteristics such as physical strength, toughness and a 'getting on with the job' mentality are highly valued and are regarded as 'masculine' characteristics. The equivalent to these characteristics for civilian personnel is a hard, businesslike stance, for example in discussions. This is contrasted with 'unmanly' or 'feminine' characteristics such as emotionality, vulnerability and (physical) weakness, nagging and complaining. According to the stereotypical images that are common in this environment, heterosexual women and gay

men are the furthest from meeting this norm. Lesbian women occupy an intermediate position. From the interviews with personnel with a different ethnic or cultural background, we concluded that they too are seen to some extent as 'different', but that women in this group were more likely to associate their negative experiences with their gender than with their ethnic/cultural background. 'Masculinity' evidently prevails over 'whiteness' as the norm.

The narrow and stereotypical interpretation of what constitutes masculinity and femininity may play a role in the high percentage of women reporting unwanted sexual attention Masculinity is defined as something active, strong, virile and initiative-taking, while women tend to be seen as passive and physically weaker. Research on sexual violence links such an interpretation of masculinity and femininity to the perception that it is natural and legitimate for men to want to 'conquer' or 'possess' women (Hines 2007; Van Hooff & Kraan 1991). As a result, women are more susceptible to inappropriate behaviour from men.

Deviating from the norm puts those concerned outside the group and can lead to social sanctions. In an organisation that is strongly focused on unity and actively encourages this at the point of enrolment, during training and among younger personnel, this mechanism is even more powerful. The consequence of this is a high degree of loyalty to the organisation and to one's colleagues, but at the same time low tolerance of people's individuality. Unity, trust and a group culture are important, especially in a military context, for achieving a shared goal as efficiently as possible. However, the norms that dominate this group culture now appear to be so strictly defined that even characteristics that are not necessarily required in order to achieve functional unity (e.g. sexual orientation) have become sensitive areas. A less strict and stereotypical interpretation of the dominant norm, without losing sight of the functionality of the group culture and unity, would include more people and could make them less vulnerable to negative events.

The greater vulnerability of minority groups within the assimilation culture of the Defence organisation also explains the contrast between the results of the survey and the findings from the interviews. The survey results produce a predominantly positive picture, whereas in the interviews we were frequently confronted with people's negative experiences. This apparent discrepancy can however be explained. The interviews were held only with members of minority groups, and it is known from other studies (e.g. the periodic studies of inappropriate behaviour within the Defence organisation from 2006 (Staal 2006), 2008 (De Haas & Van Berlo 2008) and 2010 (Defensie 2010)) that these groups are more susceptible to this type of behaviour. The quantitative data relate to Defence personnel as a whole, of which minorities make up only a small part. Moreover, the Defence workforce is particularly homogeneous, with the heterosexual male of Dutch origin setting the standard.

Staff from minority groups are also not wholly outside the group; by contrast, they form part of the group and its culture. Female, gay and bisexual staff and staff with a non-Western ethnic background also value the core elements of the group culture within the organisation, such as the sense of community, belonging and group mentality, and are

keen to be part of it. The respondents from minority groups who were questioned for this study have largely conformed to the prevailing Defence culture, and also (partially) propagate the stereotypical norm of masculinity. Most of the women interviewed, for example, reported that they try even harder to prove to their colleagues that they are not inferior to men – and have succeeded in doing so. The coping strategies, focused on assimilation, also mean that many of the 'successful' members of minority groups confirm stereotypical notions about their group: they set themselves apart from their group by pointing out that they are the exceptions who do perform well within the organisation. Consequently, they prefer not to be challenged on the basis of their minority identity. They believe that demanding or enforcing visibility or a minority identity is counter-productive. Measures to promote diversity are likely to be more effective and legitimate in the eyes of personnel if they take these sensitivities into account. Consideration could for example be given to whether the benefits of diversity could be couched in terms of functional competencies, without linking them to specific groups. Everyone with that competence can then offer added value to the organisation, rather than framing the benefit as a quality that certain groups need to possess.

Management in all organisations have a special responsibility for the social safety of their staff. This study shows on the one hand that some superiors are contemptuous of this principle: 17% of personnel with a negative experience report that a superior was involved in the incident as a perpetrator. On the other hand, superiors play a very important role in setting standards for behaviour. They can for example make it clear that certain comments or 'jokes' will not be tolerated. Setting standards for appropriate behaviour in this way can also help people to be open about their sexual orientation. Colleagues can also play a role in guarding the limits of appropriate behaviour, and can challenge colleagues who display inappropriate behaviour. The interviews showed that staff would feel supported by this, but also that they currently do not always receive this support from colleagues.

An important caveat to this study is that we only questioned incumbent personnel and therefore those who have succeeded in developing effective coping strategies. As one respondent put it: 'You have to be able to take it if you want to (continue to) work here'. There are indications that those who do not manage this or who are unable to cope in some other way, leave the organisation. It would therefore be worthwhile carrying out research among those who leave to discover the reason for their departure. Policy to increase diversity is only worth pursuing if those who join the organisation actually remain there.