

UNIVERSITY OF COPENHAGEN

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES



Disrup

Rituals, emotions, and
struggles in workplace interactions
of hard-of-hearing employees

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PhD Dissertation

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2025

Ida Friis Thing

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Ph.d.-afhandling 2025 © Ida Friis Thing
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Forord

Jeg er taknemmelig for VELUX FONDENS finansiering af projektet *Hvordan hører vi sammen? Interaktionelle dynamikker i fællesskaber af og med mennesker med høretab*, som min Ph.d.-afhandling udspringer af. Derudover vil jeg særligt gerne takke Inge Kryger Pedersen, forskningsleder på projektet og min vejleder gennem hele processen. Inge, du har været en uvurderlig støtte med din konstruktive kritik og kyndige vejledning fra jeg blev en del af projektet. Jeg har altid følt, at jeg kunne komme til dig med mine spørgsmål og overvejelser. Derudover har jeg nydt vores mange ture til konferencer, oplæg og skriveretreats – ikke mindst din evne til at holde styr på tidsplanen og din lyst til at hoppe en tur i havet (selv om vinteren!).

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Sammenfatning

I denne afhandling undersøger jeg de processer og konsekvenser, som afbrudte og mislykkede interaktioner medfører i arbejdslivet, ved at anvende medarbejdere med høretab som case. Afhandlingen belyser interaktionelle sammenbrud og de emotionelle konflikter, der kan opstå som følge heraf. Afhandlingen tager udgangspunkt i det overordnede forskningsspørgsmål: Hvad karakteriserer afbrudt interaktion, og hvilke sociale konsekvenser medfører det?

Analysen bygger på mikrosociologiske begreber om interaktionsritualer (Collins 2014) og *face-work* (Goffman 1967, 1990) til at undersøge interaktionelle mikroprocesser og sociale normbrud. Derudover anvendes følelsessociologiske begreber om sympati som gaveudveksling (Clark 1987, 1997; Hochschild 2003) til at belyse betydningen af inkluderende interaktionelle gestus i inklusionsprocesser. Afhandlingens empiriske grundlag består af semi-strukturerede interviews med medarbejdere med høretab samt interviews med kolleger og ledere uden høretab fra to arbejdspladser, hvor der blev udført fire måneders feltarbejde.

Den første artikel undersøger interaktionelle udfordringer i afbrudt interaktion og bidrager med en konceptualisering af fire typer af kvaler: 1) *Concealing interactional disruptions*; 2) *Managing conflicts*; 3) *Keeping track of the conversation*; og 4) *Reintegrating into interactions*. Den anden artikel undersøger betydningen af inkluderende interaktionelle gestus for den sociale inklusion og eksklusion af medarbejdere med høretab, samt risikoen for akkumulativ eksklusion fra arbejdspladsens kultur og symboler. Artiklen bidrager til eksisterende mikrosociologisk og emotionssociologisk litteratur ved at udfolde, hvordan sociale eksklusionsprocesser udfolder sig på arbejdspladsen for mennesker med høretab gennem kæder af situationel eksklusion og begrænset adgang til udveksling af følelsesgaver. Den tredje artikel undersøger følelsesregler om at udvise interaktionelt hensyn på arbejdspladsen og belyser, hvordan interaktionelle hensyn somme tider resulterer i mislykkede interaktionsritualer med omkostningerne: *restrained emotional buildup*, *emotional exhaustion* og *efforts to manage emotions*. Artiklen bidrager til den eksisterende emotionslitteratur ved at tilbyde en konceptualisering af tre typer omkostninger ved at udvise inkluderende interaktionelle hensyn på arbejdspladsen.

Samlet set bidrager afhandlingen med en analyse af, hvordan afbrudt interaktion og mislykkede interaktionsritualer udspiller sig på arbejdspladsen for medarbejdere med høretab, samt de følelsesmæssige og sociale konsekvenser for både dem og deres kollegaer. Ved at kombinere

interviews med medarbejdere med høretab, kollegaer og ledere samt feltarbejde på arbejdspladser adresserer afhandlingen en begrænsning i eksisterende litteratur om afbrudt interaktion og mislykkede interaktionsritualer ved at belyse processer for interaktionel stratifikation for medarbejdere med høretab.

Summary

In this dissertation, I examine the processes and consequences of disrupted and failed interactions in the workplace, using employees with hearing loss as a case study. It explores interactional breakdowns and the emotional conflicts that may arise as a result. The dissertation is guided by the overarching research question: What characterizes disrupted interaction, and what social consequences does it entail?

The analysis draws on the micro-sociological concepts of interaction rituals (Collins 2014) and face-work (Goffman 1967, 1990) to examine interactional micro-processes and social norm breaches. Additionally, it draws on perspectives from the sociology of emotions on sympathy as emotional gift exchange (Clark 1987, 1997; Hochschild 2003) to analyze the role of inclusive interactional gestures in the processes of inclusion. The empirical foundation of the dissertation consists of semi-structured interviews with employees with hearing loss, as well as interviews with colleagues and managers without hearing loss at two workplaces where four months of ethnographic fieldwork were conducted.

The first article investigates interactional challenges in disrupted interaction and contributes a conceptualization of four types of struggles: 1) *Concealing interactional disruptions*; 2) *Managing conflicts*; 3) *Keeping track of the conversation*; and 4) *Reintegrating into interactions*. The second article examines the role of inclusive interactional gestures for the social inclusion and exclusion of employees with hearing loss, as well as the risk of cumulative exclusion from workplace culture and symbols. The article contributes to existing micro-sociological and sociology of emotions literature by unfolding how processes of social exclusion manifest in the workplace for hard-of-hearing employees through chains of situational exclusion and restricted access to emotional gift-giving. The third article investigates feeling rules related to interactional inclusion in the workplace, shedding light on how inclusive interactional gestures sometimes result in failed interaction rituals with consequences such as restrained emotional buildup, emotional exhaustion, and efforts to manage emotions. The article contributes to the existing sociological literature on emotions by offering a conceptualization of three types of costs associated with displaying inclusive interactional gestures in the workplace.

Overall, this dissertation contributes an analysis of how disrupted interaction and failed interaction rituals unfold in the workplace for employees with hearing loss, as well as the emotional and social consequences for both them and their colleagues. By combining

interviews with employees with hearing loss, colleagues, and managers, along with ethnographic fieldwork, the dissertation addresses a limitation in existing research by shedding light on processes of interactional stratification affecting employees with hearing loss.

Introduktion

Afbrudt interaktion, misforståelser og mislykkede interaktioner er fænomener, som de fleste oplever på daglig basis. Samtidig er det fænomener, der, omend de er frekvente dele af de flestes hverdagsliv, kan true grundlæggende menneskelige behov for at være en del af fællesskaber, knytte stærke relationer og blive opfyldt af positive sociale følelser.

Mislykkede og afbrudte interaktioner kan føre til ensomhed (Husu 2021), vold (Jensen and Vitus 2020), faldende solidaritet (Collins 2020) og social eksklusion (Ince 2022). Ulighed i muligheden for at indgå i gode interaktioner manifesterer sig i mønstre, således at nogle grupper er mere udsat for interaktionelle vanskeligheder end andre og er i større risiko for at opleve de sociale og fysiske konsekvenser, som disse vanskeligheder kan bevirke. Disse grupper omfatter blandt andre mennesker med forskellige former for sanse- eller kommunikationshandikap (Jepsen 2021; Naraine and Lindsay 2011), folk, der benytter bestemte former for medieret kommunikation (Collins 2020), og mennesker, som interagerer i kontekster med sprogbarrierer (Roberts 2021).

Mens en del forskning har undersøgt de mekanismer, som er i spil under succesfulde interaktioner i forbindelse med begivenheder såsom fester (Tutenges 2023), sport (Cottingham 2012), religiøse arrangementer (George 2018) og politiske protester (Casquete 2006), er der i mindre grad belyst, hvilke processer og konsekvenser mislykkede interaktioner afføder i hverdagslivet (Davis 1961; Husu 2021; Ince 2022; Jepsen and Liebst 2021).

Denne afhandling undersøger de processer og konsekvenser, som afbrudte og mislykkede interaktioner medfører i arbejdslivet, ved at anvende medarbejdere med høretab som case. Gennem casestudiet af medarbejdere med høretab er det muligt at opnå viden om interaktionelle processer, deres sammenbrud og de emotionelle konflikter, det kan afføde, da denne gruppe i særlig grad er udsat for afbrudt interaktion (Bengtsson, Clausen, and Pedersen 2024; Christensen and Amilon 2023).

Verdenssundhedsorganisationen (WHO) anslår, at over 1,5 milliarder mennesker har en form for høretab, og dette tal forventes at stige (WHO 2021). Den eksisterende litteratur peger på, at medarbejdere med høretab oplever vanskeligheder ved at indgå i den sociale interaktion på arbejdspladsen (Christensen 2006; Christensen and Amilon 2023; Granberg and Gustafsson 2021; Hansen 2008; Lund 2015), i højere grad oplever ensomhed sammenlignet med

medarbejdere uden høretab (Christensen 2006) og er i risiko for social eksklusion (Hindhede 2012; Jepsen and Liebst 2021; Shukla et al. 2020). Endvidere er høretab associeret med arbejdsløshed (Christensen and Amilon 2023; Shan et al. 2020) og tidlig tilbagetrækning (Helvik, Krokstad, and Tambs 2013).

Mens eksisterende forskning har belyst en række sociale problemer for medarbejdere med høretab, er der stadig begrænset viden om de konkrete processer af afbrudt interaktion, som udfolder sig i hverdagen, og de følelsesmæssige og interaktionelle kvaler, som de afføder. I modsætning til tidligere studier inddrager denne afhandling en kombination af interviews med medarbejdere med høretab, deres kollegaer og ledere uden høretab samt etnografisk feltarbejde på arbejdspladser. Denne kombination muliggør en mikroanalyse af processerne for afbrudte og mislykkede interaktioner og en undersøgelse af de følelser, som opstår, og den mening, situationerne tilskrives blandt de interagerende parter.

Afhandlingen tager udgangspunkt i det overordnede forskningsspørgsmål: Hvad karakteriserer afbrudt interaktion, og hvilke sociale konsekvenser medfører det? Dette undersøges gennem tre artikler, der adresserer følgende spørgsmål: 1) Hvilke typer af interaktionelle kvaler oplever medarbejdere med høretab i deres bestræbelser på at deltage i det sociale liv på arbejdspladsen? 2) Hvilken rolle spiller inkluderende interaktionelle gestus for deres sociale inklusion? 3) Hvilke omkostninger er forbundet med at udvise inkluderende interaktionelle gestus over for kollegaer?

Afhandlingens empiriske grundlag består af semi-strukturerede interviews med medarbejdere med høretab fra 19 danske arbejdspladser samt interviews med kolleger og ledere uden høretab fra to arbejdspladser, hvor jeg udførte feltarbejde over en periode på fire måneder. I alt indgår 29 interviews og feltnoter fra 150-175 timers observation.

Afhandlingens analyser trækker på mikrosociologiske begreber om interaktionsritualer (Collins 2014) og *face-work* (Goffman 1967, 1990) til at undersøge interaktionelle mikroprocesser og sociale normbrud. Derudover anvendes følelsessociologiske begreber om sympati som gaveudveksling (Clark 1987, 1997; Hochschild 2003) til at belyse betydningen af inkluderende interaktionelle gestus i inklusionsprocesser.

En social situation udgør, ifølge Collins, et succesfyldt interaktionsritual i samme grad, som den lever op til fire følgende kriterier: mennesker skal være fysisk samlet, de skal fokusere på samme objekt eller aktivitet, dele en følelsesmæssig stemning og have en tydelig afgrænsning i forhold til dem, som ikke deltager i ritualen (Collins 2014:48). Interaktionsritualer kan

indbefatte en lang række sociale interaktioner fra dem, som skaber gruppetilhørsforhold på arbejdspladsen, til dem, som er fyldt med friktion og skaber følelser af udmattelse, kedsomhed eller irritation. Begrebet er derfor særlig anvendeligt til at undersøge og udfolde nogle af de interaktionelle kvaler, som den eksisterende litteratur har identificeret blandt medarbejdere med høretab. *Face-work* (Goffman 1967, 1990) betegner de verbale og nonverbale bestræbelser, som individer gør sig, for at tilpasse deres udtryk, så det stemmer overens med den ønskede selvpræsentation. Jeg anvender begrebet til at undersøge, hvordan medarbejdere tilpasser sig til den normative sociale orden i sociale interaktioner på arbejdspladsen.

I tillæg til de mikrosociologiske begreber om interaktionsritualer og *face-work* anvender jeg Clarks (1987, 1997) begreb om sympati som en social følelse, der både har evnen til at skabe sociale bånd mellem mennesker og, hvis behovet for sympati ikke imødekommes, at skabe afstand mellem dem. Ligesom penge og lignende ressourcer er sympati, ifølge Clark, en begrænset ressource; det kræver følelsesarbejde (Hochschild 2003) og mental energi at udvise sympati. Dette får mennesker til at give og modtage sympatigaver i overensstemmelse med kulturelt definerede principper. At udvise de inkluderende interaktionelle gestus, som jeg i afhandlingen konceptualiserer som sympatigaver, overfor kolleger med høretab kan f.eks. indebære at tale langsommere og tydeligere end normalt, udvise tålmodighed ved behov for gentagelser, eller bevidst opretholde øjenkontakt under en interaktion. I afhandlingen undersøger jeg, hvordan følelsesudvekslinger kan være behæftet med problemer – dels når behovet for inkluderende interaktionelle gestus ikke imødekommes og resulterer i situationel eksklusion for medarbejdere med høretab, og dels når behovet imødekommes, men ledsages af underliggende følelser af irritation eller vrede.

Med perspektiver fra mikrosociologien og emotionssociologien bidrager afhandlingen til den begrænsede litteratur om processer af afbrudte og mislykkede interaktioner. Den første artikel undersøger interaktionelle udfordringer i afbrudt interaktion og bidrager med en konceptualisering af fire typer af kvaler: 1) *Concealing interactional disruptions*; 2) *Managing conflicts*; 3) *Keeping track of the conversation*; og 4) *Reintegrating into interactions*. Den anden artikel bidrager til at belyse vigtigheden af inkluderende interaktionelle gestus for den sociale inklusion og eksklusion af medarbejdere med høretab, samt risikoen for akkumulativ eksklusion fra arbejdspladsens kultur og symboler. Den illustrerer derudover, hvordan situationel eksklusion kan hæmme medarbejdere med høretabs mulighed for at give og modtage følelsesgaver blandt kollegaer, og de sociale konsekvenser. Den tredje artikel identificerer en følelsesregel (Hochschild 1979) om at udvise interaktionelt hensyn på

arbejdspladsen og belyser, hvordan interaktionelle hensyn somme tider resulterer i mislykkede interaktionsritualer med omkostninger såsom hæmmet følelsesmæssig opbygning, følelsesmæssig udmattelse og bestræbelser på at kontrollere følelser.

Samlet set bidrager afhandlingen med en analyse af, hvordan afbrudt interaktion og mislykkede interaktionsritualer udspiller sig på arbejdspladsen for medarbejdere med høretab, samt de følelsesmæssige og sociale konsekvenser for både dem og deres kollegaer. Ved at kombinere interviews med medarbejdere med høretab, kollegaer og ledere samt feltarbejde på arbejdspladser adresserer afhandlingen en begrænsning i eksisterende litteratur om afbrudt interaktion og mislykkede interaktionsritualer ved at belyse processer for interaktionel stratifikation for medarbejdere med høretab.

Baggrund

I denne sektion introduceres nogle af de kontekster, som afhandlingen skriver sig ind i. Først introduceres forskningsprojektet *Hvordan hører vi sammen?*, dets samarbejdspartnere og dets fire delprojekter, herunder det delprojekt, som denne afhandling udspringer af. Dernæst beskrives omfanget af høretab blandt erhvervsaktive i Danmark samt de sociale og beskæftigelsesmæssige udfordringer, der knytter sig til at have et høretab på arbejdsmarkedet. Efterfølgende præsenteres afhandlingens handicapforståelse, efterfulgt af et afsnit, der argumenterer for, hvorfor arbejdspladsen udgør et relevant fokus for undersøgelsen af afbrudt interaktion. Sektionen afsluttes med en læsevejledning, der skitserer afhandlingens struktur.

Afhandlingens rolle i forskningsprojektet *Hvordan hører vi sammen?*

Afhandlingen har rod i et større forskningsprojekt med titlen *Hvordan hører vi sammen? Interaktionelle dynamikker i fællesskaber af og med mennesker med høretab* med Inge Kryger Pedersen som leder. Projektet er støttet af VELUX FONDEN og forløber i perioden 2021-2025. Projektet er et HUMpraxis projekt, hvor forskere fra henholdsvis Sociologisk Institut, Københavns Universitet og VIVE – Det Nationale Forsknings- og Analysecenter for Velfærd, arbejder sammen med praksisaktørerne Castberggård Job, Frijsenborg Efterskole og Høreforeningen. Castberggård er en institution, der yder tilbud til døve, CI-brugere, personer med høretab og deres pårørende gennem dens tre funktioner som højskole, jobcenter og conferencecenter. Frijsenborg Efterskole er en efterskole, som aktivt arbejder med inklusion af unge med høretab. Projektets sidste praksisaktør, Høreforeningen, er en interesseforening, der varetager mennesker med høreproblemers interesser.

Forskningsprojektet er inddelt i fire subprojekter, som har det overordnede formål at styrke fællesskaber for mennesker med høretab ved at skabe viden om processer for inklusion og eksklusion i skoler og på arbejdspladser. Projektets første subprojekt A, som udføres af postdoc ved Sociologisk Institut, Københavns Universitet, Kim Sune Jepsen, belyser gennem interviews og videoobservationer individuelle strategier for håndtering af høretab blandt unge, samt betydningen af venskaber og andre uformelle fællesskaber for at indgå i sociale sammenhænge. Subprojekt B, som danner baggrund for denne afhandling, undersøger gennem interviews og feltarbejde interaktionelle og følelsesmæssige processer for afbrudt interaktion samt inklusion og eksklusion blandt medarbejdere med høretab. Subprojekt C, som udføres af seniorforsker Steen Bengtsson fra VIVE, Det Nationale Forsknings- og Analysecenter for Velfærd, belyser gennem befolkningsundersøgelsen SHILD 2020¹ (Bengtsson et al. 2024; Christensen and Amilon 2023) samt en spørgeskemaundersøgelse blandt elever på Frijsenborg Efterskole levevilkår for gruppen med høretab sammenlignet med befolkningen som helhed. Forskningsprojektets sidste subprojekt D udføres af Inge Kryger Pedersen, lektor på Sociologisk Institut, Københavns Universitet, og belyser hvordan professionelle forstår og håndterer social inklusion i arbejdet med mennesker med høretab.

Høretab og arbejdsliv i en dansk kontekst

I dette afsnit vil jeg beskrive omfanget af høretab i Danmark blandt borgere i den arbejdsdygtige alder samt beskrive nogle af de sociale og arbejdstilknytningsmæssige problematikker, som er blevet kortlagt gennem forskning i en dansk kontekst.

I en dansk kontekst anslås det, at omkring 20 procent af borgere i den arbejdsdygtige alder har problemer med hørelsen (Christensen and Amilon 2023). Selvom nedsat hørelse er en funktionsvariation, som oftest opstår med alderen (Christensen and Amilon 2023), tyder studier på, at en større andel af yngre mennesker er i risiko for nedsat hørelse som en konsekvens af blandt andet brugen af høretelefoner (Dillard et al. 2022; WHO 2021). Den fremtidige demografiske udvikling, med en voksende andel ældre borgere samt en stigende forekomst af nedsat hørelse blandt yngre generationer, er blandt de faktorer, der gør, at andelen af mennesker med høretab på verdensplan forventes at stige (WHO 2021).

Høretab kan være en vanskelig størrelse at måle, da mange forskellige faktorer kan spille ind. Dels er der stor individuel forskel på, hvordan et høretab opleves af den enkelte. To personer

¹ SHILD står for Survey of Health, Impairment and Living Conditions in Denmark, og er en befolkningsundersøgelse, som har været udført hvert fjerde år siden 2012.

kan således have den samme audiologiske hørekurve, men opleve høretabet vidt forskelligt og have væsentlig forskellige oplevelser af, i hvor høj grad høretabet er en hindring i arbejdslivet. Derudover er der en stor andel af mennesker, som oplever problemer med hørelsen, men som ikke har et diagnosticeret høretab (Christensen and Amilon 2023), ligesom der er en stor andel af dem med høretekniske hjælpemidler, som ikke benytter sig af dem (Christensen 2006; Hindhede 2010). Problemer med hørelsen kan også have andre årsager end dem, som kan måles gennem en klinisk audiologisk høretest, og eksempelvis være forbundet med problemer med taleopfattelse eller kapaciteten til at skelne ord fra hinanden, såkaldt skelneevne (Christensen 2006). Jeg har derfor valgt ikke at inddele informanterne i afhandlingen efter graden af audiologisk målbart høretab, da det ikke nødvendigvis vil afspejle den grad af problemer, som de oplever i deres arbejdsliv.

I en undersøgelse foretaget af VIVE, Det Nationale Forsknings- og Analysecenter for Velfærd, belyses frekvensen af høretab blandt borgere i den arbejdsdygtige alder samt denne gruppes vilkår på arbejdsmarkedet sammenlignet med personer uden høreproblemer (Christensen and Amilon 2023). Undersøgelsen anvender selvangivet høretab som mål for omfanget af høretab i befolkningen og finder, at 18 % af befolkningen mellem 18-64 år har ”lidt vanskelighed” med deres hørelse, mens 2,2 % har ”en del vanskelighed” og 0,1 % ”slet ikke kan høre” (ibid).

Høretab er blevet forbundet med en række af forhold på arbejdsmarkedet, når gruppen med høretab sammenlignes med den generelle befolkning på arbejdsmarkedet. Forskning viser, at sammenlignet med gruppen uden høretab, så er andelen af personer i den arbejdsdygtige alder med høretab, som er i beskæftigelse, lavere (Christensen and Amilon 2023; Clausen 2003; Dammeyer et al. 2019). Samtidig er andelen af gruppen i støttet beskæftigelse (Christensen and Amilon 2023) og uden beskæftigelse (Christensen and Amilon 2023; Clausen 2003; Dammeyer et al. 2019) højere sammenlignet med personer uden høretab. Endvidere har medarbejdere med høretab signifikant lavere forventninger om at være i stand til at finde et nyt arbejde inden for den første måned, hvis de mistede deres job, sammenlignet med den generelle befolkning (Dammeyer et al. 2019).

Derudover arbejder populationen med høretab i arbejde også færre timer end den generelle befolkning i arbejde (Christensen 2006; Christensen and Amilon 2023), samt har en lavere selv vurderet arbejdssevne (Christensen and Amilon 2023; Hansen 2008). Endvidere er der også vist en sammenhæng mellem høretab og øget sandsynlighed for at gå på førtidspension (Christensen 2006; Clausen 2003).

Forskning i mennesker med høretabs vilkår på det danske arbejdsmarked har også belyst en række sociale faktorer, som gør sig gældende for gruppen. Eksisterende litteratur har beskrevet, hvordan medarbejdere med høretab oplever gerne at ville undgå socialt samvær og arrangementer på arbejdspladsen (Hansen 2008; Rosenmeier and Hansen 2016), og at dette er gældende for en større andel af medarbejdere med høretab sammenlignet med gruppen uden høretab (Christensen and Amilon 2023). Endvidere oplever gruppen vanskeligheder med at følge med i gruppesamtaler og indgå på lige fod i uformelt socialt samvær (Bengtsson et al. 2024; Christensen and Amilon 2023; Hansen 2008; Jepsen and Liebst 2021; Rosenmeier and Hansen 2016). De sociale problemer med at følge med i sociale sammenhænge kan tænkes at hænge sammen med oplevelsen af ensomhed på arbejdspladsen (Rosenmeier and Hansen 2016), som i noget højere grad opleves af erhvervsaktive med høretab sammenlignet med erhvervsaktive uden høretab (Christensen 2006).

Eksisterende forskning indikerer desuden, at der forekommer konflikter og eksklusionsprocesser mellem medarbejdere med høretab og deres kollegaer. En større andel af medarbejdere med høretab oplever ubehagelige drillerier på arbejdspladsen (Christensen 2006; Clausen 2003) samt manglende støtte fra deres kollegaer (Christensen 2006; Clausen 2003) og ledere (Clausen 2003) sammenlignet med medarbejdere uden høretab. En undersøgelse af brugere med Cochlear-implantater i den erhvervsaktive alder viser, at minimum hver tiende oplever, at der sjældent eller aldrig bliver taget hensyn til deres høretab på arbejdspladsen blandt kollegaer og ledere (Rosenmeier and Hansen 2016:47), og at knap hver tiende føler sig ensom det meste af tiden eller altid (Rosenmeier and Hansen 2016:49). Eksisterende forskning beskriver endvidere, at erhvervsaktive med høretab oplever at blive psykisk udmattede på arbejdspladsen (Christensen 2006; Hansen 2008; Jepsen 2021; Jepsen and Liebst 2021; Lund 2015; Rosenmeier and Hansen 2016), og at dette gør sig gældende for en større andel end blandt erhvervsaktive uden høretab (Clausen 2003).

I en kvantitativ undersøgelse af betydningen af en nedsat hørelse i forhold til arbejdsmarkedstilknytning og arbejdsliv finder Christensen (2006) en uoverensstemmelse mellem medarbejdere med høretabs egen vurdering af, hvilken betydning nedsat hørelse har for deres arbejdsliv, og de statistiske analyser. Undersøgelsen, som er foretaget blandt et repræsentativt udsnit af den danske befolkning i alderen 50-64 år, viser, at gruppen med høreproblemer i højere grad har en svækket relation til kollegaer og ledelse, oftere føler sig udmattede og i højere grad forbinder push-faktorer, såsom dårligt helbred og besvær med at klare arbejdet, frem for pull-faktorer såsom mere tid til familien eller fritidsinteresser, som

grund til tilbagetrækning fra arbejdsmarkedet. Undersøgelsen peger på, at høretabet giver en forringelse af arbejdslivet, men at den enkelte ikke nødvendigvis er bevidst om sammenhængen (Christensen 2006).

Den eksisterende forskning om at have et høretab på arbejdspladsen viser således, at der er en række sociale problemer forbundet med at have et høretab og indgå i det sociale fællesskab på arbejdspladsen, samt at belastningerne har konsekvenser for den enkelte i form af psykisk udmattelse, ensomhed og forringet relation til kollegaer og ledere. Endvidere tyder det på, at høretabet ikke blot kan være usynligt for omgivelserne, men at virkningen af høretabet tilmed kan være ”usynligt” for medarbejderen med høretab selv. I afhandlingens tre artikler har jeg udfoldet de processer af afbrudt interaktion og social eksklusion, som mennesker med høretab indgår i på arbejdspladsen, og bidrager således til at beskrive kompleksiteten i de sammenhænge, som den statistiske forskning viser.

Høretab og handicap

For nogle af interviewpersonerne med høretab i denne afhandling er afbrudt interaktion et gennemgående træk i sociale situationer, selv når de anvender høreteknologiske hjælpemidler. For dem er det en betingelse for interaktion at navigere i huller i samtaler ved hjælp af kontekstuelle ledetråde.

En af interviewpersonerne, Martin², som har et betydeligt skelnetab³, beskriver den afbrudte interaktion som at lytte til en radio, der midlertidigt mister signalet, før forbindelsen genoprettes. Derfor er de sætninger, Martin hører, ofte præget af manglende ord og huller, der kræver fortolkning. For andre interviewpersoner er denne udfordring særlig tydelig i situationer med baggrundsstøj eller gruppesamtaler. Afbrudt interaktion kan komme til udtryk som korte pauser midt i en sætning eller længere sekvenser af uforståelig dialog. Den afbrudte interaktion kan øge risikoen for utilsigtet at bryde den sociale samhandlings grundregler, hvilket kan medføre sociale sanktioner og misforståelser.

For mange med høretab kan høreteknologiske hjælpemidler ikke fuldt ud kompensere for høretabet, og der vil opstå situationer, hvor det er vanskeligt at følge med i den verbale kommunikation (Bengtsson et al. 2024; Christensen and Amilon 2023; Hindhede et al. 2024). Høretab som en funktionsvariation bliver således et socialt problem, når medarbejdere med

² Alle navne på interviewpersoner er blevet ændret.

³ Tab af evnen til at genkende og adskille ord fra hinanden.

høretab forhindres i at deltage i interaktioner og sociale fællesskaber. Handikappet opstår således, når medarbejderne ikke kan deltage på lige vilkår i det sociale miljø (Oliver 1990). For døve medarbejdere og medarbejdere med høretab, der kommunikerer på tegnsprog og arbejder på en arbejdsplads, hvor tegnsprog er det primære sprog, bliver funktionsnedsættelsen derfor ikke nødvendigvis til et handicap (Scully 2020). I denne undersøgelse fokuserer jeg imidlertid på medarbejdere med høretab og døve med Cochlear-implantater, der arbejder på arbejdspladser, hvor der tales dansk talesprog, hvilket gælder for de fleste medarbejdere med høretab i Danmark.

Arbejdspladsen som fokus

Arbejdspladsen som fokus for undersøgelsen af afbrudt interaktion og mislykkede interaktioner er væsentligt af flere forskellige grunde. Arbejdet har en central betydning, i og med at det dels er en kilde til individets selvforsørgelse, og dels er en arena, hvor erhvervsaktive bruger en stor del af deres tid (Hochschild 2022). Arbejdspladsen har en identitetsskabende funktion og er betydningsfuld i forhold til individets sociale netværk og samfundsmæssige status (Grint and Nixon 2015:297f). Samtidig har arbejdspladsen nogle forhold, som kan vanskeliggøre afbrudt interaktion yderligere og muligvis skabe dårligere betingelser for interaktionel inklusion, end det er tilfældet i den tid, der tilbringes blandt venner og familie uden for arbejdet. Arbejdspladsens strukturer og kultur kan lægge et pres på medarbejderne om effektivitet, hvilket kan påvirke deres vilje og følelsesmæssige ressourcer til at udvise tålmodighed, venlighed og tidskrævende interaktionelle gestus overfor medarbejdere med høretab. Et studie af sammenhængen mellem udvisning af sociale støtte mellem kollegaer og arbejdsmæssige stressfaktorer på arbejdspladsen viser, at graden af social støtte var negativt korreleret med arbejdsmæssige stressfaktorer (Jex et al. 2003). Dette aspekt ved arbejdspladsen som felt vender jeg tilbage til i afhandlingens diskussion.

På samfundsniveau har Danmark forpligtet sig til at implementere de økonomiske, sociale og kulturelle rettigheder, der er beskrevet i FN's handicapkonvention. Konventionen fastslår, at mennesker med handicap har ret til *"arbejde på lige fod med andre, hvilket omfatter retten til at kunne tjene til livets ophold ved beskæftigelse, som de selv frit vælger eller påtager sig på et arbejdsmarked og i et arbejdsmiljø, der er åbent, inkluderende og tilgængeligt"* (UN 2006:19). I 2024 modtog Danmark imidlertid kritik fra FN for manglende implementering af handicaprettigheder på flere områder, herunder beskæftigelse.

Denne afhandlings undersøgelse af de processer, som vanskeliggør interaktionel inklusion på arbejdspladsen for mennesker med høretab, kan bidrage til at skabe viden, som kan forbedre vilkårene for gruppen. En forbedring af sociale forhold, der kan reducere den øgede forekomst af arbejdsløshed og tidlig tilbagetrækning fra arbejdsmarkedet, vil samtidig kunne have en positiv økonomisk effekt på samfundsniveau (Christensen 2006).

Læsevejledning

De følgende afsnit af afhandlingen er struktureret i fire hoveddele: teori, metode, en diskuterende konklusion samt de tre forskningsartikler, der udgør kernen af afhandlingen. De teoretiske afsnit introducerer og begrundet afhandlingens teoretiske valg. Indledningsvist begrundet jeg afhandlingens anvendte teorier samt de kritikker, der kan rettes mod dem, og hvordan de teoretiske traditioner kan komplementere hinanden. Herefter præsenteres det mikrosociologiske perspektiv fra Randall Collins og Erving Goffman med fokus på den sociale situation, interaktionsritualet og *face-work*. Dernæst præsenteres afhandlingens emotionssociologiske perspektiver fra Arlie Hochschilds og Candace Clarks arbejder om emotioner og den socioemotionelle økonomi. Afslutningsvist præsenteres afhandlingens videnskabsteoretiske refleksioner.

De metodiske afsnit beskriver afhandlingens empiriske grundlag og metodevalg. Først begrundes valget af høretab på arbejdspladsen som case til at undersøge afbrudt interaktion. Herefter beskrives det empiriske materiale og de anvendte kvalitative metoder, herunder interview og feltarbejde. Dernæst redegør jeg for min position som forsker samt de metodiske overvejelser vedrørende adgang til feltet, samplingsstrategi, analysestrategi og generalisering. Afslutningsvis præsenterer jeg mine etiske refleksioner.

I den diskuterende og konkluderende del af afhandlingen sammenfatter og diskuterer jeg de vigtigste fund fra de tre artikler. Indledningsvis opsummerer jeg de tre artikler, der udgør kernen af afhandlingen. Derefter følger en konkluderende diskussion, hvor jeg sammenfatter afhandlingens væsentligste fund og diskuterer deres implikationer i forhold til, hvordan den emotionelle kultur på arbejdspladser kan forandres mod et mere inkluderende miljø. Afslutningsvis præsenterer jeg afhandlingens overordnede begrænsninger, inden de tre forskningsartikler introduceres.

Teori

I de følgende teoretiske afsnit begrundes jeg først afhandlingens teoretiske valg, før jeg udfolder de centrale teorier og begreber, der danner grundlag for artiklernes analyser. Først begrundes jeg afhandlingens anvendte teorier og adresserer centrale kritikker heraf. Herefter præsenteres det mikrosociologiske perspektiv fra Randall Collins og Erving Goffman med fokus på den sociale situation, interaktionsritualet og *face-work*. Dernæst præsenteres afhandlingens emotionssociologiske perspektiver fra Arlie Hochschilds og Candace Clarks arbejder om emotioner og den socioemotionelle økonomi. Afslutningsvist præsenteres afhandlingens videnskabsteoretiske refleksioner.

Teoretiske refleksioner

I denne sektion begrundes jeg afhandlingens teoretiske valg og udfolder, hvilke aspekter begreberne er særlig gode til at belyse, samt hvilke aspekter de i mindre grad indfanger. Afhandlingens artikler tager afsæt i en mikrosociologisk forståelse af den sociale situation som central for reproduktionen og forandringen af sociale processer. Jeg trækker både på Randall Collins' begreber om interaktionsritualer og emotionel energi samt Erving Goffmans begreber om *face-work* og fremmedgørelse i interaktioner. Derudover anvender jeg et emotionssociologisk perspektiv med Arlie Hochschilds teori om emotioner og *emotion work* samt Candace Clarks forståelse af emotioner som gaveudveksling. I det følgende udfolder jeg, hvordan disse teoretiske perspektiver supplerer hinanden og samtidig afhjælper nogle af de kritikpunkter, der kan rettes mod dem hver især.

Collins og Goffman er begge blevet kritiseret for at have et reduktivt blik på individet, hvor samfundets rolle i individets tilblivelse betones på bekostning af en forståelse af menneskets subjektive indre og private dimensioner (Smith 2019:110). Goffmans ofte citerede formulering: "Not, then, men and their moments. Rather moments and their men" (Goffman 1967:3), understreger denne tilgang, som Collins viderefører med sin reformulering: "In a strong sense, the individual is the interaction ritual chain" (Collins 2014:4–5). Hochschild har blandt andet kritiseret Goffmans teoretiske ramme – en kritik, der ligeledes kan rettes mod Collins – for ikke i tilstrækkelig grad at tilskrive individet en indre stemme og handlekapacitet (Hochschild 2003:226–28). Selvet bliver i teorierne ikke udviklet som noget, der føler, handler og reagerer på de regler, som eksisterer i den sociale situation. Selvom Goffman beskriver, hvordan følelser som skam kan undertrykkes, fremstilles dette primært som en proces, der sker *mod* selvet, snarere end en handling, som selvet selv udfører. Han beskriver studiet af social interaktion

gennem etnografi som studiet af trafikreglerne for social interaktion: “the code the person adheres to in his movement across the paths and designs of others, but not where he is going, or why he wants to get there. One does not even learn why he is ready to follow the code, for a large number of different motives can equally lead him to do so” (Goffman 1967:12). Denne beskrivelse understreger, hvordan hans fokus ligger på de strukturerende regler for social interaktion, snarere end på individets handlekapacitet og indre følelser.

Ved at anvende Hochschilds og Clarks begreber om indre emotioner, følelsesregler og følelsesmæssigt display åbner afhandlingen for en forståelse af selvet som et refleksivt subjekt, der forholder sig til og træffer beslutninger om de interaktionelle og følelsesmæssige regler (Hochschild 2003:226–28). Gennem disse begreber – og med interviewet som primær metode – bliver det ikke blot muligt at afdække “the code”, som Goffman formulerer det, men også at undersøge, hvorfor medarbejdere i nogle situationer vælger at følge denne kode, mens de i andre situationer afviger fra den.

Dette belyses eksempelvis i afhandlingens tredje artikel, hvor kollegaer uden høretab beskriver, hvordan de aktivt forsøger at kontrollere følelser af irritation under afbrudt interaktion, fordi de grundlæggende anerkender den eksisterende følelsesregel om at vise hensyn til kollegaer med høretab. I andre tilfælde udtrykker kollegaerne et mere ambivalent forhold til samme regel. Det gælder eksempelvis Christian, der beskriver, hvordan tur-tagning under møder “dræbte vores ånd her på arbejdspladsen”. Clarks og Hochschilds teoretiske begreber bidrager således med et perspektiv, der fremhæver individets indre liv og dets kapacitet til at forhandle, reflektere over og tage stilling til de eksisterende følelseskulturer.

Brugen af Clarks og Hochschilds begreber om emotioner og følelsesmæssigt display muliggør desuden en analyse af interaktionelle gestuss som følelsesudtryk – uanset om de ledsages af oprigtige følelser som tålmodighed og sympati eller ej. Dette åbner for en analyse, hvor medarbejdernes gestus samt deres følte og udtrykte følelser kan undersøges hver for sig. En inkluderende interaktionel gestus, f.eks. at opsummere pointer fra et møde til en medarbejder med høretab, kan analyseres som et display af en følelsesgave, samtidig med at den udføres med indre følelser af irritation eller utålmodighed. Afhandlingens første og tredje artikel viser, hvordan inkluderende interaktionelle gestus, der udvises med underliggende følelser af irritation eller vrede, kan skabe konflikter mellem medarbejdere og på sigt beskadige relationer.

En anden kritik af Goffmans teoretiske ramme er, at den kun i begrænset omfang forbinder interaktionssituationer til større sociale strukturer. Dermed risikerer situationerne at fremstå

som "fractured island(s) of reality" (Hochschild 2003:225). Ved at inddrage Collins' begreb om kæder af interaktionsritualer viser jeg, hvordan begivenheder i én situation får konsekvenser i efterfølgende situationer. Dette er omdrejningspunktet for afhandlingens anden artikel, der undersøger, hvordan situationel eksklusion kan akkumulere over tid og føre til en generel fremmedgørelse fra arbejdspladsens kulturelle symboler og fællesskab. Collins' teori tilbyder således et analytisk blik for, hvordan kæder af situationer gradvist kan udvikle sig til sociale strukturer, og hvordan disse strukturer samtidig reproduceres og forandres gennem social interaktion (Kemper & Collins 1990:33).

Goffmans og Collins' teoretiske perspektiver på den sociale situation giver desuden mulighed for at undersøge den eksisterende normative sociale orden. I afhandlingen anvender jeg deres teorier til at belyse de interaktionelle mikroprocesser, der udfolder sig på arbejdspladsen. Hvad sker der eksempelvis, når medarbejdere med høretab uforvarende bryder med den sociale samhandlings grundregler ved ikke at svare, når nogen råber "godmorgen" på gangen, eller ved at undlade at stille uddybende spørgsmål til en kollegas fortælling under frokosten? Vil deres sociale værd blive vurderet ud fra disse regelbrud, og hvis ja, hvordan manifesterer de sociale sanktioner sig? På denne måde er Collins' og Goffmans begreber særligt egnede til at undersøge det at have et høretab i en arbejdspladskontekst, hvor den sociale koordination i interaktionssituationerne er udfordret. Deres teori om interaktionsritualer er især anvendelig til at udforske de mikroprocesser og mekanismer, der ligger til grund for den diskrimination og eksklusion, som kvantitative studier på området har dokumenteret.

Collins' fokus på generelle aspekter af interaktion, såsom rytmisk og følelsesmæssig *entrainment* – eller manglen på samme – betoner de mekaniske og ikke-symbolske aspekter af social interaktion. Til gengæld er hans teori mindre opmærksom på de sociale normer og den kulturelle kontekst, hvori interaktionsritualerne udfolder sig. For at nuancere dette aspekt inddrager jeg Goffmans teori om den sociale samhandlings regler, *face-work* og normbrud. Dette perspektiv muliggør en analyse af medarbejdernes bestræbelser på at overholde normative forventninger samt deres forsøg på at undgå pinlige situationer og sociale sanktioner. Derudover anvender jeg Hochschilds begreber om *emotion work* og *feeling rules* samt Clarks begreb om den socioemotionelle økonomi til at belyse de aspekter af social interaktion, som relaterer sig til sociale normer og den kulturelle kontekst. Ved at kombinere Collins' teori på den ene side med Goffmans, Clarks og Hochschilds perspektiver på den anden belyser afhandlingen to centrale aspekter ved afbrudt interaktion.

Det første aspekt vedrører de normative dimensioner af afbrudt interaktion, herunder hvordan medarbejdere med høretab udfører ekstra arbejde for at undgå at fornærme eller støde kollegaer og for at opretholde *face* i interaktioner præget af afbrydelser. Det omfatter også de forhandlinger, der opstår, når medarbejdere uden høretab forsøger at leve op til specifikke følelsesregler ved at udføre forskellige former for *emotion work*. Teoriene, der beskæftiger sig med de normative aspekter af social interaktion, sætter fokus på, hvad der er på spil for individet, når sociale normer brydes – fra kortvarig skam og mindre sociale sanktioner til eksklusion fra fællesskabet.

Det andet aspekt vedrører de mekaniske dimensioner af afbrudt interaktion, herunder hvordan både medarbejdere med og uden høretab oplever vanskeligheder med at opnå synkronicitet og gensidig følelsesmæssig opbygning i interaktioner med mange afbrydelser. Collins' begreber om interaktionsritualer og emotionel energi bidrager til at forklare, hvad der henholdsvis tiltrækker og frastøder medarbejdere fra bestemte sociale situationer. Mens Collins betoner mængden af emotionel energi som forklarende faktor for, hvad der driver mennesker mod bestemte interaktionssituationer og frastøder dem fra andre, nuancerer Hochschild, Clark og Goffmans teorier med deres betoning af sociale normer og kulturel kontekst denne forklaring. Hochschilds, Clarks og Goffmans teorier bidrager til en forståelse af, hvorfor medarbejdere fortsat deltager i interaktionsritualer, selv når disse ikke genererer høj emotionel energi (King 2019:46–48).

På denne måde forener afhandlingen flere teoretiske perspektiver, der kobler de mekaniske aspekter ved afbrudt interaktion såsom synkronicitet og emotionel energi med deres normative aspekter såsom sociale sanktioner og følelsesregler. I afhandlingens første artikel kombinerer jeg Collins' og Goffmans teoretiske perspektiver, mens jeg i anden og tredje artikel anvender Collins' teori i samspil med begreber fra Clark og Hochschild. I de følgende sektioner vil jeg først udfolde de mikrosociologiske perspektiver fra Randall Collins og Erving Goffman, og derefter de emotionssociologiske perspektiver fra Arlie Hochschild og Candace Clark.

Den sociale situation og interaktionsritualer

I Collins teoretiske perspektiv er den sociale situation det forskningsmæssige udgangspunkt. Ifølge Collins er sociale situationer ikke blot et produkt af de individer, der deltager i dem; de indeholder deres egne regelmæssigheder (Collins 2014:5). Det er netop disse mønstre og brud, som mikrosociologien søger at afdække. Ifølge Collins er det gennem kæder af sociale situationer, at samfundsmæssige strukturer bliver til (Collins 2014:5). Samtidig virker de etablerede strukturer tilbage på interaktionssituationerne i en vekselvirkning (Kemper and Collins 1990:33). Sociale strukturer konstrueres, reproduceres og forandres således gennem interaktionssituationer (Collins 2014:9). Et mikrosociologisk fokus indebærer derfor ikke en negligering af sociale strukturer som eksempelvis diskrimination. Tværtimod søger mikrosociologien at undersøge de grundlæggende processer, hvorigennem sociale strukturer skabes og transformeres. Afhandlingens artikler står på skuldrene af den mikrosociologiske tilgang og tager udgangspunkt i den sociale situation i undersøgelsen af afbrudte og mislykkede interaktioner og de interaktionelle og emotionelle konsekvenser, det medfører.

I afhandlingen anvender jeg Collins' begreb om interaktionsritualer, som han videreudvikler fra Durkheims og Goffmans (Durkheim 2012; Goffman 1967) konceptualiseringer af processerne i delte følelses- og fokusmæssige rytmer mellem mennesker (Collins 2014:7). Ifølge Collins udgør en social situation et interaktionsritual, for så vidt at den lever op til fire følgende kriterier: Deltagerne skal være fysisk til stede sammen⁴, de skal have en fælles opmærksomhed rettet mod et objekt eller en aktivitet, de skal dele en følelsesmæssig stemning, og der skal være en afgrænsning mellem dem, der deltager i ritualen, og dem, der står udenfor (Collins 2014:48).

Når et interaktionsritual er succesfuldt, suges deltagerne ind i en rytme, hvor deres fælles opmærksomhed og følelsesmæssige engagement forstærker hinanden og skaber en spiral af gensidig kropslig og interaktionel synkronisering, hvilket Collins kalder følelsesmæssig og rytmisk *entrainment* (Collins 2014:48). Durkheim beskrev, hvordan ritualer i religiøse stammer skabte kollektiv *effervescence* – en ekstatiske følelse på gruppeniveau (Durkheim 2012). Forskning i rusmiddelkultur, sportsbegivenheder, vold, religiøse begivenheder og politiske

⁴ Forskning i online interaktionsritualer problematiserer kriteriet om at være fysisk til stede sammen og understreger, at interaktionsritualer medieret gennem teknologi indeholder nye muligheder for solidaritet og fællesskaber (Johannessen 2023).

møder viser, hvordan interaktionsritualer i disse kontekster kan fremkalde lignende intense følelser (Collins 2004; Cottingham 2012; George 2018; Tutenges 2023). Interaktionsritualer begrænser sig imidlertid ikke til særlig intense begivenheder. De omfatter også mere hverdagslige situationer såsom energidrænende møder på arbejdspladsen, hverdagssamtaler mellem kollegaer eller faglige diskussioner med højt engagement. Begrebet kan således anvendes til at analysere et bredt spektrum af sociale interaktioner – ikke kun dem, der med succes skaber kollektiv *effervescence*, men også dem, der er præget af friktion, eller som mislykkes og resulterer i udmattelse, kedsomhed eller irritation.

I den udstrækning et ritual skaber en rytmisk *entrainment* mellem deltagerne gennem gensidig kropslig og emotionel tilpasning, genererer det, hvad Collins betegner som emotionel energi. Høj emotionel energi forbindes med følelser af entusiasme, opløftelse, tillid og handlekraft, mens lav emotionel energi er karakteriseret ved udmattelse, kedsomhed og apati (Collins 2014:49–51). Emotionel energi genereres ikke kun individuelt, men også på gruppeniveau, hvor den skaber solidaritet og gruppetilhørsforhold. En undersøgelse af succesfulde og mislykkede interaktioner kan dermed give indsigt i processer for inklusion og eksklusion, eksempelvis på arbejdspladsen. Mennesker tiltrækkes af vellykkede interaktionsritualer og frastødes af dem, der mislykkes. Kæder af interaktionsritualer har en selvforstærkende kraft, idet personer, der har deltaget i situationer med høj emotionel energi, vil have en fordel i fremtidige sociale interaktioner, mens dem, som i forvejen er præget af lav emotionel energi, vil have en ulempe. På den måde kan kæder af interaktionsritualer have en stratificerende karakter (Collins 2014:131).

Gennem interaktionsritualer kan symboler lades med emotionel energi, som genaktiveres, når de bringes frem, hvilket forlænger den emotionelle energi af ritualet. Collins forstår symboler bredt som emblemer, der markerer gruppetilhørsforhold, narrativer, der genfortælles, eller de sproglige koder og kulturelle repertoire, der præger forskellige faglige fællesskaber (Collins 2014:81–87). I afhandlingens tredje artikel viser jeg, hvordan medarbejdere med høretab kan blive ekskluderet fra denne type kulturel kapital, der manifesterer sig i måden, historier fortælles på, og i interne jokes på arbejdspladsen. Artiklen belyser, hvordan denne eksklusion begrænser deres mulighed for at deltage i emotionelle gaveudvekslinger kollegaerne imellem.

Face-work og fremmedgørelse

Goffmans begreber om *face-work* og fremmedgørelse i interaktioner beskæftiger sig med de kulturelt formede regler, som eksisterer i sociale interaktioner, og som individer i varierende grad lykkes med at overholde for at opretholde den normative sociale orden.

I sociale interaktioner anlægger mennesker – bevidst eller ubevidst – et perspektiv på situationen, sig selv og de involverede samtalepartnere. Dette mønster af gestus og ytringer betegner Goffman som en *line*. Den positive værdi, som individets *line* med succes etablerer i en social situation, kaldes, hos Goffman *face* (Goffman 1967:5). Det er et fælles ansvar for interaktionspartnerne at opretholde både deres eget og hinandens *face* ved at tilpasse ytringer og gestus til den ønskede selvfremsstilling. Disse bestræbelser betegner han *face-work* og kan eksempelvis indebære behændigt at undgå samtaleemner, der potentielt truer en samtalepartners eller ens eget *face*, høfligt at overse fortællelser eller helt at undgå situationer, hvor risikoen for *defacement* er for stor. Goffman beskriver, hvordan det i sociale situationer forventes, at individer både udviser selvrespekt for deres eget *face* og hensyntagen til andres *face* – og dermed strækker sig langt for at give indtryk af, at acceptere det *face*, som andre påberåber sig (Goffman 1967:10–11).

En persons *face* kan imidlertid blive unddraget personen på flere måder, hvilket Goffman betegner som *defacement* (Goffman 1967:10). *Wrong face* opstår, når der i en situation fremkommer informationer, som ikke kan forenes med den *line*, som personen har præsenteret sig med (Goffman 1967:8). Dette illustreres eksempelvis i afhandlingens første artikel, hvor Charlotte, en medarbejder med høretab i en ledende HR-stilling, udfordres i sin *line* som en professionel og kompetent leder, da hun under et møde stiller et spørgsmål, der afslører, at hun har misset afgørende information. En person kan også risikere pludselig at stå uden et *face*, hvis en situation opstår, hvor vedkommende ikke er klar med en *line*, der passer til konteksten (Goffman 1967:8).

At opleve *defacement*, enten hos sig selv eller andre, er ofte pinefuldt og forbundet med skam. Selve det at afsløre følelser af skam over for de omkringværende kan, som ringe i vandet, udløse skam hos dem, der er vidne til situationen. Følelser af skam eller pinlighed forsøges derfor, ifølge Goffman, kontrolleret for ikke at udgøre en trussel mod den sociale situation (Goffman 1967:12–13). Selvom individet i vid udstrækning søger at undgå sociale situationer, der udgør en trussel for de involveredes *faces*, er disse episoder en almindelig og ofte forekommende del af hverdagslivet. Når en trussel mod en af deltagernes *face* opstår, føler de

involverede sig ofte forpligtede til at påbegynde en korrektionsproces, der kan genskabe en tilfredsstillende rituel tilstand – en såkaldt reetablering af *ritual equilibrium* (Goffman 1967:19–23). Ifølge Goffman er *face-work* vanegjorte betingelser for sociale interaktioner. Det er praksisser, som sjældent er målet med interaktionen, men snarere fungerer som interaktionsmæssige vilkår, som individet bevidst eller ubevidst søger at overholde (Goffman 1967:12–13).

Goffman beskriver derudover, hvordan forskellige former for fremmedgørelse i interaktionen kan udgøre en yderligere trussel mod de interaktionelle regler. Ud af de fire former for fremmedgørelse, Goffman identificerer, *external preoccupation*, *self-consciousness*, *other-consciousness* og *interaction-consciousness*, fokuserer jeg i afhandlingen på de tre sidste. Den første type af fremmedgørelse, *external preoccupation*, beskriver en situation, hvor individet under en interaktion bliver distraheret af noget, som ikke er relateret til interaktionen. I analysen af det empiriske materiale fandt jeg imidlertid, at begrebet ikke var gavnligt til at analysere de processer, som var på spil for medarbejdere med høretab. Derfor er det udelukkende *self-consciousness*, *other-consciousness* og *interaction-consciousness*, som jeg anvender i afhandlingen. *Self-consciousness* opstår, når individer bliver overdrevent opmærksomme på deres egen præstation i interaktionen, mens *other-consciousness* betegner en overdreven opmærksomhed på interaktionspartneren og *interaction-consciousness* en hyperfokusering på selve interaktionen og dens måde at skride frem på. Alle tre former for fremmedgørelse involverer en overdreven grad af fokus, som stjæler fra den naturlige og umiddelbare involvering i samtalen (Goffman 1967:18–24).

I afhandlingens anden artikel viser jeg, hvordan medarbejdere med høretab kan opleve fremmedgørelse gennem *other-consciousness*, når de mister brudstykker af interaktionen, men samtidig forsøger at skjule dette for at opretholde de interaktionelle regler. For at undgå at gøre opmærksom på den afbrudte interaktion fokuserer medarbejderen intensivt på samtalepartnerens udtryk for at aflæse en passende *line* til situationen. Jeg beskriver også, hvordan en afsløring af afbrudt interaktion over for samtalepartneren kan føre til *self-consciousness* hos medarbejderen med høretab, samt hvordan bestræbelserne på at holde styr på og afkode afbrudte interaktioner kan resultere i *interaction-consciousness*.

Hvad er emotioner?

I afhandlingen anvender jeg forskellige perspektiver inden for emotionssociologien, men jeg trækker primært på Hochschilds (2003) begrebsliggørelse af emotioner. Jeg skelner ikke mellem begreberne *emotioner* og *følelser*, men anvender dem synonymt gennem afhandlingen, ligesom Hochschild og Clark gør det.

Hochschild beskriver følelser som en biologisk givet sans, der – på samme måde som menneskets øvrige sanser – formidler information om vores relation til omverdenen, herunder gruppen og samfundet. Samtidig præjer følelser individet om dets egne indre, til tider ubevidste, processer (Hochschild 2003:17–18). Når det gælder forståelsen af følelsernes biologiske forankring, er Hochschild på linje med mere biologisk orienterede perspektiver, såsom Collins'. Hans tilgang bidrager til forståelsen af de generelle træk ved interaktionelle processer, hvor mennesker – med varierende succes – synkroniserer deres opmærksomhed og følelsesmæssige stemning i en rytme, der kan styrke sammenhængskraften i grupper og samfund (Collins 2014:15). Collins perspektiv mangler imidlertid et bud på, hvordan kulturelle kontekster indvirker på denne proces, samt hvordan individer aktivt kan kontrollere og ændre deres følelser.

I det empiriske materiale var det tydeligt, at medarbejderne aktivt både fremelskede og undertrykte følelser. Eksempelvis forsøgte kollegaer uden høretab at undertrykke irritation eller vrede – eller at mønstre sympati og tålmodighed – for at imødekomme en social norm om at vise interaktionelt hensyn til kollegaer med høretab. For at analysere disse aspekter i empirien trækker jeg på Hochschild forståelse af, hvordan sociale faktorer indvirker på og skaber følelser, samt hvordan individer aktivt kontrollerer, eller forsøger at kontrollere, dem. Ifølge hende er emotioner ikke udelukkende en biologisk essens, der trigges af ydre omstændigheder (Hochschild 2003:17–18). Emotioner er indfiltret i følelseskulturer og følelsesregler og kan skabes, omformes og undertrykkes gennem forskellige teknikker (Hochschild 2003:27).

Dette perspektiv stemmer overens med Clarks' (1987, 1997), som også fremhæver følelseskulturers kontekstafhængighed. Clark illustrerer dette gennem eksemplet med Ik-samfundet, hvor ekstreme overlevelsесvilkår og hungersnød formede en følelseskultur, hvor sympati og omsorg ansås som svaghedstegn, mens andres smerte og fejltagelser var genstand for latterliggørelse. Clark bruger eksemplet til at vise, hvordan samfund og emotioner gensidigt påvirker hinanden. I det vestlige kapitalistiske samfund såvel som i Ik-samfundet formes

følelser gennem kulturen og samfundet. Samtidig bidrager følelserne til sociale strukturer ved at danne og opløse sociale bånd, som knytter grupper og samfund sammen (Clark 1987:3–5). Den proces, hvor emotioner omformes gennem sociale processer, kan ifølge Hochschild ikke skilles fra emotionerne selv. Der findes således, ifølge dette perspektiv, ikke en uberørt biologisk essens af emotioner, der kommer før det sociale (Hochschild 2003:230).

I afhandlingen stiller jeg mig på skuldrene af Hochschild og Collins' forståelse af emotioner som rodfæstet i biologien. Samtidig trækker jeg på Hochschilds og Clarks perspektiver, der betoner, hvordan følelser kan kontrolleres og formes gennem følelsesarbejde og kulturelle processer. Derudover anskuer jeg emotionel og rytmisk synkronisering som en grundlæggende menneskelig proces i tråd med Collins' teori.

Følelsesgaver, sympati og den socioemotionelle økonomi

Ved at videreudvikle Hochschilds perspektiver på følelser som gaveudveksling (Hochschild 2003:18) udvikler Clark (1997) på baggrund af empiriske studier af sympati en teori om de principper, der styrer udvekslingen af følelsesgaver i det moderne samfund. En følelsesgave kan eksempelvis være at udvise omtanke ved at spørge, hvordan ens kollega har det, eller udvise taknemmelighed over at få hjælp til en opgave. Clark viser, hvordan følelsesgaver gives og tilbageholdes på en struktureret måde i det, hun betegner som den socioemotionelle økonomi. Selvom udvekslingen af følelser adskiller sig fra økonomiske transaktioner, argumenterer Clark for, at der er væsentlige ligheder mellem de to systemer, som ofte overses (Clark 1997:132–33).

Ligesom materielle ressourcer er følelsesgaver ikke ubegrænsede – de kræver både tid og energi at give. Nogle gange kræver det at give en følelsesgave, at individet undertrykker følelser, der anses for upassende, eller fremelsker følelser, der ikke var til stede i udgangspunktet, såkaldt *følelsesarbejde* (Hochschild 2003). Den socioemotionelle økonomi styres af kulturelt bestemte principper og regler, der guider individet i, hvad der føles retfærdigt (Clark 1997:132) – det, Hochschild betegner som *følelsesregler*. Følelsesregler er kulturelle scripts, der foreskriver, hvordan man *bør* føle i en given situation (Hochschild 2003:56). Eksempelvis identificerer jeg i afhandlingens tredje artikel en følelsesregel om at vise hensyn til kollegaer med høretab gennem forskellige inkluderende gestus – en følelsesregel, som både medarbejdere med høretab og deres kollegaer uden høretab følte sig forpligtiget til at følge.

Det lykkes imidlertid ikke altid medarbejderne at udvise disse gestus med tilhørende passende følelser af venlighed og tålmodighed, og de må somme tider bruge teknikker til at undertrykke uvelkomne følelser. Netop i de situationer, hvor mennesker forsøger at kontrollere deres indre følelser for at tilpasse sig sociale forventninger, bliver det muligt at identificere følelsesreglerne (Hochschild 2003:57). Brud på følelsesregler kan føre til sanktioner – enten fra individet selv eller fra andre – eller udløse en *rule reminder* (Hochschild 1979:564). Et eksempel på dette er Lars, en medarbejder med høretab, der uddelte ørepropper til sine kollegaer før et møde for at minde dem om at udvise de interaktionelle hensyn, han havde brug for.

I afhandlingen anvender jeg begrebet sympati om de inkluderende gestus, der faciliterer inklusion af medarbejdere med høretab i samtaler. Dette kan eksempelvis være at gentage sætninger, opretholde øjenkontakt med samtalepartneren eller opsummere hovedpointerne i en gruppesamtale, når en nytilkommen deltager slutter sig til samtalen. Succesfulde udvekslinger af sympati kan skabe intimitet og styrke sociale bånd mellem kollegaer, mens fraværet af sympati kan bidrage til eksklusion. Derfor kan en analyse af udveksling af sympati på arbejdspladsen bidrage til at udfolde inklusions- og eksklusionsprocesser. Følelsesregler omhandlende hvem der har fortjent sympati, hvor meget og hvornår, er moralske spørgsmål, der kontinuerligt forhandles i sociale interaktioner (Clark 1997:22).

Clark beskriver sympati som en overordnet betegnelse for en række forskellige følelser og gestus, der kan udtrykkes på et væld af forskellige måder (Clark 1997:33). Sympati er en social følelse, idet den – i modsætning til eksempelvis angst – altid involverer mindst to personer. Ifølge Clark består sympati af tre komponenter: empati, sympatiske følelser rettet mod et andet menneske som reaktion på den andens smerte eller problemer og *display* (Clark 1997:32-33). Den første komponent, empati, beskriver evnen til at sætte sig i et andet menneskes sted, i tråd med Meads begreb om rolleovertagelse. Empati er en grundlæggende forudsætning for sympatiprocessen og er, som det eneste af de tre komponenter, altid til stede. For at en følelse eller gestus kan betragtes som sympati, skal der dog, ifølge Clark, også være mindst én af de to øvrige komponenter til stede: enten sympatiske følelser rettet mod et andet menneske, eller *display*, som betegner sympati, når det udtrykkes gennem interaktion eller gestus (Clark 1997:44–57). Når empati og sympatiske følelser rettet mod et andet menneske ikke ledsages af *display*, betegnes det som *covert sympathy*, mens empati med *display* uden sympatiske følelser betegnes som *surface sympathy* (Clark 1987:34). Dette svarer til Hochschilds begreb *surface acting*, hvor individets ændrer dets følelsesmæssige udtryk uden at ændre de indre følelser

(Hochschild 2003:36–37). *Deep acting* refererer derimod til den proces, hvor individer gennem følelsesarbejde oparbejder de passende følelser med autenticitet og oprigtighed (Hochschild 2003:33). Clarks begreber om sympati gør det således muligt at undersøge gestus som sympatigaver, uanset om de ledsages af sympatiske følelser eller ej.

Gennem en undersøgelse af de uskrevne regler for udvekslingen af sympati identificerer Clark de fire følgende regler for sympatietikette”1) *Do not make false claims.* 2) *Do not claim too much sympathy, for too long, or for too many problems.* Corollary 2a: *Do not accept sympathy too readily.* 3) *Claim some sympathy to keep accounts open.* 4) *Reciprocate to those who have given sympathy*” (Clark 1987:159). Clark fandt i sine interviewpersoners beskrivelser, at personer, der blev opfattet som uberettigede til at kræve sympati, ofte havde overtrådt en eller flere af disse uskrevne regler for udveksling. Særligt den anden og fjerde regel er relevante i forbindelse med afhandlingens case om medarbejdere med høretab.

At have et vedvarende behov for interaktionelt hensyn som medarbejdere med høretab på en arbejdsplads domineret af hørende kan, med Clarks perspektiv, indebære en risiko for at bryde reglen om ikke at kræve for meget sympati og dermed over tid udtømme retten til at modtage sympati. Samtidig kan situationel eksklusion fra uformelle samtaler på arbejdspladsen gøre det vanskeligt at opnå den nødvendige viden om kollegaer, som er afgørende for at gengælde personlige følelsesgaver. Dette kan resultere i et brud på sympatietikettens fjerde regel om at gengælde modtagne sympatigaver. I afhandlingens anden artikel undersøger jeg de udfordringer, der kan opstå i sympatiudvekslingen for medarbejdere med høretab.

Principperne for udveksling af sympati varierer afhængigt af relationens karakter. Principperne mellem et barn og en forælder er eksempelvis anderledes, end den er mellem kollegaer, eller mellem fremmede. Ikke desto mindre gælder der ofte, i overensstemmelse med sympatietikettens fjerde regel, en forventning om, at en sympatigave gengældes – enten gennem en fremtidig sympatigave til giveren eller ved at udvise taknemmelighed for følelsesgaven (Clark 1997:132).

En persons ret til at kræve sympatigaver afhænger, ifølge Clark, af vedkommendes tidligere forvaltning af sympatiudvekslinger – det, hun betegner som en *sympathy biography* (Clark 1997:181–82). Hvis en person overholder de normative etiketteregler for følelsesudveksling, opnår vedkommende retten til at kræve og forvente sympati fra andre. Denne ret kalder Clark for *sympathy credit*, mens regnskabet for, hvor meget sympati personen har krav på, betegnes

som *sympathy margin* (Clark 1997:150–51). Bredden af en persons *sympathy margin* afhænger af flere faktorer: hvor meget sympati personen allerede har gjort krav på (*do not claim too much sympathy*), i hvilken grad vedkommende har gengældt modtagne sympatigaver (*reciprocate to those who have given sympathy*), samt hvordan personens sociale værd forhandles i den sociale kontekst (Clark 1997:150–51). Hvis en person indløser sine *sympathy credits* uden samtidig at gengælde følelsesgaverne, risikerer vedkommende at blive opfattet som en ”*complainer*” (Clark 1997:165), hvilket kan føre til, at sympatien fra andre enten tilbageholdes eller udvises som *surface sympathy* uden oprigtige følelser. For en uddybning af relationen mellem sympati og beslægtede følelser som empati, medfølelse og medlidenhed henvises til afhandlingens tredje artikel i reviewsektionen, hvor dette emne behandles nærmere.

Afhandlingen kombinerer således de mikrosociologiske perspektiver fra Randall Collins og Erving Goffman med de emotionssociologiske perspektiver fra Arlie Hochschild og Candace Clark.

Videnskabsteoretiske refleksioner

I denne sektion placerer jeg de forskellige perspektiver, som jeg forener i afhandlingens analyser, i deres respektive teoretiske traditioner. Derefter udfolder jeg, hvordan disse teoretiske perspektiver adskiller sig fra hinanden på tre punkter vedrørende erkendelsen af den virkelige verden, karakteren af menneskers handlen og individets kapacitet til at ændre emotioner. Herefter præsenterer jeg tre grundlæggende ligheder mellem perspektiverne i deres opfattelse af ”virkeligheden” af den empiriske verden, eksistensen af både symbolsk og ikke symbolsk interaktion og social interaktion som vigtig i sin egen ret. Afslutningsvist argumenterer jeg for, hvordan kombinationen af perspektiverne bidrager til at udfolde forskellige niveauer i den empiriske verden.

Metodologisk og epistemologisk trækker afhandlingen på symbolsk interaktionisme (Holstein and Gubrium 1995; Järvinen and Mik-Meyer 2005). Ifølge Herbert Blumers reformulering (1969) hviler den symbolske interaktionisme på tre præmisser. Den første præmis er, at mennesker handler på baggrund af den mening, som ”ting” har for dem. Med ”ting” menes der alle de sociale og fysiske ting, som mennesker har omgang med i deres væren i verden, såsom fysiske objekter, individer, institutioner, grupper og værdier (Blumer 1969:2). Den anden præmis er, at mening opstår gennem social interaktion, mens det tredje og sidste præmis indebærer, at den mening, som konstrueres i social interaktion formes gennem individets egen fortolkning.

Det vil eksempelvis sige, at medarbejdere udviser og tilbageholder hensyn på baggrund af den mening, som det at tage hensyn har for dem. Ifølge det symbolsk interaktionistiske perspektiv har det at udvise hensyn ikke en iboende mening. I stedet forhandles og konstrueres den mening, som knyttes til det at vise hensyn på arbejdspladsen, løbende i sociale interaktioner, både mellem de ansatte og bredere i samfundet. Derudover gennemgår den socialt konstruerede mening en fortolkningsproces af de enkelte medarbejdere.

I afhandlingens tredje artikel identificerer jeg en følelsesregel om at udvise interaktionelt hensyn til medarbejdere med høretab på arbejdspladsen. Jeg viser, hvordan medarbejdere håndterer reglen på forskellige måder i forskellige situationer; reglen om udvisning af hensyn kan efterleves som foreskrevet med tålmodighed og venlighed, den kan udvises som *surface sympathy*, ledsaget af underliggende følelser af vrede, eller den kan helt omgå. Følelsesreglen repræsenterer den mening, som er opstået gennem social interaktion, mens medarbejders overholdelse af den – eller mangel på samme – udspiller sig på et væld af måder, der er knyttet til medarbejdernes fortolkningsmæssige proces. De epistemologiske konsekvenser af at anvende et symbolsk interaktionistisk perspektiv vil blive uddybet i afhandlingens metodiske sektioner.

I det følgende beskriver jeg først, hvor de forskellige teoretikere placeres inden for disse traditioner, hvorefter jeg fremhæver deres forskelle og ligheder. Hochschild og Clarks teoretiske perspektiver placeres typisk i en tradition af emotionssociologien, der fokuserer på kulturelle scripts, normer og regler for følelsesudveksling (Barbalet 1998:23; Lawler and Thye 1999:224; Turner and Stets 2006:26). I denne tradition vægtes den sociale kontekst og kulturen som afgørende for, hvordan emotioner udvises og opleves. Samtidig anerkender traditionen individets kapacitet til at transformere følelser – jævnfør eksempelvis Hochschild begreb om *emotion work* (2003) – eller til strategisk at anvende følelsesdisplays til egen fordel, som det ses i Clarks begreb om *micro-politics* (2004) (Turner and Stets 2006). Goffman placeres ofte i denne tradition grundet hans undersøgelse af sociale normer og individets bestræbelser på at opretholde *face* og undgå sociale sanktioner (Lawler and Thye 1999:224; Turner and Stets 2006:26). Som Hochschild og Clark senere også har gjort, beskriver Goffman desuden, hvordan individet besidder evnen til at agere strategisk gennem begreber som *impression management* (Goffman 1990), *strategic interaction* (Goffman 1971) og *tilpasningsstrategier* (Goffman 2017a). Goffmans beskrivelser af individets bestræbelser på at tilpasse følelsesmæssige udtryk til den gældende normative sociale orden begrænser sig imidlertid til display snarere end en bestræbelse på at ændre indre følelser (Hochschild 1979:555–56).

Collins argumenterer derimod for, at Goffmans teorier bør placeres i en Durkheimsk tradition, hvor menneskers ritualiserede adfærd analyseres med udgangspunkt i den sociale situation (Collins 1994:218f). Her vægtes Goffmans mikrosociologiske fokus på interaktionsritualet (1967) som styrende kraft (Collins 1994:219). Goffmans position kan således anskues fra begge perspektiver, hvilket afspejles i Turner og Stets' klassifikation af emotionssociologiske traditioner, hvor de placerer ham i begge kategorier (Turner and Stets 2005:69f, 2006:26;32). Turner og Stets placerer også Collins i den Durkheimske tradition, da han videreudvikler ritualteoriene fra Durkheim og Goffman i sin teori om kæder af interaktionsritualer, hvilket han også selv argumenterer for i *Four Sociological Traditions* (Collins 1994:219; Turner and Stets 2005:69f, 2006:32). Den del af den mikrosociologiske tradition, som er repræsenteret ved Goffman og Collins, har haft fokus på de grundlæggende processer, hvorigennem samfundet stratificeres og holdes sammen med udgangspunkt i sociale interaktioner. Faglitteraturens placering af de forskellige teoretikere inden for de teoretiske og videnskabsteoretiske traditioner er ikke entydig, og som beskrevet her placeres de somme tider forskelligt af forskellige forfattere eller i flere traditioner samtidig.

Jeg vil argumentere for, at Hochschild, Clark og Goffman kan placeres indenfor for – eller i det mindste siges at trække på – et symbolsk interaktionistisk og pragmatisk paradigme (Barbalet and Turner 2008; Brinkmann 2017:91f), hvor grundanskuelserne af verden stemmer overens med principperne for symbolsk interaktionisme, som formuleret af Blumer. Han beskriver den empiriske videnskabs rolle inden for den symbolske interaktionisme som "an enterprise that seeks to develop images and conceptions that can successfully handle and accomodate the resistance offered by the empirical world under study" (Blumer 1969:22–23). Goffmans placering er igen et spørgsmål om, hvordan hans værker læses ind i forskellige traditioner. Mens han af nogle placeres i den symbolske interaktionisme (Brinkmann 2017:106; Lawler and Thye 1999:224), placeres han af andre inden for et realistisk mikrosociologisk paradigme (Collins 1994:277) med rødder i etologien (Jerolmack, Teo, and Westberry 2024). Collins' teorier kan, med hans søgen efter kausale og generelle forklarende principper (Collins 2009:8–9; 21), placeres i et realistisk (Collins 2014:103) eller positivistisk (Kemper 1990:21) paradigme. De forskellige perspektiver kan således placeres inden for forskellige paradigmer (Brinkmann 2017:158).

I det følgende vil jeg pege på perspektivernes forskelle og ligheder samt placere afhandlingens ståsted i relation til dem. Jeg vil beskrive tre punkter, hvor de teoretiske perspektiver fra henholdsvis den symbolske interaktionisme samt fra den realistiske tradition kan siges være

forskellige i henhold til deres syn på erkendelsen af den virkelige verden, karakteren af menneskers handlen og individets kapacitet til at ændre emotioner.

Det første punkt drejer sig om erkendelsen af den empiriske verden. Hvor den realistiske eller positivistisk inspirerede tradition søger at finde universelle principper (Boolsen and Jacobsen 2012), så er den symbolske interaktionisme skeptisk overfor troen på at opnå sådanne universelle sandheder gennem videnskaben, i det at empiriske studier kontinuerligt viser, at nye indsigter kaster nyt lys over den empiriske verden (Blumer 1969:23). Snarere søger den symbolske interaktionisme at nærme sig den empiriske virkelighed gennem begreber, som kan udfolde elementer af den (Blumer 1969:22–23).

Det andet punkt vedrører karakteren af menneskers handlen og vægtningen af biologiske faktorer. Collins lægger vægt på biologisk motiveret adfærd frem for handlinger, der udspringer af social meningsskabelse. Han argumenterer for, at "(...) our human capacity for symbolism only adds refinements to the basic gestures, however powerful they may be in their consequences for the number of persons who can live together and the complexity of the things they can do. The invisible world of organizations and institutions remains grounded in the behavior of human animals in real places; here is where the causal locus of sociological propositions must be" (Collins 2009:56). Dette "*causal locus*" udfolder han gennem beskrivelser af processerne bag følelsesmæssig og rytmisk *entrainment*. I kontrast til dette perspektiv fremhæver Blumer den symbolske interaktionismes fokus på symbolsk interaktion: "in their association human beings engage plentifully in non-symbolic interaction as they respond immediately and unreflectively to each other's bodily movements, expressions, and tones of voice, but their characteristic mode of interaction is on the symbolic level, as they seek to understand the meaning of each other's action (Blumer 1969:8–9).

Det tredje og sidste punkt, jeg vil fremhæve, omhandler menneskets kapacitet til at forandre emotioner. Dette punkt er en forlængelse af det forrige punkt og indebærer, at et realistisk perspektiv, der vægter biologiens forrang, begrænser individets mulighed for med succes at kontrollere sine følelser gennem *emotion work*-teknikker (Hochschild 1979:554). Mens det realistiske perspektiv, som det kommer til udtryk hos Goffman og Collins, anerkender individets evne til at ændre det følelsesmæssige display – eksempelvis gennem Goffmans begreb om *face work* – tilskrives ændringer af "indre" følelser, med Collins perspektiv, i højere grad de grundlæggende biologiske mekanismer, såsom *rhythmic entrainment*, snarere end individets bevidste bestræbelser.

Mens de realistiske/positivistiske og de symbolsk interaktionistiske/pragmatiske perspektiver adskiller sig på visse punkter omkring erkendelsen af den virkelige verden, karakteren af menneskers handlen og individets kapacitet til at ændre emotioner, deler perspektiverne imidlertid også nogle grundlæggende antagelser. I det følgende vil jeg udfolde tre punkter, hvor perspektiverne er samstemmende hvad angår eksistensen af en ”virkelig” empirisk verden, anerkendelsen af både symbolsk og ikke symbolsk interaktion og social interaktion som vigtig i sin egen ret.

For det første enes perspektiverne om, at der eksisterer en *virkelig* empirisk verden, og at denne empiriske verden bedst undersøges ved en pluralitet i metoder (Blumer 1969:23–28; Collins 2009:9). Ifølge den symbolske interaktionisme eksisterer den empiriske verden som en realitet, der kan ”talk back” til vores forestillinger og teorier om den (Blumer 1969:22–23). At virkeligheden, ifølge denne position, altid er betragtet gennem forskerens blik, ændrer således ikke på, at den eksisterer *derude*. Begge positioner anerkender endvidere, at ”virkeligheden” ikke alene består af fysiske objekter, men også af sociale og symbolske aspekter, som er akkurat så *virkelige* som genstande, og som videnskaben kan nærme sig gennem empirisk forskning (Blumer 1969:10f; Collins 2014).

For det andet enes perspektiverne om sameksistensen af både ikke-symbolsk interaktion og symbolsk interaktion (Blumer 1969; Collins 2009:56, 2014). Blumer karakteriserer ikke-symbolsk interaktion som interaktion, hvor individer reagerer umiddelbart på hinanden uden en forudgående fortolkningsproces. Denne form for interaktion er således ikke reflektiv – et eksempel på dette er kropslig synkronisering i sociale situationer. Symbolsk interaktion, derimod, involverer en fortolkningsmæssig proces (Blumer 1969:8–9).

For det tredje deler perspektiverne en opfattelse af social interaktion som vigtig i sin egen ret og som udgangspunkt for udformningen af de respektive teorier. Begge perspektiver tager udgangspunkt i den sociale interaktion, som hverken opfattes som et produkt af en overordnet struktur – hvad Collins kalder ”the code” – eller et produkt af individuel psykologi (Blumer 1969:7f; Collins 2014:32f).

De teoretiske perspektiver, jeg anvender i afhandlingen, adskiller sig dermed på visse punkter omhandlede erkendelsen af den virkelige verden, karakteren af menneskers handlen og individets kapacitet til at ændre emotioner. Samtidig deler de en række grundlæggende antagelser, herunder opfattelsen af en *virkelig* empirisk verden, anerkendelsen af både

symbolsk og ikke symbolsk interaktion samt forståelsen af social interaktion som betydningsfuld i sin egen ret.

Ontologisk trækker afhandlingen på både den realistiske og den symbolske interaktionistiske tradition i sin forståelse af eksistensen af en *virkelig* empirisk verden samt i erkendelsen af følelsers biologiske forankring. Jeg anvender Collins' realistiske perspektiv til at belyse, hvordan principper for *rhythmic entrainment* indvirker på sociale situationer, mens jeg anvender Clark, Hochschild og Goffmans kulturelle/normative perspektiver til at udfolde, hvordan medarbejdere bestræber sig på at undgå normbrud og sociale sanktioner. Epistemologisk trækker afhandlingen på den symbolske interaktionistiske tradition. I analyserne stræber jeg efter at nærme mig og udfolde den empiriske verden gennem begreber frem for at identificere universelle lovmæssigheder. De forskellige perspektiver bidrager til at udfolde de forskellige niveauer i den empiriske verden, henholdsvis det biologiske gennem *rhythmic entrainment*, det kulturelle gennem normer, regler og sanktioner, og det individuelle gennem bestræbelser på at transformere følelser gennem *emotion work*.

Metode

I de følgende metodiske sektioner præsenterer jeg undersøgelsens empiriske grundlag og metodevalg. Først uddyber jeg valget af høretab på arbejdspladsen som en case på afbrudt interaktion, efterfulgt af en beskrivelse af det empiriske materiale. Derefter begrundes jeg valget af interview og feltarbejde samt de metodiske tilgange og fremgangsmåder, jeg har anvendt. Herefter reflekterer jeg over min egen position som hørende og min medproduktion af det empiriske materiale. Dernæst beskriver jeg, hvordan jeg fik adgang til feltet, og introducerer tilgangen til sampling, analysestrategi og generalisering. Afslutningsvis gennemgår jeg afhandlingens etiske overvejelser.

Høretab på arbejdspladsen som case på afbrudt interaktion

Da jeg startede på forskningsprojektet *Hvordan hører vi sammen?*, kom jeg direkte fra at arbejde med blinde og svagtseende og de udfordringer, de oplevede i hverdagssituationer. Jeg var optaget af, hvad det vil sige at have en funktionsvariation, der påvirker sanserne, og jeg syntes, at projektet om voksne med høretab på arbejdsmarkedet var et interessant felt. Forskningen viste, at gruppen oplevede en række problemer, som jeg gerne ville undersøge helt tæt på. Hvad ville det sige at gå på arbejde og ofte være i risiko for at miste vigtig information eller falde ud af samtaler rundt om frokostbordet? Jeg ville undersøge problemet ved at observere de situationer i den kontekst, de udspillede sig i, og tale med de mennesker, som oplevede det i deres hverdag.

Formålet var ikke at udvikle teori eller forstå et bredere problem, men derimod først og fremmest at få en bedre forståelse af livet på arbejdsmarkedet med høretab. At undersøge medarbejdere med høretab var indledningsvist for mig hvad Robert Stake betegner som en *intrinsic case*; den udgjorde en forskningsinteresse i sig selv, ikke fordi den skulle illustrere et generelt eller abstrakt fænomen (Stake 1995:445). Med tiden gik det imidlertid op for mig, at de problemer jeg undersøgte, var almenmenneskelige problemer, som mennesker med høretab oplever i særdeleshed. Jeg blev i stigende grad interesseret i afbrudt interaktion og mislykkede interaktionsritualer som generelle fænomener, og høretab på arbejdsmarkedet som en case, der kunne vise noget særligt om dem. På den måde udviklede min case sig fra at være udelukkende en *intrinsic case* til også at være en *instrumental case*, der kunne bidrage med en indsigt til et større og mere generelt fænomen (Stake 1995:445).

Jeg begyndte at observere, hvordan afbrudt interaktion og sproglige misforståelser også var en del af mit eget arbejdsliv på en arbejdsplads, hvor medarbejdere med forskellige sproglige baggrunde ofte taler et sprog, der ikke er deres modersmål. Og som mor til to børn i børnehavealderen har jeg ofte taget mig selv i at tænke over, hvornår jeg sidst har haft en uafbrudt samtale med min kæreste i en hverdag, hvor misforståelser, gentagelser eller sammenbrud af samtaler pga. højt lydniveau og afbrydelser fra børnene er normalen. Goffman (1967:134) skriver ligeledes i sit essay om fremmedgørelse i sociale interaktioner, at ”spontan ”normal” involvering lader til at være undtagelsen og fremmedgørelse af forskellig art en statistisk regel”⁵.

Gennem casestudiet af medarbejdere med høretab er det muligt at få en dybdegående viden om afbrudte interaktionelle processer som bredere fænomen. Casen er ikke repræsentativ for fænomenet afbrudt interaktion og mislykkedes interaktionsritualer; den er derimod ualmindelig rig på informationer om netop de mekanismer, som jeg søger at udfolde. Jeg ønsker at undersøge, hvordan interaktionel ulighed udfolder sig i hverdagssituationer på arbejdspladsen, samt hvilke konsekvenser uligheden medfører. Høretab på arbejdspladsen udgør, hvad Bent Flyvbjerg kalder en ”ekstrem case”, fordi den tilbyder mere information om afbrudt interaktion og mislykkedes interaktionsritualer, end det sandsynligvis ville være tilfældet, hvis jeg havde valgt en tilfældig arbejdsplads, hvor ingen af de ansatte havde høretab (Flyvbjerg 2006:229). Casen er særlig egnet til at forstå fænomenet afbrudt interaktion og den mening, som det har for dem, som oplever det. Den er derfor valgt ud fra et kriterie om at maksimere brugbar information fra et lille sample baseret på en forventning om, at interaktionerne i særlig grad er præget af afbrydelser og mislykkede interaktionsritualer (Flyvbjerg 2006:230). Det har imidlertid ikke været et ønske at undgå systematisk bias i forekomsten af afbrudt interaktion, da jeg ikke har ønsket at undersøge frekvensen af fænomenet, men derimod karakteren af det.

Både Ervin Goffman og Fred Davis har blandt andre benyttet sig af strategien om at undersøge det særegne for at forstå det almene i deres undersøgelser af interaktion og sociale normer gennem cases som psykiatriske hospitaler og mislykkede interaktioner mellem kropskapable og mennesker med synlige funktionsvariationer (Davis 1961; Goffman 2017b). Davis betoner, at vores forståelse af en mekanisme ofte er fejlbehæftet og ufuldstændig, indtil mekanismen bryder sammen, og vi kan se, hvad den består af (Davis 1961:132). På samme måde er høretab på arbejdspladsen en case, som i særdeleshed bidrager til viden om interaktionelle processer,

⁵ Min egen oversættelse

deres sammenbrud og de emotionelle konflikter, det kan afføde. Som Robert E. Stake skriver i bogen *The art of case study research*: ”nogle gange er det bedre at lære meget fra et atypisk tilfælde end lidt fra et tilsyneladende typisk tilfælde” (Stake 1995:451).

Det kvalitative casestudie har den fordel, at det muliggør en opmærksomhed på undtagelser og elementer i problemstillingen, som man ikke indledningsvist var opmærksom på. Således er det gennem en tæt forbindelse med felten muligt gennem hele forskningsprocessen at opdage nye og overraskende elementer i empirien, som ikke bliver usynliggjort af, eksempelvis, valg af variabler, som det kan være tilfældet i kvantitativ forskning (Flyvbjerg 2006:336; Stake 1995:452). Jeg stødte også selv på elementer, som overraskede mig, i det empiriske materiale. F.eks. stødte jeg gennem forskningslitteratur og praktikere på den opfattelse, at udfordringerne for inklusion af mennesker med høretab på arbejdsmarkedet hovedsageligt skulle findes i samfundsmæssig stigmatisering og stereotypisering af mennesker med handicap samt manglende viden om handicap fra ledere og kollegaer. Mens disse forklaringer uden tvivl har noget at sige, fandt jeg imidlertid også, at der var noget andet på spil. Et høretab er ikke synligt på samme måde som et bevægelseshandicap, og min erfaring var, at der opstod nogle andre misforståelser og uheld i interaktionen end dem, som handlede om fremmedgørelse i interaktionen på grund af samfundsmæssig stigmatisering. Interaktionen bar også præg af nogle mekaniske udfordringer, som udmattede både medarbejdere med høretab og deres kollegaer uden høretab, og som gik ud over relationen mellem dem. På den måde, kan casen gå i dybden med processer, der tillader analysen at skifte spor undervejs.

Jeg har bestræbt mig på at beskrive konteksten for min case så fyldestgørende så muligt, da de interaktionelle processer, som jeg afdækker i afhandlingen, selvfølgelig er påvirket af en lang række omstændigheder, såsom arbejdspladskultur, økonomiske strukturer, fysiske omstændigheder, statslige kompensationsmuligheder for handicap og statushierarkier. Det har derfor været mig magtpåliggende at være gennemsigtig i min beskrivelse af de omstændigheder, som har formet min empiri, og tydeliggøre baggrunden for mine tolkninger af det empiriske materiale. Jeg har efterstræbt at ”holde casen åben”, som Flyvbjerg formulerer det, ved at søge at beskrive kompleksiteter og modsætninger, der gør det muligt for læseren også at lave deres egne tolkninger af de situationer, der udfolder sig, og eventuelt bruge casen til at kaste lys over andre fænomener (Flyvbjerg 2006:238).

Det empiriske materiale

Afhandlingens empiriske materiale består af semi-strukturerede interviews med 19 medarbejdere med høretab fra 19 danske arbejdspladser samt interviews med 5 kolleger og 2 ledere uden høretab fra to arbejdspladser, hvor jeg gennemførte fire måneders feltarbejde. Derudover indgår 2 opfølgningsinterviews med de medarbejdere med høretab, som jeg fulgte under feltarbejdet, samt 1 interview og 2 samtaler med 3 hørekonsulenter. Samlet set omfatter materialet 29 interviews, 2 samtaler og feltnoter fra 150-175 timers observation.

Jeg startede med at interviewe de 19 medarbejdere med høretab i efteråret og vinteren 2022 og påbegyndte derefter feltarbejdet og interviewene med kollegaer og ledere uden høretab i perioden januar 2023-april 2023. Interviewene med medarbejderne med høretab varede i gennemsnit omkring 80 minutter, mens interviewene med kollegaer og ledere i gennemsnit var lidt kortere. Alle interviewene blev optaget og senere transskriberet af en studentermedhjælper på forskningsprojektet i henhold til en transskriptionsnøgle. I udformningen af transskriptionsnøglen ønskede jeg, at den transskriberede tekst i vid grad skulle afspejle elementer som talepause, afbrydelser, grin, suk og sarkasme, for at skabe de bedste forudsætninger for en analyse, som kunne gå tæt på den konkrete interaktion.

I tillæg til interviewene består materialet af feltarbejde på de to arbejdspladser, der strækker sig over en 4-måneders periode fra januar 2023 til april 2023 med et samlet antal timer i felten på 150-175. Under feltarbejdet besøgte jeg arbejdspladsen 1-2 gange om ugen i omkring 6-7 timer ad gangen. Jeg brugte i omegnen af 90-105 timer i børnehaven i løbet af januar og februar 2023 og derefter omkring 60-70 timer på tegnestuen i løbet af marts og april 2023.

Derudover har jeg interviewet tre hørekonsulenter, én i et formelt interview som jeg optog, og to på mere uformel facon. De to sidste interviews var ikke strukturerede gennem en interviewguide og blev ikke optaget, hvorfor jeg ikke har talt dem med i det samlede antal interviews. Interviewet og samtalerne med hørekonsulenterne brugte jeg primært til at få et indblik i de kendte problematikker, som praktikere inden for feltet møder, samt til at danne mig et indtryk af henholdsvis mulighederne for at få offentlig støttet hjælp til høreproblemer og terminologien omkring høretab.

Valg af metoder

I denne sektion vil jeg videre begrunde valget af de metoder, som jeg har anvendt til at besvare afhandlingens problemstilling. Som Amanda Coffey og Paul Atkinson formulerer det, opstår forskningsproblemer, metoder og teoretiske perspektiver ofte som ”packages of ideas” snarere end idéer løsrevet fra metode og teori (Atkinson and Coffey 2003:417). Det er også tilfældet med dette forskningsprojekt, som blev til i en mikrosociologisk teoretisk ramme. Derfor var jeg fra start klar over, at jeg ville anvende en kombination af interview og feltarbejde til at undersøge afbrudt interaktion og de sociale konsekvenser, det medførte på arbejdspladsen.

Jeg anvender det, Atkinson og Coffey betegner som et ”metodisk princip om symmetri” mellem interviewene og feltarbejde (2003:425). I dette perspektiv udgør feltarbejdet ikke en ”guldstandard” for, hvordan der opnås viden om sociale situationer. Tværtimod producerer interviewene og feltarbejdet forskellige former for empiri, der kan udfolde forskellige aspekter ved interaktionssituationer, emotioner og mening (Atkinson and Coffey 2003). Jeg betragter ikke feltarbejde som en metode, der giver direkte og uproblematisk adgang til situationer, sådan som de ”virkelig” fandt sted. Med dette mener jeg, at forskeren aldrig har adgang til umedierede, ”naturligt forekommende” data, da enhver betragtning af virkeligheden altid er medieret gennem betragteren selv (Atkinson and Coffey 2003:424–25). Derfor opfatter jeg både mit interviewmateriale og mine feltnoter som forskellige former for genfortællinger af sociale situationer. Feltarbejdet gav mulighed for at komme tættere på den konkrete interaktion i den kontekst, den fandt sted, end hvad retrospektive beskrivelser gennem interviewene kunne have gjort. Interviewene gjorde det muligt at undersøge andre elementer – såsom mening, emotioner og personlig historik – som var lige så betydningsfulde for den virkelighed, der udfoldede sig i de sociale situationer, men som ikke kunne opnås gennem observation alene (Lamont and Swidler 2014:160). Jeg anvender således en metodologisk pragmatisk tilgang, hvor valget af metoder er baseret på deres evne til at belyse forskellige elementer af forskningsspørgsmålet (Lamont and Swidler 2014:155). I de følgende afsnit vil jeg uddybe, hvad henholdsvis feltarbejdsmetoden og interviewmetoden har bidraget med i afhandlingen.

Afhandlingens genstandsfelt er emotioner, interaktionssituationer og den mening, som medarbejderne tilskriver dem. Feltarbejdet gav adgang til den konkrete interaktion i sociale situationer på arbejdspladsen. Gennem detaljerede feltnoter kunne jeg undersøge konkrete udvekslinger af inkluderende interaktionsgestus – eller fraværet af dem – samt afbrydelser i interaktion og nonverbal kommunikation. Jeg fik indblik i de små og tilsyneladende

ubetydelige hverdagsudvekslinger mellem kollegaer, som ofte ikke står klart i hukommelsen ved retrospektiv genfortælling i et interview, hvor mere følelsesladede eller betydningsfulde situationer typisk træder tydeligere frem. Det betyder imidlertid ikke, at de små interaktioner er uden betydning. Tværtimod kan de bidrage med værdifuld indsigt i kæder af interaktionsritualer samt processer af sympatiudveksling, inklusion og eksklusion. Feltarbejdet på de to arbejdspladser har således muliggjort empiri om sekvenser af situationer og deres indbyrdes forbindelse. Min tilstedeværelse i felten gav mig desuden mulighed for at undersøge den mening, der var knyttet til interaktionsritualerne fra forskellige positioner. Gennem både mine egne oplevelser af situationerne, samtaler med kollegaer uden høretab og medarbejdere med høretab, åbnede empirien for multiple, sameksisterende virkeligheder (Stake 1995:454).

I interviewene med medarbejderne med høretab blev det også tydeligt, at de ord, sætninger eller samtaler, de ikke havde hørt, som regel forblev udfyldte ”huller”, når de genfortalte en situation. Disse ”huller” var værdifulde at undersøge i interviewene, da de skabte mulighed for at tale om de følelser, som det kan give at blive ekskluderet fra sociale situationer. Laila, en medarbejder med høretab, som jeg fulgte, følte eksempelvis, at hendes kollegaer holdt hemmeligheder for hende, når de snakkede lavmælt hen over skrivebordene i storrumskontoret, hvor hun ikke havde mulighed for at lytte med. Samtalerne kunne handle om børn, ferier og mere følsomme temaer såsom sygdom, slankekur og konflikter med kunder. Gennem feltarbejdet fik jeg indblik i netop de daglige sympatiudvekslinger, som Laila gik glip af. Dette gav mig et vigtigt indblik i arbejdspladsens kultur og fællesskab.

Gennem interviewene fik jeg adgang til andre aspekter af de sociale situationer. Her kunne jeg udforske den mening, som interviewpersonerne tilskrev interaktionssituationerne, samt få indblik i deres biografi og den personlige kontekst, som rakte længere tilbage i tiden. Gennem interviewene kunne jeg også få indsigt i de emotioner, som var på spil i de sociale situationer. Emotioner kan ofte være ”gemt” i empirien og vanskelige at fortolke udelukkende ud fra observerede situationer (Wettergren, Flam, and Kleres 2015:115). Mennesker kan undertrykke og fremelske følelser, så de fremviste følelser i situationen ikke stemmer overens med de følte. Derfor var det afgørende at få de emotionelle aspekter frem gennem både de interviews, jeg lavede under feltarbejdet, samt dem, jeg udførte med medarbejdere med høretab fra andre arbejdspladser. Hvordan jeg gjorde dette, vil jeg komme nærmere ind på i afsnittet om interview.

I afhandlingens første og tredje artikel benytter jeg primært uddrag fra interviewene i eksemplificeringen af de forskellige typer af kvaler i afbrudt interaktion og typerne af omkostninger ved at udvise inklusive interaktionelle gestus, hvorimod jeg i afhandlingens anden artikel primært trækker på uddrag af feltnoter. At jeg primært benytter mig af den ene af de empiriske kilder i artiklernes eksempler, betyder imidlertid ikke, at den anden empirikilde ikke har været afgørende for de resultater, som jeg præsenterer i artiklerne. F.eks. bruger jeg hovedsageligt feltnoter fra én enkelt dag på arkitektkontoret til at vise, hvordan situationel eksklusion i én situation kan have indvirkninger, der får betydning i en efterfølgende situation. Uddragene er vist i sin oprindelige sekvens og er valgt på baggrund af deres evne til at illustrere konsekvensen af akkumuleret eksklusion. Imidlertid var interviewmaterialet afgørende for at sammenligne situationel eksklusion på tværs af datamaterialet og finde ligheder og forskelle i identificeringen af mønstrene i empirien. Jeg har således brugt det samme empiriske materiale i de tre artikler.

Interview

I denne sektion beskriver jeg først den interaktionistiske metodetradition, som afhandlingen trækker på, hvorefter jeg redegør for, hvordan jeg konkret har grebet interviewets opbygning og temaer an.

For at opnå indsigt i emotioner, interaktionssituationer og den mening, som medarbejderne tilskriver dem, anvender jeg en interaktionistisk tilgang (Holstein and Gubrium 1995; Järvinen 2005) til det kvalitative interview. I den interaktionistiske tradition ansues interviewet som en meningsskabende proces, hvor både interviewer og interviewperson spiller en aktiv rolle i interviewet (Holstein and Gubrium 1995). Empirien er således ikke kun et udtryk for interviewpersonens personlige erfaringer, men også for den mening, der produceres i interviewsituationen, samt for bredere diskursive ressourcer og kulturelle rammer (Holstein and Gubrium 1995). Interviewspørgsmålene kan få interviewpersonen til at reflektere over og sammenkæde aspekter af deres liv på nye måder, hvilket kan skabe nye positioner og tolkninger. Dette er dog ikke unikt for det interaktionistiske interview, men et grundvilkår for alle interviews – og en forudsætning for at opnå indsigt i emotioner samt den betydning, som situationer med afbrudt interaktion har for interviewpersonerne. At interviewpersonernes virkelighed var en fortløbende fortolkningsproces, som også involverede mig, blev tydeligt i interviewene.

Et eksempel er et interview med en medarbejder med høretab ved navn Greta. Hun beskrev, hvordan hun, før hun fik høreapparater, ikke kunne aflæse samtals retning under møder med sine kollegaer. I disse situationer følte hun sig "truet" og reagerede, som hun selv formulerede det, "aggressivt" over for sine kollegaer. I interviewet bad jeg hende om at uddybe situationen og de følelser, den vækkede. Derefter spurgte jeg nærmere ind til relationen til hendes kollegaer med spørgsmålet: "(...) Men før du fik høreapparaterne, spiste du frokost sammen med nogle andre [kollegaer]?" hvortil hun svarede:

Greta: Ja (...) Det kan være svært for mig selv at identificere, om mit høretab har været grunden til, at jeg kan blive opfattet som f.eks. lidt streng eller lidt utilnærmelig. Det kan jo også godt være, at man er kommet til at ikke at få indgået i den der fornødne bløde small talk, som der er over et frokostbord, eller når man lige går forbi nogen. Jeg tror måske, at de lokaler herovre [peger over mod kollegaer i en tilstødende bygning] godt kan synes, at jeg ikke er sød, selvom jeg prøver at være det. Og min sekretær har også slået sig på mig ofte, eller flere gange, fordi hun synes, at jeg kan være – hun siger, at hun syntes, jeg kan være nedgørende. Og det kan jo være noget, der slet ikke har noget med mit høretab at gøre, noget med min personlighed at gøre. Men jeg er ikke så god til det der. Jeg er meget direkte, og jeg er ikke så god til det der mere bløde snak. (...) Så jeg kan ikke rigtig selv gennemskue, om noget af den der afstødning eller frastødning, som folk har med mig, har noget at gøre med den måde, jeg bruger min stemme på, eller noget at gøre med de ting, jeg ikke hører. Fordi man ved jo ikke, hvad det er, man ikke hører.

Afslutningsvist i interviewet fortalte Greta, at det havde været rart at få lov til at fortælle om hendes oplevelser, og at interviewet havde givet hende nogle nye perspektiver på, hvordan hun håndterede sit høretab. Interviewets temaer har på denne måde indvirkning på interviewpersonernes fortolkningsmæssige proces, som kontinuerligt former og forandrer den virkelighed, som jeg som forsker er interesseret i at undersøge (Holstein 1995:16). I afhandlingen har jeg bestræbt mig på at tydeliggøre min egen rolle i medproduktionen af det empiriske materiale. Dette belyser jeg blandt andet i afsnittene "*At undersøge hverdagen med høretab som hørende*" og "*At medproducere data*". Inden da vil jeg dog først beskrive, hvordan jeg konkret har struktureret interviewets opbygning og temaer, samt min tilgang til feltarbejdet.

Interviewguide

Interviewene var semi-strukturerede og baserede på en interviewguide, der skitserede de tematikker, jeg ønskede at berøre. Jeg fulgte dog ikke nødvendigvis interviewguiden kronologisk, men lod samtalen udfolde sig og udforskede de spor, der opstod undervejs (Holstein 1995:56).

Når en potentiel informant henvendte sig, gav jeg via e-mail en kort introduktion til interviewets tematikker. I mailen skrev jeg blandt andet: "I interviewet vil jeg bede dig fortælle om dig selv, din baggrund og din historie med høretab. Herefter vil jeg spørge ind til dit

arbejdsliv og bede dig beskrive situationer, hvor høretabet spillede en rolle.” På denne måde kunne interviewpersonerne allerede inden interviewet begynde at reflektere over temaerne og deres egne erfaringer.

Nogle dage inden interviewene sendte jeg endnu en besked, hvor jeg bad dem tænke på 3 konkrete situationer, hvor høretabet spillede en rolle på deres arbejdsplads. Formuleringen lød som følger: ”Inden interviewet vil jeg gerne bede dig tænke på 3 situationer, hvor dit høretab fik betydning på dit arbejde og genkalde dig så mange detaljer om dem som muligt. Det kan både være positive eller negative situationer.” Den forberedende proces havde til hensigt at få interviewpersonerne til at genkalde sig specifikke situationer og aktivere deres minder om situationerne. Jeg ønskede at få dem til at tænke på konkrete sociale situationer for at producere hvad Mario L. Small og Jessica M. Calarco kalder ”palpable data” (2022:80-98). Det vil sige empiri, som ikke består af interviewpersonernes abstraktioner og brede generaliseringer, men derimod indeholder konkrete og detaljerede beskrivelser. Sektionen med beskrivelserne af de tre situationer var kernen i interviewene samt den del, hvor størstedelen af eksemplerne i de tre artikler kommer fra.

Interviewet var struktureret sådan, at jeg indledningsvist startede med at fortælle lidt om forskningsprojektet, og de temaer, som jeg var interesseret i at spørge ind til. Derefter understregede jeg, at der ikke var noget, som var ”for småt” til at blive fortalt, da jeg netop var interesseret i detaljerede beskrivelser af hverdagslige situationer, stemninger og følelser. Derefter talte jeg med interviewpersonen om, hvordan navne på personer, virksomheder og særlige kendetegn ville blive ændret i de endelige artikler, samt at de til enhver tid kunne trække deres samtykke tilbage. Efter at interviewpersonerne havde givet mundtligt samtykke til at deltage, indledte jeg interviewet med at spørge dem, om de ville fortælle lidt om sig selv, hvorefter jeg bevægede mig videre til interviewets resterende temaer: høretabshistorie, arbejdsliv, de forberedte situationer, det sociale på arbejdspladsen og fritid.

Sektionen med de forberedte situationer fungerede ofte som en åbning til beskrivelser af andre situationer – både lignende og helt anderledes end de forberedte. På den måde fungerede de som en overgang til at tale om nogle af de elementer i interviewet, som var mere følsomme. Jeg strukturerede interviewspørgsmålene således, at hver sektion indledtes med lette, deskriptive spørgsmål, for eksempel: ”Vil du fortælle om, hvornår og hvordan du fik dit nuværende job?” Jeg ønskede at starte med spørgsmål, der var nemme at besvare, inden vi

bevægede os ind på aspekter, som kunne være komplekse eller følelsesmæssigt svære (Kvale and Brinkmann 2015:189).

Spørgsmål vedrørende interviewpersonernes følelser var eksempelvis et element, som krævede omhu i interviewsituationen. At spørge direkte ind til følelser kan få interviewpersonen til at hæve deres parader og associere til stærke følelsesmæssige udtryk som fx at græde eller grine (Wettergren, Flam, and Kleres 2015:115). Derfor var jeg varsom med, hvordan jeg spurgte ind til de følelsesmæssige aspekter af situationerne. I stedet for at spørge direkte ind til, hvilke følelser interviewpersonen havde oplevet i en given situation, startede jeg i stedet med at stille spørgsmål som ”hvordan var det for dig?” eller ”hvad tænkte du om det?”, for så senere at spørge mere direkte ind til forskellige følelser.

Flere af interviewpersonerne blev berørte og græd under interviewet – eksempelvis når vi talte om sorgen over at have mistet det sociale liv, de engang havde, frygten for ikke at have en plads på arbejdsmarkedet eller oplevelsen af social eksklusion på arbejdspladsen. Jeg var derfor opmærksom på, at interviewtemaerne kunne være sensitive og krævede en høj grad af nærvær og medmenneskelig fornemmelse i interviewsituationen. Af den grund blev næsten alle interviews foretaget i interviewpersonernes eget hjem for at skabe de bedste forudsætninger for, at interviewpersonerne følte sig i trygge omgivelser. Enkelte af interviewene fandt sted på interviewpersonernes arbejdsplads efter deres eget ønske.

Feltarbejde

Opdelingen mellem deltagende og ikke-deltagende feltarbejde kan umiddelbart virke kunstig, da alt direkte observation i et felt uundgåeligt involverer en eller anden form for deltagelse. Der er imidlertid forskel på, hvordan forskeren ser sig selv som en del af feltet. I mit feltarbejde har jeg i vid udstrækning benyttet en ikke-deltagende tilgang, hvilket vil sige, at jeg ikke har forsøgt at indgå aktivt i de arbejdsopgaver, som de medarbejdere, jeg fulgte, udførte – henholdsvis pædagogisk arbejde og arkitektarbejde (Czarniawska 2007:54–55). En mere tilbagetrukket rolle i felten har den fordel, at forskeren i højere grad kan koncentrere sig om at observere de igangværende aktiviteter frem for både at skulle deltage og samtidig være opmærksom på begivenhederne. Jeg anvendte metoden *shadowing* (Czarniawska 2007), hvor jeg fulgte medarbejdere med høretab gennem deres forskellige aktiviteter i løbet af arbejdsdagen. Den observerende tilgang betyder imidlertid ikke, at forskeren forsøger at være ”en flue på væggen” for at minimere sin egen påvirkning (Czarniawska 2007:56). Tværtimod ønskede jeg at komme i kontakt med de ansatte og tale med dem i det omfang, det var muligt.

Jeg mødte typisk ind på samme tidspunkt som den medarbejder, jeg fulgte, og forlod arbejdspladsen, når personen fik fri. I børnehaven betød det, at jeg fulgte pædagogen rundt i en række forskellige kontekster – fra aktiviteter på stuen til legepladsen og på udflugter med børnene. Her medbragte jeg en notesbog, hvor jeg tog feltnoter om det, jeg observerede, og undertiden skrev direkte interaktioner ned. Efterfølgende renskrev jeg mine feltnoter på computer i en mere detaljeret form. På tegnestuen var observationen mere stationær, idet størstedelen af dagen foregik på et storrumskontor med et par håndfulde andre ansatte. På kontoret var der ikke faste kontorpladser, men oftest lykkedes det mig at finde en kontorplads ved siden af arkitekten, jeg fulgte, hvor jeg kunne sidde med min bærbare computer og skrive feltnoterne direkte ind i detaljeret form.

Fra feltarbejdets begyndelse aftalte jeg med informanterne, at vi ikke på forhånd fastlagde en specifik periode for, hvor længe jeg skulle følge dem. Jeg ønskede ikke, at de skulle føle sig forpligtet til en bestemt periode, hvis de undervejs skiftede mening, eller syntes, at min tilstedeværelse var ubehagelig eller akavet. Længden af feltarbejdet på de to arbejdspladser var derfor snarere et produkt af en kontinuerlig forhandling (Czarniawska 2007:56), primært mellem mig og dem, jeg fulgte, og sekundært mellem mig og deres leder.

Undervejs i feltarbejdet var det vigtigt for mig kontinuerligt at følge op på spørgsmål der opstod undervejs og afklare aspekter, som ikke fremgik af mine observationer. For eksempel spurgte jeg ofte arkitekten, hvordan hun oplevede møder, hvor kollegaerne talte hurtigt med mange overlap og afbrydelser. Opfølgningerne var vigtige for at be- og afkræfte de fortolkninger, som jeg lavede undervejs i feltarbejdet (Small and Calarco 2022:99–118). Somme tider var det svært at stille opfølgende spørgsmål på en diskret måde, der ikke virkede interfererende i arbejdet. På vej fra det ene lokale til det andet druknede opfølgende spørgsmål somme tider i baggrundsstøj. Ofte krævede det, at vi fandt et afsides sted uden støj og andre medarbejdere, for at jeg på en diskret måde kunne stille mine uddybende spørgsmål. Nogle gange følte jeg, at det ville kræve for meget af mine interviewpersoners arbejdstid at hive dem til side, så jeg notede også løbende spørgsmål, som jeg ved feltarbejdets afslutning stillede dem i et mere formelt interview. Disse opfølgninger – både undervejs og i de afsluttende interviews – styrkede mine tolkninger af det empiriske materiale.

Tegnestuen

Tegnestuen var placeret i en stor bygning, som husede mange forskellige kontorer og delte en række fælles faciliteter som f.eks. den store fælles kantine. På kontoret stod skrivebordene to og to i rækker med fronten mod hinanden, så computerskærmenes rygge mødtes på midten af hver række. Arbejdsstationerne var fleksible og fungerede efter først-til-mølle-princippet. Arbejdsdagen på arbejdspladsen var i vid udstrækning fleksibel, og de ansatte kunne vælge at arbejde hjemmefra eller flekse. Medarbejderne på kontoret havde alle videregående uddannelser, og de samarbejdede på tværs af forskellige professionelle baggrunde.

På kontoret var der altid en summen af baggrundssnak; både fra kollegaer, der sparrede om faglige aspekter, udvekslingen af personlige anekdoter eller telefonsamtaler. Længere nede ad gangen var der et enkeltmandskontor eller ”stillerum”, som de ansatte kunne vælge at benytte. Laila, en af de medarbejdere med høretab, som jeg fulgte, brugte kontoret, når hun havde telefonsamtaler med kunder, hvor hun behøvede ro for at høre modparten, men derudover sad hun mestendels på storrumskontoret i løbet af en arbejdsdag. Arbejdet på kontoret blev af de ansatte beskrevet som noget, der i høj grad krævede kollegial sparring og sidemandsoplæring. Medarbejderne rejste sig hyppigt for at søge råd hos deres kollegaer, eller for selv give et råd med, mens de kiggede en kollega over skulderen. Lederen af arbejdspladsen, Morten, tilskyndede til et arbejdsmiljø med mange interaktioner, både faglige og private. Han beskrev kulturen på kontoret som et sted, hvor de yndede at snakke og diskutere. Medarbejderne havde, ifølge Morten, en tæt relation til hinanden, der tillod drilleri og til tider en grov tone. Han mente, at der skulle være plads til at joke med hinanden på arbejdspladsen, og at det gode sociale miljø faciliterede en kultur, hvor kollegaerne hjalp hinanden.

Andre ansatte på kontoret beskrev også arbejdsmiljøet som meget socialt, og som et sted, hvor der var plads til at vende det med sin kollega, hvis man havde en dårlig dag. De beskrev imidlertid også, at tonen på kontoret til tider kunne være barsk, særligt når det drejede sig om faglige diskussioner.

Frokostpauserne blev som regel tilbragt i bygningens fælles kantine, hvor medarbejderne ofte satte sig i grupper fordelt efter kontorer. Kantinen var et stort rum med langborde der kunne rumme den mange etager høje bygnings medarbejdere. Flere af de ansatte uden høretab fortalte, at de forestillede sig, at de havde det ligesom Laila, når de opholdt sig i kantinen. De beskrev, at de ”zonede ud” af samtaler og blev ”drænet” på grund af den dårlige akustik og det høje

lydniveau. Til tider spiste mindre grupper af de ansatte i stedet på kontorets etage i køkkenet eller et sofalokale på samme gang.

Tiden var en faktor, som trådte frem i interviewene med kollegaerne. De fortalte om antallet af projekter, hvordan der kunne opstå flaskehalse i arbejdsflowet, og hvordan det tog tid fra deres egne projekter, når de skulle oplære en kollega. Jeg beskriver aspekterne omhandlende tidspres på de to arbejdspladser, fordi det havde betydning for, den grad af interaktionelt hensyn, som medarbejderne følte, at de kunne udvise over for medarbejdere med høretab. Dette vender jeg tilbage til i afhandlingens konkluderende diskussion.

Børnehaven

Børnehaven er en to-etagers bygning med et tilhørende udendørsareal med en legeplads. Bygningens kælder huser børnenes garderobe, mens de forskellige stuer er placeret i stueetagen. Børnene er delt op efter alder på stuerne, med en tilknyttet gruppe af personale. De ansatte på arbejdspladsen bestod af pædagoger, pædagogiske assistenter, pædagogmedhjælper, køkkenpersonale og en leder. Dagene i børnehaven følger en struktureret plan for f.eks. morgensamling, udendørs leg, frokost, udflugt og planlagte aktiviteter. Børnene bliver ofte delt op i mindre grupper, der laver hver deres aktivitet. De ansatte havde, i modsætning til tegnestuen, faste arbejdstider, der i en vis grad kunne skemalægges efter deres ønsker. I de tidsrum, hvor medarbejderne var sammen med børnene, var interaktionen mellem kollegaerne ofte begrænset til korte udvekslinger omkring planlægning af aktiviteter eller korte beskeder. De fleste af interaktionerne i løbet af en dag var således mellem børn og ansatte. I de daglige aktiviteter var der ofte et væld af lyde fra børn, som legede, hvorimod der under børnenes frokost og til morgensamlinger gjaldt en kultur, hvor man talte efter tur.

Personalet holdt skiftevis pause i et lille personalelokale med sofaer og stole i en cirkel. Fordi de ansatte holdt pause på skift, var der ofte kun få mennesker i pauserummet. Pauserummet var karakteriseret af en uformel stemning, hvor de ansatte delte kage og drak kaffe, mens de udvekslede historier fra deres privatliv eller vendte situationer, de havde haft med børnene. I interviewene beskrev medarbejderne arbejdspladsen som et sted, hvor de havde et godt socialt miljø, hvor der var plads til at grine og spørge hinanden om hjælp.

Hver dag i børnehaven startede med, at der blev lavet en plan over, hvilke ansatte der var på arbejde, og på hvilke stuer der var brug for flere hænder. Der var ofte sygemeldte medarbejdere, og de ansatte måtte rokere internt, for at få dagsplanen til at gå op.

At undersøge hverdagen med høretab som hørende

Som person uden høretab havde jeg ved projektets begyndelse kun begrænset viden om, hvad det ville sige at leve med høretab. Jeg havde tidligere arbejdet med svagtseende og blinde brugere i en virksomhed, som lavede teknologiske hjælpemidler, men jeg vidste også, at der var væsentlige forskelle mellem de to funktionsvariationer og de udfordringer, som det kunne give. En af mine interviewpersoner fortalte, at hendes veninde med høretab havde beskrevet det sådan, at når man mister synet, så mister man kontakten til tingene, men når man mister hørelsen, så mister man kontakten til andre mennesker. Det er netop de relationelle og sociale aspekter af høretabet, jeg som sociolog er interesseret i at undersøge.

Som person uden høretab står jeg i en privilegeret position i verbale interaktioner, som risikerer at give blinde vinkler for vigtige aspekter af at indgå på en arbejdsplads med et høretab. Det var derfor vigtigt for mig at være ydmyg, når jeg bevægede mig ind på et felt, som jeg på det tidspunkt kun havde begrænset personlig eller faglig erfaring med. Særligt i forhold til de teknologiske hjælpemidler har mine informanter måtte bære over med mig og vist og forklaret, hvordan teknisk udstyr for de fleste er en del af deres hverdag og dermed også interviewsituationen. Efter et interview med Mads, en medarbejder med høretab, fandt jeg først for sent ud af, at mikrofonen på min skjorte fortsat sendte direkte lyd til hans høreapparater – nu blot fra toilettet, som jeg lånte efter interviewet. En episode, vi begge på bedste goffmanske manér undgik at omtale. Senere i projektet fik jeg selv høretab tæt ind på livet, da min søn fik konstateret væske på ørerne og deraf nedsat hørelse og forsinket sprogudvikling, og måtte have lagt dræn ad flere omgange.

Min egen position i forhold til høreområdet udviklede sig således både fagligt og personligt undervejs i processen. I det følgende afsnit vil jeg uddybe de udfordringer og fordele, som min position medførte for genereringen af empiri.

At medproducere data

Som interviewer og deltager i feltet formede min position og tilstedeværelse den empiri, som afhandlingen er bygget på. Snarere end at se det som en ”forurening” af allerede eksisterende viden anskuer jeg det, jævnfør afhandlingens symbolsk interaktionistiske position, som et epistemologisk vilkår. Mening skabes gennem interaktion, og at den formes og omformes gennem eksempelvis et interview, gør den ikke mindre væsentlig. I enkelte tilfælde oplevede jeg indledningsvist i interviewet, at min position som person uden høretab positionerede mig som en, der skulle overbevises om, at det at have et handicap og en succesfuld professionel

karriere ikke gensidigt udelukkede hinanden. I en situation oplevede jeg eksempelvis, at en informant fortalt et narrativ om at ”overkomme sit handicap” på en måde, som havde karakter af en færdigstøbt fortælling, som var blevet fortalt mange gange. I den situation følte jeg, at den samfundsmæssige stigmatisering og stereotypisering af mennesker med handicap stod i vejen for, at interviewpersonen kunne udfolde de udfordringer, som høretabet også gav ham, og som han udfoldede senere i interviewet. I enkelte interviewsituationer som denne, tog det tid at etablere et interviewmiljø, hvor interviewpersonerne følte sig trygge ved at dele de kompleksiteter, som deres fortællinger indeholdt. Generelt udviste interviewpersonerne imidlertid en stor villighed og lyst til at dele deres erfaringer og besvare mine spørgsmål.

Min position som person uden høretab var en fordel i interviewene med kollegaer uden høretab. I disse interviews ville et synligt høreapparat muligvis have afholdt medarbejdere uden høretab i at udtrykke ambivalente og negative følelser omkring at vise hensyn til deres kollegaer med høretab.

Også under feltarbejdet influerede jeg de omgivelser, som jeg indgik i. I børnehaven accepterede børnene ikke min rolle som passiv observatør og var hurtige til at stille mig spørgsmål og involvere mig i opgaver som at hjælpe dem i overtøjet, tegne tegninger eller gyngede dem på legepladsen. Dog forsøgte jeg størstedelen af tiden at have en mindre deltagende position, som i højere grad muliggjorde, at jeg kunne observere de ansattes interaktioner. På arkitektkontoret var min rolle mere tilbagetrukket, og jeg sad mestendels på en kontorplads eller fulgte min informant Laila til møder, sparring eller frokostpauser. Særligt i begyndelsen oplevede Laila, at min tilstedeværelse gjorde hendes kollegaer mere forstående og tålmodige. Hun bemærkede, at kollegaer, der tidligere havde udvist irritation over at skulle gentage sig selv, nu virkede mere rolige og støttende. Dette var, ifølge Laila, imidlertid tydeligst i starten af feltarbejdet.

Generelt har min tilstedeværelse på de to arbejdspladser sandsynligvis medført, at ansatte uden høretab blev mere opmærksomme på at imødekomme de behov, som deres kollega med høretab gav udtryk for. Som det ofte er tilfældet i situationer, hvor mennesker er under observation, vil de fleste forsøge at fremstille deres foretrukne selv (Järvinen and Mik-Meyer 2005). Jeg antager derfor, at de eksklusionsprocesser og manglende inkluderende interaktionelle gestus, som jeg observerede under feltarbejdet, muligvis er endnu mere udtalt i mit fravær. De analytiske fund vil således i højere grad nedtone end forstærke de beskrevne processer. Imidlertid gav interviewpersonernes beskrivelser af tidligere sociale situationer adgang til

viden om en bred vifte af situationer fra deres arbejdsliv, hvor deres kollegaer ikke var under observation af mig som forsker.

Adgang til feltet

Jeg indledte projektet med at gennemlæse eksisterende forskningslitteratur på området for at få et overblik over de centrale forskningstemaer og blive fortrolig med terminologi og begreber. Herefter arrangerede jeg møder med tre hørekonsulenter fra henholdsvis Høreforeningen, Castberggård og et kommunikationscenter. Høreforeningen og Castberggård fungerede som praksisaktører i projektet, og gennem dem blev jeg henvist til den tredje hørekonsulent fra kommunikationscentret. Formålet med disse møder var at opnå en grundlæggende forståelse af de udfordringer, borgere med høretab oplever, når de opsøger støtte, samt de processer, der leder op til dette.

De tre institutioner fungerede samtidig som rekrutteringskanaler for informanter. Castberggård tilbyder bl.a. jobvejledning til erhvervsaktive, der har brug for støtte til at fastholde deres arbejde på grund af høreudfordringer, mens Høreforeningen er en interesseorganisation, der varetager mennesker med høretabs interesser. Kommunikationscentre er kommunale tilbud til mennesker med hørenedsættelse og andre funktionsvariationer, der kan give udfordringer med interaktion. Ved at rekruttere gennem disse tre kanaler ønskede jeg at opnå en variation i udvalget af interviewpersoner til undersøgelsen for at skabe et godt grundlag for at udforske forskellige aspekter ved afbrudt interaktion.

Hørekonsulenterne fra Castberggård og kommunikationscentret videreformidlede mit informationsbrev om forskningsprojektet til deres klienter, mens Høreforeningens kommunikationsafdeling gav mig mulighed for at dele et opslag om projektet i deres medlemsgrupper på Facebook. Informationsbrevene til erhvervsaktive på Castberggård og medlemmerne af Høreforeningen resulterede i henvendelser fra personer, der ønskede at deltage i projektet, mens informationsbrevet til kommunikationscentrets klienter ikke førte til nogen henvendelser. Under selve interviewprocessen afsluttede jeg hvert interview med at spørge, om interviewpersonen kunne henvise mig til andre erhvervsaktive med høretab i deres netværk. Rekrutteringen af interviewpersoner skete således gennem tre hovedkanaler: Castberggård, Høreforeningen og sneboldsrekruttering (Thagaard 2017) via eksisterende interviewpersoner. I metodesektionen om sampling vil jeg videre uddybe sammensætningen af mine interviewpersoner og dens betydning for empirien.

Jeg fik adgang til de arbejdspladser, hvor jeg foretog feltarbejde, gennem de interviewpersoner med høretab, som jeg allerede havde interviewet. Jeg anvendte en bottom-up-strategi, hvor jeg først indhentede samtykke fra medarbejderen, før jeg kontaktede virksomheden for at forespørge om muligheden for at udføre feltarbejde. Jeg indhentede samtykke fra medarbejderen først, for at undgå at medarbejderne følte et pres fra deres leder om at deltage i undersøgelsen.

At rekruttere gennem medarbejderne med høretab frem for gennem lederne af arbejdspladserne kan have haft den virkning, at det i højere grad er informanter, som har oplevet høretabet som et væsentligt problem i deres hverdag, der har henvendt sig. Samtidig kan det tænkes, at rekruttering gennem ledelsesniveauet kunne have bidraget med flere ”gode eksempler” på interaktionel inklusion. En strategisk sampling (Staunæs and Søndergaard 2005:55) af de mest velfungerende cases på interaktionel inklusion på arbejdspladser kunne i en fremtidig undersøgelse bidrage med værdifuld indsigt i de processer, hvor sympatiudveksling mellem medarbejdere med høretab og medarbejdere uden høretab fører til vellykkede interaktionsritualer. Jeg uddyber afhandlingens begrænsning ved at fokusere på afbrudt interaktion, frem for de processer, der muliggør succesfulde interaktionsritualer, i den afsluttende sektion om begrænsninger.

Sampling

For at opnå en variation af interaktionssituationer og emotioner, anvendte jeg en strategisk sampling, hvor jeg søgte interviewpersoner, der var forskelligt positionerede med hensyn til type af job, køn, uddannelse og graden af høretab (Staunæs and Søndergaard 2005). Med hensyn til uddannelse havde 1 ingen uddannelse udover folkeskolen, 2 havde en erhvervsuddannelse, 12 havde en mellemlang uddannelse og 12 havde en lang videregående uddannelse. 20 af interviewpersonerne var kvinder, mens 7 var mænd. Alle 19 interviewpersoner med høretab havde et diagnosticeret høretab i varierende grad, og 18 af dem brugte forskellige former for høretekniske hjælpemidler som høreapparater eller Cochlear-implantater.

Interviewpersonerne i afhandlingen har samlet set et højere uddannelsesniveau, end den generelle befolkning (Danmarks Statistik 2025). Samlet kan siges for gruppen af interviewpersoner, at mange af dem har jobs, hvor der stilles høje krav til kommunikative færdigheder, hvad end det drejer sig om kundekontakt/borgerkontakt eller en høj frekvens af møder. På den måde kan man forestille sig, at denne gruppe kan være særligt udfordret i

interaktionen på arbejdspladsen sammenlignet med andre stillinger, hvor interaktion ikke er en lige så stor del af arbejdet. Disse pointer understøtter imidlertid casens kvalitet som ”ekstrem case”. Da jeg i afhandlingen, som tidligere beskrevet, ikke ønsker at undersøge frekvensen af afbrudt interaktion og eksklusion, er et repræsentativt sample af interviewpersoner hverken ønskværdigt eller muligt, grundet undersøgelsens kvalitative karakter. Derimod vil jeg løbende inddrage kvantitative studier til at belyse pointer omhandlende omfang og fordeling.

Samplingen af interviewpersoner var en kontinuerlig proces gennem empirigenereringen, der muliggjorde, at jeg kunne tilpasse mængden og karakteren af empirien til de idéer, der opstod undervejs (Holstein 1995:74). Jeg stoppede samplingen af medarbejdere med høretab efter at have udført 19 interviews, da de samme fortællinger, emotioner og interaktionssituationer begyndte at gentage sig i det empiriske materiale (Staunæs and Søndergaard 2005). I behandlingen af det empiriske materiale, som jeg allerede havde produceret, gik op for mig, at jeg manglede perspektivet fra kollegaerne uden høretab, og jeg besluttede at udføre kollegainterviews under mit feltarbejde. Jeg ønskede egentlige interviews snarere end de samtaler, som jeg løbende havde med de ansatte på de to arbejdspladser. På den ene arbejdsplads fik jeg lov til at udføre kollegainterviewene i medarbejdernes arbejdstid, hvorimod jeg på den anden arbejdsplads foretog interviewene uden for arbejdstiden. Jeg interviewede i alt 5 medarbejdere uden høretab og derudover lederne på begge de arbejdspladser, jeg besøgte.

Jeg valgte at udføre feltarbejde på henholdsvis en tegnestue og i en børnehave af flere forskellige grunde. For det første var de to interviewpersoner med høretab, som arbejdede der, gode informanter i den forstand, at jeg vidste fra interviewene, at jeg ved at følge dem kunne få meget information om netop de interaktionelle processer, som jeg var interesseret i. Derudover havde de to arbejdspladser også på flere måder en forskellig karakter, hvilket muliggjorde sammenligning af forskellige typer af arbejdspladser (Pedersen, Blok, and Meilvang 2020). Mens tegnestuen var karakteriseret af en høj grad af sparring kollegaerne imellem, var interaktionen mellem kollegaer i børnehaven begrænset til korte udvekslinger udover pauser, hvor de ansatte talte sammen i mindre grupper i pauserummet. Børnehaven havde generelt et højt lydniveau, men i mange forskellige fysiske kontekster, hvor hverdagen på tegnestuen mestendels fandt sted på et storrumskontor med en summen af snak på kryds og tværs af skrivebordene. De to feltsteder repræsenterer således to forskellige miljøer, både fysiske og kulturelt, og bidrog til at udfolde en variation af forskellige interaktionssituationer og emotioner knyttet til afbrudt interaktion.

Jeg ønskede at komme tæt ind på de ansattes hverdag på de to arbejdspladser, og jeg prioriterede derfor at bruge flere timer på de to feltsteder fremfor færre timer på flere arbejdspladser (Small and Calarco 2022:18-20).

Analysestrategi

Uanset om der fra begyndelsen anvendes udviklede teorier eller ej, struktureres verden uundgåeligt gennem sprog, kategorier og den position, vi anskuer den fra (Ragin and Becker 1992:217–18). Den analytiske proces, hvor empiriske genstande fortolkes gennem kategorier og begreber, er således uundgåeligt pågående fra undersøgelsens start.

Analysestrategien i afhandlingen er siden de indledende faser af projektet informeret af et teoretisk perspektiv om interaktionsritualer (Collins 2014), som var styrende for beslutningen om at undersøge interaktionssituationer på arbejdspladsen. Kodningen af det empiriske materiale var på den måde en integreret del af hele interviewprocessen, hvor temaerne omkring interaktionssituationer og interaktionelle afbrydelser rammesatte interviewet (Holstein 1995:56). Undervejs i empirigenereringen læste jeg kontinuerligt både teoretiske tekster og eksisterende forskning på området, som guidede min opmærksomhed mod forskellige dele af empirien. Da jeg begyndte at kode det empiriske materiale ved hjælp af Nvivo-software, var jeg stadig i gang med feltarbejdet på de to arbejdspladser. Den første runde af kodning indeholdt koder såsom ”kommunikativ afkobling”, ”inklusion”, ”eksklusion” og ”hensyn”. Gennem interviewene blev det tydeligt, at medarbejderne med høretab ofte oplevede, at deres kollegaer ikke udviste tilstrækkeligt hensyn i interaktionssituationer, hvilket jeg ønskede at undersøge nærmere. Koden ”hensyn” udsprang således af et empirisk tema, mens ”kommunikativ afkobling” var teoretisk informeret af Collins' begreber. Jeg søgte efter teori, som kunne bidrage til at udfolde, hvad der var på spil i det at udvise hensyn til kollegaer. Under feltarbejdet på tegnestuen, som var den sidste del af empirigenereringen, læste jeg derfor Candace Clarks bog *Misery and company in everyday life* (1997) om sympatiudvekslinger, da en oplevelse i felten fik mig til at reflektere over, hvordan sympati generelt manifesterede sig på kontoret blandt de ansatte.

En dag viklede jeg ved et uheld min fod ind i ledningen til min bærbare computer, og jeg nåede ikke at redde mig fri, før jeg lå på gulvet på storrumskontoret. Laila hjalp mig op, og spurgte mig med stor oprigtighed og uden det mindste smil på læben, om jeg var okay. Hun var altid utrolig sympatserende og betænksom overfor mig under feltarbejdet – hun huskede for eksempel at spørge til min søn, da jeg en dag måtte melde afbud for at passe ham, tilbød at tage

kaffe med til mig, når hun selv hentede en kop, og sørgede for, at jeg havde et sted at sidde, når jeg ankom om morgenen. Episoden med ledningen fik mig til at tænke over, hvordan sympati blev udvekslet på arbejdspladsen, og hvordan det kunne være, at de inklusive interaktionelle gestus fra Lailas kollegaer ofte udeblev i situationer, hvor de var nødvendige for, at hun kunne deltage. Tilblivelsesprocessen af de analytiske kategorier, som eksempelvis *hensyn*, var således en abduktiv proces (Timmermans and Tavory 2012), hvor jeg vekslede mellem teoretisk informering – eksempelvis fra *Misery and Company in Everyday Life* (1997) – og opmærksomhed på de ting, der undrede mig i felten.

I den anden runde af kodningen undersøgte jeg aspektet om hensyn nærmere gennem underkoder som ”omkostningen ved hensyn” og ”meningen med hensyn”, informeret af Clarks tanker om sympati som gaver, der udveksles mellem mennesker. I den sidste og tredje kodningsrunde skabte jeg en række underkoder til nogle udvalgte koder fra anden runde, som jeg ønskede at komme mere i dybden med. For eksempel lavede jeg tre underkoder til koden ”omkostningen ved hensyn”, som navngav de mønstre, jeg så på tværs af det empiriske materiale, og som dannede grundlaget for analysen i den tredje artikel. De første to underkoder – ”når ånden dør” og ”følelsesmæssigt drænet” – var navngivet efter direkte citater fra interviewene, mens den sidste, ”bestræbelser på at styre følelser”, var teoretisk informeret af Hochschilds begreb om *emotion work* (Hochschild 2003).

Kodningen på tværs af feltnoter og interviewmateriale gjorde det muligt at sammenligne forskelle og ligheder mellem de forskellige interaktionssituationer og emotioner på tværs af de forskellige kontekster, de udspillede sig i – hvad Maxwell og Miller (2008:465) betegner som en *categorizing strategy*. Denne tilgang muliggjorde identificeringen af mønstre i det empiriske materiale. Samtidig indebærer kodning en risiko for, at konteksten går tabt, når materialet ”klippes” op i koder (Maxwell and Miller 2008). I kodningen søgte jeg derfor at inddrage længere bidder og interviewspørgsmål, for at bibeholde sammenhængen i det sagte. Derudover vendte jeg kontinuerligt tilbage til de enkelte interviews i arbejdet med koderne for at lokalisere kodebidder i interviewpersonens fortælling.

Udover kodningen anvendte jeg også en *connecting strategy* (Maxwell and Miller 2008:467) i analysen af feltnoterne, hvor jeg bibeholdt dem i kronologisk rækkefølge og analyserede dem som en helhed. Dette gjorde det muligt at identificere nøglesituationer på arbejdspladsen og undersøge, hvordan de var internt forbundne. Eksempelvis anvendte jeg denne strategi i den

tredje artikel, hvor jeg analyserer, hvordan kæder af mislykkede interaktionsritualer kan føre til en fremmedgørelse fra arbejdspladsens kulturelle symboler og sociale fællesskab.

Ved at kombinere de to analysestrategier – henholdsvis en sammenlignende tilgang på tværs af materialet og en sekventiel analyse af nøglesituationer – har jeg søgt at identificere mønstre i empirien, samtidig med at bevare den empiriske kontekst.

Generalisering

I denne sektion vil jeg først beskrive afhandlingens tilgang til generalisering og dernæst redegøre for de specifikke former for generaliseringer, jeg laver i afhandlingens tre artikler. Generaliseringerne, som udspringer af casen om høretab på arbejdsmarkedet, er analytiske generaliseringer (Halkier 2011). De er udformet gennem anvendelsen af teoretiske begreber såsom interaktionsritualer, *sympati* og *face work* for at identificere og udfolde mønstre i det empiriske materiale.

Jeg har efterstræbt, at afhandlingen kan bidrage til forskningen både som en *instrumental* og *intrinsic* case. Som *instrumental* case bidrager den med teoretisk informerede analytiske generaliseringer, eksempelvis om kvaler i afbrudt interaktion og omkostningerne ved at tilbyde inklusive interaktionelle gestus. Som *intrinsic* case bidrager den gennem en detaljeret beskrivelse af det at have høretab på arbejdsmarkedet og den kontekst, som gør sig gældende for netop mine interviewpersoner i Danmark (Stake 1995). Det har således været mit mål at balancere mellem på den ene side at udforme generaliserbare og teoriinformerede resultater, og på den anden side at være tro mod den kompleksitet og kontekstbundethed, som kendetegner mellem menneskelige situationer. De sociale situationer, der udgør analysens genstandsfelt, er netop kendetegnet ved det, som Charlotte Delmar (2010) betegner en *quality of doubleness*, idet de både er særegne og almene på samme tid. De udspiller sig i et tidsrum, der ikke gentager sig, og de er oplevet af mennesker med hver deres unikke livsbiografi og kæder af interaktionsritualer. Samtidig rummer de elementer af almene oplevelser og følelser (Delmar 2010:121–22).

I det følgende vil jeg beskrive, hvordan afhandlingens første og tredje artikel bidrager med analytiske generaliseringer gennem forskellige typer, og derefter redegøre for, hvordan afhandlingens anden artikel bidrager med analytiske generaliseringer gennem det, Halkier (2011) betegner som *category zooming*.

I afhandlingens første og tredje artikel udformer jeg analytiske generaliseringer gennem forskellige typer – henholdsvis typer af kvaler i afbrudt interaktion og typer af omkostninger ved at tilbyde inkluderende interaktionelle gestus. Typerne er skabt ved at identificere mønstre i empirien gennem kodningsprocessen og derefter kondensere dem til kategorier, der fremhæver bestemte træk, mens den overser andre (Halkier 2011:790). Typerne er således konstrueret med udgangspunkt i deres forskellige karakteristika, som ikke er overlappende, i modsætning til den empiriske virkelighed, som er karakteriseret af overlap, skift og nuancer. Gennem typerne ønsker jeg at bidrage med analytiske generaliseringer, der kan kondensere komplekse processer af afbrudt interaktion og sympatiudvekslinger i andre sammenhænge end den undersøgte.

I afhandlingens første artikel identificerer jeg fire forskellige typer af kvaler i afbrudt interaktion: *concealing interactional disruptions*, *managing conflicts*, *keeping track of the conversation* og *reintegrating into interactions*. *Concealing interactional disruptions* adskiller sig fra de øvrige typer, da den omhandler bestræbelser på at skjule afbrudt interaktion, mens *managing conflicts* omhandler bestræbelser på at håndtere konflikter, der er opstået som følge af afbrudt interaktion. *Keeping track of the conversation* dækker de indsatser, som omhandler at blive på sporet af samtalen og følge med, mens *reintegrating into interactions* betegner forsøg på at reintegrere sig interaktionelt i gruppen efter en afkobling.

I afhandlingens tredje artikel benytter jeg ligeledes typer til at lave generaliseringer. Her identificerer jeg tre typer af omkostninger ved at udvise inkluderende interaktionelle gestus: *restrained emotional buildup*, *emotional exhaustion* og *efforts to manage emotions*. *Restrained emotional buildup* er en omkostning, der betegner, at interaktionelle hensyn – såsom håndsoprækning til møder og undgåelse af taleoverlap – kan hæmme den sociale energi i en situation. *Emotional exhaustion* handler derimod om den følelsesmæssige udmattelse, det kan medføre at udvise interaktionelle gestus, som eksempelvis at gentage sig selv. Den sidste type, *efforts to manage emotions*, handler om at kontrollere følelser i forbindelse med at udvise inkluderende interaktionelle gestus. Dette kan både indebære at undertrykke uønskede følelser såsom irritation eller vrede og at fremelske ønskede følelser såsom tålmodighed og sympati.

Typerne i første og tredje artikel er baseret på mønstre i interaktionssituationer – ikke på mønstre blandt forskellige typer af medarbejdere. Det betyder, at flere typer af kvaler i afbrudt interaktion ofte kan være til stede samtidig, ligesom de kan overlappe i det empiriske materiale. Udformningen af analytiske typer indebærer uundgåeligt en reduktion af den empiriske

kompleksitet (Halkier 2011:792). Dette er både en fordel og en ulempe ved at anvende typer som generaliseringsmetode. På den ene side indebærer det en risiko for, at kompleksitet og kontekstafhængighed går tabt, men på den anden side er netop denne kondensering en styrke, da den muliggør analytiske konstruktioner, der kan anvendes på tværs af kontekster. Formålet med typerne er ikke at gengive den empiriske virkelighed én til én, men derimod at kondensere aspekter af empirien gennem teoretiske informerede kategorier og begreber. Generaliseringerne er ikke universelle, men er i høj grad et produkt af en bestemt kontekst, både historisk, kulturelt og politisk, som jeg har bestræbt mig på at tydeliggøre gennem afhandlingen. Ligeledes har det ligget mig på sinde at præsentere undtagelser og kompleksitet i det empiriske materiale, så læseren har mulighed for at følge min fortolkning (Halkier 2011:787–88).

I afhandlingens anden artikel, der omhandler betydningen af inkluderende interaktionelle gestus og situationel eksklusion, er de analytiske generaliseringer mere procesorienterede. Gennem det, Halkier betegner som *category zooming* (2011:792), zoomer jeg ind på situationel eksklusion og sympatiudvekslinger som processer i det empiriske materiale og udfolder, hvordan de udspiller sig på forskellige måder. Jeg viser, hvordan situationel eksklusion for nogle er et vilkår, der pålægger dem yderligere interaktionelt arbejde uden at føre til en generel eksklusion fra arbejdspladsens fællesskab, mens kæder af situationel eksklusion for andre resulterer i en kumulativ fremmedgørelse fra arbejdspladsens kulturelle symboler og fællesskab. På denne måde er denne form for generalisering mere orienteret mod at vise kompleksiteten i de empiriske processer (Halkier 2011:792).

Selvom det at have et høretab på arbejdsmarkedet indebærer sit eget sæt af omstændigheder, mener jeg, at de mekanismer og processer, som jeg udfolder i afhandlingen, muligvis også kan benyttes til at belyse dele af processer af afbrudt interaktion, sympatiudveksling samt inklusions- og eksklusionsprocesser hos andre grupper og i andre kontekster. Dette vil jeg uddybe nærmere i diskussionsafsnittene af afhandlingens første og anden artikel.

Etiske overvejelser

I afhandlingen anvender jeg en kontekstuel og situationel tilgang til de etiske dilemmaer, der opstod undervejs i undersøgelsen – såkaldt *etik i praksis* (Johnson 2014; Kvale and Brinkmann 2015:112–15) – frem for en processuel etik baseret på forhåndsgodkendelse fra en etisk komité. Feltarbejde indebærer ofte uforudsete situationer, og jeg vurderede, at den mest etisk forsvarlige tilgang var at tage stilling til dem løbende frem for at følge et på forhånd fastlagt

sæt principper. Forudbestemte etiske procedurer risikerer at begrænse forskeren i at revurdere og tilpasse principperne undervejs til konteksten (Delamont and Atkinson 2018:122).

Et eksempel på en situation, hvor feltarbejdet krævede en fleksibel og procesorienteret tilgang til etik, var min egen rolle i felten. Inden feltarbejdets begyndelse havde jeg besluttet at indtage en ikke-deltagende rolle på de to arbejdspladser. Især i børnehaven ønskede jeg at undgå at knytte bånd til børnene eller deltage i pædagogiske opgaver. Der var imidlertid enkelte situationer, hvor jeg endte med hjælpe til i arbejdet med børnene. Et eksempel på det var en dag, hvor børnegruppen var på tur, og der opstod tumult mellem nogle af børnene, mens vi gik langs en befærdet vej. De to pædagoger havde svært ved at holde styr på hele børneflokken, så den ene spurgte mig, om jeg havde mulighed for at hjælpe med at guide børnene sikkert hjem. I denne situation vurderede jeg, at det mest etiske valg ikke var at holde fast i min oprindelige beslutning om en tilbagetrukket rolle, men derimod at handle ud fra, hvad der i konteksten var det mest forsvarlige.

Et andet aspekt af feltarbejdet, der krævede kontinuerlig etisk stillingtagen, var spørgsmålet om informeret samtykke. Under hele undersøgelsen har jeg bestræbt mig på at sikre, at alle involverede deltog på et informeret grundlag. Forud for interviewene udsendte jeg informationsbreve til deltagerne, hvori forskningsprojektet blev beskrevet. Disse informationer blev gentaget ved interviewets start sammen med oplysninger om sikker opbevaring af data, sløring af karakteristika såsom navne på mennesker, navne på virksomheder og særlige kendetegn, samt muligheden for på et hvert tidspunkt at trække samtykket tilbage. På samme måde indhentede jeg samtykke fra de personer, jeg skulle følge under feltarbejdet, hvorefter jeg kontaktede deres ledere for at få deres samtykke. Inden feltarbejdets start sendte jeg også informationsbreve til alle medarbejdere, som jeg ville observere direkte, samt til forældrene til børnene i den stue, jeg skulle besøge. Brevene indeholdt kontaktoplysninger, så medarbejdere og forældre kunne henvende sig med eventuelle spørgsmål til projektet.

Det var imidlertid ikke altid muligt at opnå informeret samtykke fra alle, der indirekte indgik i observationerne. For eksempel omfattede mine feltstudier også observationer af personer fra andre kontorer, der brugte kantinen, eller som kortvarigt stoppede op og talte med den medarbejder, jeg fulgte, før de forlod situationen igen. I sådanne tilfælde var det praktisk umuligt at indhente samtykke fra alle tilstedeværende (Johnson 2014:28–29). En procesorienteret tilgang til etik gjorde det muligt for mig at træffe beslutninger, der var

informeret af den konkrete kontekst, jeg befandt mig i – både under feltarbejdet og interviewene.

Anvendelsen af *shadowing* (Czarniawska 2007), hvor jeg følger medarbejdere med høretab i deres daglige virke på arbejdspladsen, kan medføre øget opmærksomhed fra kollegerne på den person, der følges. For nogle kan det at have et høretab være behæftet med stigma og skam, og således være noget, som ønskes at holdes skjult for kollegaer og arbejdsgiver af frygt for sociale sanktioner. Det var derfor vigtigt for mig at tale med mine informanter om, hvad feltarbejdet indebar, for at minimere ubehag og undgå at påføre dem skade.

De personer, som jeg valgte at følge, udtrykte begge at de var interesserede i at udbrede viden om, hvad det vil sige at have et høretab på arbejdspladsen – både internt på deres egen arbejdsplads og gennem forskning. Jeg talte løbende med begge personer om, hvordan det var for dem, at jeg observerede deres hverdag, og sørgede for, at det informerede samtykke var en løbende proces. Derfor havde jeg heller ikke på forhånd fastlagt en tidshorisont for feltarbejdet, som snarere var et produkt af en løbende samtale mellem mig og de to nøgleinformanter (Czarniawska 2007:56). Efter feltarbejdet geninterviewede jeg dem begge, og de fortalte, at det havde været en god oplevelse at lade mig observere deres hverdag. Den ene nøgleinformant udtrykte det sådan her: ”Det har været fint. Jeg håber, at det gør noget forskel i samfundet. At man kan blive mere bevidst om de problemer, der er. Det er meget svært at få folk til at blive ved med at huske, at det er et problem, og at man ikke bliver glemt. Ikke alle forstår, hvad det handler om i virkeligheden.”

At følge få personer over en længere periode, som jeg har gjort i feltarbejdet, betyder også, at informanterne potentielt kan læse om deres egen hverdag og de processer af inklusion og eksklusion, som jeg formidler gennem artiklernes analyser. Jeg har gennem udarbejdelsen af artiklerne kontinuerligt afvejnet den potentielle emotionelle smerte, det kan forårsage dem at læse mine tolkninger af processer af eksklusion, mod det samfundsmæssige bidrag til feltet, som analyserne kan bidrage med. Det er dog væsentligt at understrege, at de eksklusionsprocesser samt de underliggende følelser af irritation og vrede fra kolleger, som særligt anden og tredje artikel udfolder, er aspekter af nøgleinformantens arbejdsliv, som hun i forvejen kender til, og som hun selv ønsker at bidrage til at belyse. Der er således ikke tale om en blotlægning af hidtil skjulte følelser og konflikter, men om processer, hun selv reflekterer over i interviewene.

For at beskytte de kolleger uden høretab, som jeg interviewede som en del af feltarbejdet, har jeg talt med dem om at navne på personer, virksomheder og særlige kendetegn ville blive ændret i de endelige artikler for at sikre mig, at de var indforstået med graden fortrolighed i projektet. Derudover har jeg valgt i nogle tilfælde at sløre medarbejdernes køn samt at give interviewpersoner og medarbejdere fra feltarbejdet forskellige navne på tværs af de tre artikler for at beskytte deres identitet yderligere.

Diskuterende konklusion

I de følgende konkluderende og diskuterende afsnit opsummerer jeg først de tre artikler, der udgør kernen af afhandlingen. Derefter følger en konkluderende diskussion, hvor jeg sammenfatter afhandlingens vigtigste fund og diskuterer deres implikationer i forhold til, hvordan den emotionelle kultur på arbejdspladser kan forandres mod et mere inkluderende miljø. Afslutningsvis præsenterer jeg afhandlingens overordnede begrænsninger, inden de tre forskningsartikler introduceres.

Opsummering af afhandlingens artikler

Artikel 1: Types of struggles in Disrupted Interaction: A case of hard-of-hearing employees, i review hos *Symbolic Interaction*

I afhandlingens første artikel undersøger jeg, gennem etnografisk feltarbejde på to arbejdspladser samt 29 interviews med medarbejdere med høretab, deres kollegaer og ledere, hvilke typer af interaktionelle kvaler medarbejdere med høretab står over for, for at kunne deltage i det sociale fællesskab på arbejdspladsen. Med brug af mikrosociologisk teori identificerer artiklen fire typer af kvaler i afbrudt interaktion: 1) Concealing interactional disruptions; 2) Managing conflicts; 3) Keeping track of the conversation; og 4) Reintegrating into interactions. Artiklen viser, hvordan nogle medarbejdere med høretab konstant er i risiko for ansigtstab, mikro-konflikter og mislykkede interaktionsritualer, hvilket pålægger dem en interaktionel og følelsesmæssig arbejdsbyrde. Desuden demonstrerer artiklen, hvordan disse interaktionelle kvaler for nogle dominerer sociale situationer i en sådan grad, at det udgør en form for social stratifikation. I artiklen diskuterer jeg implikationerne af forskellige måder, hvorpå interaktionelle afbrydelser teoretiseres i interaktionslitteraturen samt hvilke faktorer der påvirker distributionen af henholdsvis mekaniske og normative interaktionelle kvaler. Artiklen bidrager til eksisterende mikro-sociologisk litteratur ved at tilbyde en konceptualisering af fire typer af kvaler i afbrudt interaktion.

Artikel 2: Giving and getting sympathy at work: Unraveling the micro-processes of exclusion of hard-of-hearing employees, i review hos *Social Psychology Quarterly*

I afhandlingens anden artikel undersøger jeg, gennem etnografisk feltarbejde på to arbejdspladser samt 29 interviews med medarbejdere med høretab, deres kollegaer og ledere, hvilken rolle inkluderende interaktionelle gestus spiller i inklusionen af medarbejdere med høretab. Artiklen fremhæver hvordan inkluderende interaktionelle gestus kan have afgørende indflydelse på, hvorvidt medarbejdere med høretab inkluderes eller ekskluderes fra sociale

interaktioner på arbejdspladsen. For nogle er situationel eksklusion et tilbagevendende element i deres dagligdag, som pålægger dem yderligere interaktionelt arbejde uden at føre til en generel eksklusion fra arbejdspladsens fællesskab. For andre resulterer kæder af situationel eksklusion imidlertid i en kumulativ fremmedgørelse fra arbejdspladsens kulturelle symboler, såsom interne jokes og narrativer, der resulterer i en generel eksklusion fra arbejdsfællesskabet. Artiklen belyser, hvordan begrænset evne til passiv lytning i høre-dominerede miljøer ekskluderer medarbejdere med høretab fra uformelle samtaler på arbejdspladsen, hvor kolleger udveksler sympatigaver. Denne eksklusion begrænser adgangen til information, der er nødvendig for at opbygge *sympathy debt* blandt kolleger, og skaber risiko for en selvforstærkende cyklus af eksklusion.

Artiklen diskuterer undersøgelsens metodiske valg og deres indflydelse på analysens fund. Artiklen bidrager til eksisterende mikro-sociologisk og emotionssociologisk litteratur ved at belyse, hvordan processer af social eksklusion udfolder sig på arbejdspladsen for mennesker med høretab gennem kæder af situationel eksklusion og begrænset adgang til udveksling af følelsesgaver.

Artikel 3: The cost of sympathy – Coworkers’ attempts to include hard-of-hearing employees in the workplace, publiceret i *Emotions and Society*

Afhandlingens tredje artikel undersøger interaktionelle forsøg på at inkludere medarbejdere med høretab i sociale situationer gennem begrebet sympati. Artiklen afdækker med begreber fra emotions- og mikro-sociologien, hvilke typer af omkostninger det kan have at udvise interaktionelle hensyn på arbejdspladsen. Artiklen identificerer en følelsesregel om at vise hensyn gennem interaktionelle gestus overfor medarbejdere med høretab. Derudover viser artiklen, at det at udvise interaktionelle hensyn somme tider resulterer i mislykkede interaktionsritualer med omkostningerne *restrained emotional buildup*, *emotional exhaustion* og *efforts to manage emotions*. Analysen viser, hvordan overgangen fra højintensitets- til lavintensitetsinteraktion kan hæmme processerne for rytmisk og følelsesmæssig *entrainment*, mens langsomme interaktioner og gentagelser indebærer risikoen for følelsesmæssig udmattelse. Derudover vises det, hvordan det at udvise interaktionelle hensyn somme tider kræver, at ansatte undertrykker uønskede følelser af frustration og irritation og/eller fremelsker følelser af sympati og tålmodighed.

Artiklen diskuterer de forskellige faktorer, som indvirker på de følelsesmæssige omkostninger og fremhæver behovet for, at virksomheder skaber sociale og fysiske miljøer, der understøtter

stærke interaktionsritualer for medarbejdere med forskellige funktionsvariationer. Artiklen bidrager til den eksisterende emotionslitteratur ved at tilbyde en konceptualisering af tre typer omkostninger ved at udvise inkluderende interaktionelle hensyn på arbejdspladsen.

Interaktionel og følelsesmæssig stratifikation – Hvordan forandres den emotionelle kultur på arbejdspladsen?

I denne sektion diskuterer jeg afhandlingens fund og deres implikationer i relation til, hvordan den emotionelle kultur på arbejdspladser kan forandres mod et mere inkluderende miljø. Diskussionen tager afsæt i tre perspektiver – det mikrosociologiske, det praksisorienterede og det kritiske emotionsperspektiv – for at belyse fundenes betydning for praksis. Derudover vil jeg løbende opsummere fund fra de tre artikler og sætte dem i relation til eksisterende viden på området.

Afhandlingens første artikel belyser, hvordan det at have et høretab i en arbejds kontekst kan indbefatte et betydeligt interaktionelt og følelsesmæssigt ekstraarbejde. Afbrudt interaktion kan indeholde forskellige typer af kvaler herunder bestræbelser på at skjule afbrydelser, at håndtere konflikter, at holde styr på samtaler og at reintegrere sig i interaktionen efter en afkobling. Den anden artikel belyser, hvordan eksklusion i én social situation kan have indvirkninger på den næste sociale situation og således skabe en kæde af sociale eksklusioner. Dette kan føre til en fremmedgørelse fra de kulturelle symboler såsom interne jokes og identitetsskabende fortællinger, der eksisterer i et fagfællesskab. Artiklen belyser derudover, hvordan afbrudt interaktion kan bidrage til ulighed i adgangen til udvekslingen af følelsesgaver på arbejdspladsen, hvilket yderligere kan forstærke eksklusionsprocessen.

Både ansatte med og uden høretab samt lederne på de to arbejdspladser anså det for vigtigt at tage hensyn til medarbejdere med høretab. Der eksisterer således en følelsesregel om at udvise interaktionelt hensyn. Brud på denne regel blev til tider sanktioneret gennem *rule reminders* fra kolleger i form af drillende bemærkninger eller påmindelser om eksempelvis ikke at tale i munden på hinanden. Oftest var det dog uden omkostninger for medarbejdere uden høretab at overtræde denne følelsesregel. Medarbejdere med høretab beskrev, hvordan det var udmattende gentagne gange at give *rule reminders*, og hvordan de nogle gange – over tid – opgav at gøre det. Mads, en medarbejder med høretab, fortalte eksempelvis om den følelsesmæssige belastning ved at bede om et hensyn, der efterfølgende ikke blev taget. Han oplevede en dobbeltkonsekvens: både de emotionelle omkostninger ved afvisningen og det udeblevne hensyn.

At brud på følelsesreglen sjældent blev socialt sanktioneret, tyder på, at den ikke er stærkt normativt forankret i arbejdskulturen på de undersøgte arbejdspladser. Mens brud på

følelsesreglen om hensyn som regel var uden konsekvenser for medarbejdere uden høretab, havde de store konsekvenser for medarbejdere med høretab. Afhandlingen viser, hvordan inklusive interaktionelle gestus ofte er afgørende for, om medarbejdere med høretab inkluderes eller ekskluderes i sociale situationer på arbejdspladsen. I mislykkede interaktionsritualer er det således dem, der betaler den højeste pris i form af øget risiko for social eksklusion.

I det følgende diskuterer jeg afhandlingens fund om interaktionelt hensyn som en forudsætning for et inkluderende arbejdsmarked. Jeg diskuterer, hvordan en sådan kultur kan fremmes på arbejdspladser, samt om det overhovedet er ønskeligt, ved at trække på perspektiver fra praksisteori og kritisk emotionsteori i tillæg til afhandlingens mikrosociologiske perspektiv.

En forandring af arbejdspladsers emotionelle og interaktionelle kultur vanskeliggøres af, at kollegaer uden høretab kan have forbehold over for at ændre eksisterende interaktionelle praksisser. Afhandlingens tredje artikel viser, at det nogle gange indebærer en betydelig omkostning at udvise inkluderende interaktionelle gestus, hvilket kan føre til, at medarbejdere undlader at udføre dem. Disse omkostninger kan bestå i hæmmet følelsesmæssige opbygning i interaktioner, emotionel udmattelse som følge af afbrudt interaktion samt det følelsesarbejde, der kræves for at undertrykke uønskede følelser og/eller fremelske passende følelser. At udvise hensyn i interaktioner er således en form for arbejde, der kan medføre en betydelig følelsesmæssig belastning.

Tidligere studier af inklusion af medarbejdere med handicap har identificeret manglende hensyn og negative attituder fra kollegaer som en hindring for social inklusion (Haynes and Linden 2012; Naraine and Lindsay 2011; Nevala et al. 2015), hvilket stemmer overens med afhandlingens resultater. Afhandlingens tredje artikel søger at undersøge og nuancere denne proces frem for at afskrive kollegaernes reaktioner udelukkende som udtryk for ableisme eller diskrimination.

For at finde løsninger på de sociale problemer, som medarbejdere med høretab oplever på arbejdsmarkedet, mener jeg, at det er væsentligt at være nysgerrig på de interaktionelle processer og anerkende, at inkluderende interaktionelle gestus kan indebære visse omkostninger. At ændre vanegjorte praksisser kan være en vanskelig proces, da de er behæftede med følelser og sociale normer. Dette er blandt andet beskrevet i forskningen om omlægning af spisevaner mod et mere bæredygtigt forbrug. Wendler & Halkier (2023) finder i en undersøgelse af transitionen mod et reduceret kødforbrug, at en sådan omlægning af spisevaner

kræver udvikling af nye praksisser og at disse ændringer af praksis, kræver arbejde i form af tid og anstrengelser.

Selvom omlægning af spise- og forbrugsvaner på mange måder er forskellig fra in- og eksklusionsprocesser på arbejdspladsen, er der visse paralleller i forhold til de udfordringer, der kan opstå, når medarbejdere bliver bedt om at ændre deres interaktionelle praksisser. Wendler & Halkier viser, at forandring af hverdagspraksisser er en gradvis og krævende proces, der ikke nødvendigvis forudsætter individuel motivation eller holdningsændring. I stedet for at søge løsninger, der primært fokuserer på oplysning og uddannelse af det enkelte individ, argumenterer det praksisorienterede perspektiv for strukturelle ændringer, der gennem sociale og materielle infrastrukturer kan gøre det lettere at ændre praksis (Vihalemm, Keller, and Kiisel 2015; Wendler and Halkier 2023).

At oplysning og information til det enkelte individ ikke gjorde afgørende forskel for ændring af praksis, var også en erfaring, som interviewpersonerne med høretab gjorde sig. De beskrev, hvordan gentagne påmindelser og information om deres høretab over for deres kollegaer sjældent førte til en grundlæggende ændring i kollegaernes måder at interagere på. De fleste af interviewpersonerne var åbne om deres høretab på arbejdspladsen, og nogle havde endda, med hjælp fra en hørekonsulent, afholdt oplæg på arbejdspladsen om de udfordringer, de stod over for i sociale situationer. Denne åbenhed løste imidlertid ikke problemerne med manglende interaktionelt hensyn og situationel eksklusion.

I et studie om, hvordan statslige og organisatoriske aktører kan facilitere ”infrastrukturer af venlighed”, fremhæver Andersen og Brownlie (2019) vigtigheden af strukturelle forandringer frem for tiltag rettet mod den enkelte medarbejder. Venlige handlinger defineres her som *“the things that people do for one another (both practically and emotionally) in response to moments of perceived need, when there is the option to do nothing”* (Anderson and Brownlie 2019:6). Forfatterne argumenterer for, at virksomheder kan fremme venlige handlinger ved at skabe muligheder og rum for, at ansatte kan interagere på uformelle måder – snarere end at iværksætte organisatoriske kampagner eller opstille regler. Fokus er på sociale og fysiske tiltag, der gør det lettere at blive opmærksom på kollegaers behov, vise hensyn og både bede om og acceptere hjælp (Anderson and Brownlie 2019). Dette perspektiv overlapper med den praksisorienterede tilgang ved at understrege løsninger, som gør det nemmere og mindre omkostningsfyldt, at udføre bestemte handlinger – såsom inkluderende interaktionelle gestus.

Ændringer mod mere inkluderende interaktionelle infrastrukturer på arbejdspladsen vil på nogle områder sandsynligvis forbedre vilkårene for de fleste medarbejdere, mens det på andre områder kan betyde, at nogle af mekanismerne for rytmisk og emotionel *entrainment* vil hæmmes. Eksempelvis beskrev både medarbejdere med og uden høretab, hvordan store fælleskantiner med dårlig akustik og mange mennesker kunne være så drænende, at de fik hovedpine eller blev udmattede. Nogle valgte derfor at spise frokost et andet sted i virksomheden eller på atypiske tidspunkter. Ligeledes oplevede medarbejdere, både med og uden høretab, udfordringer med et højt lydniveau på arbejdspladsen. En kollega uden høretab fortalte, at han arbejdede med høretelefoner på for at undgå distraktion fra samtalerne på kontoret, mens en anden sommetider søgte ro i et enmandskontor på gangen. Infrastrukturer, der understøtter interaktioner i små grupper og giver mulighed for at arbejde i lydmæssigt rolige omgivelser, kan derfor muligvis bidrage til et bedre arbejdsmiljø for mange. Omvendt kan andre sociale infrastrukturer – eksempelvis en kultur, der anvender taleliste ved arbejds møder – muligvis for nogle begrænse muligheden for at opnå en type af interaktion, hvor fælles fokus og følelsesmæssigt stadie forstærker hinanden i et intenst interaktionsflow. Fie, en medarbejder uden høretab, beskrev i den tredje artikel, hvordan en striks turtagningsskulturs kunne medføre, at bidragene ”falde[r] lidt til jorden”, idet muligheden for spontant at besvare interaktioner reduceres.

Et fokus på strukturelle ændringer på arbejdspladsen kan dog potentielt flytte noget af ansvaret for interaktionel inklusion fra medarbejderniveau til virksomhedsniveau. Dette kan mindske presset på individuelle medarbejdere – både med og uden høretab – for i lige så høj grad at skulle kompensere for afbrudte interaktioner. Wendler og Halkier beskriver desuden, hvordan normaliseringen af bestemte praksisser kan bidrage til, at de bliver vanegjorte og dermed ikke i samme grad involverer samme omkostninger som førhen. I deres studie af praksisændringer henimod reduceret kødforbrug finder de, at mængden af arbejde, det kræver at ændre en praksis, afhænger af to faktorer: dels hvor mange nye kompetencer og rutiner individet skal tilegne sig, og dels hvor lettilgængelig og normaliseret den nye praksis er (Wendler and Halkier 2023:15).

Ved at normalisere og udbrede inkluderende interaktionelle praksisser i organisationer kan man dermed skabe en større kontakthflade med omgangsformer, der understøtter succesfulde interaktionsritualer på tværs af medarbejdere. Samtidig kan dette muligvis mindske de

omkostninger, som jeg i afhandlingen har vist kan være forbundet med at udføre disse praksisser.

Virksomheders forsøg på at fremme særlige følelseskulturer og kommunikationsformer er imidlertid blevet kritiseret for at være endnu en måde at instrumentalisere medarbejdere på. Arlie Hochschild beskriver i *Tidsfælden* (2001:43), hvordan Amerco, en stor international amerikansk virksomhed, styrker familiære bånd mellem kollegaer ved at arrangere ”anerkendelsesceremonier” og ”karriereudviklingsseminarer”. På denne måde skabes en følelseskultur på arbejdspladsen, der har til formål at fremme samarbejde, tillid og stærke personlige relationer. Arbejdspladsen bliver et sted, hvor ansatte kan føle sig værdsat, opnå anerkendelse og skabe sociale relationer, mens hjemmelivet får præg af samlebåndslogik med effektiv eksekvering af pligter og endeløse emotionelle konflikter. Hochschild kritiserer, hvordan virksomhedernes opdyrkning af sådanne emotionelle kulturer bliver endnu en måde for virksomheder at kapitalisere nye dele af ansattes liv på. Samtidig lider civilsamfundet og familielivet under den manglende tid og de ressourcer, som arbejdslivet i stigende grad kræver (Hochschild 2022).

Også Illouz (2007) analyserer kritisk, hvordan kapitalismens fremvækst har været tæt forbundet med udviklingen af en følelseskultur. Hun beskriver, hvordan det terapeutiske sprog – fra Freud og fremad – i stigende grad blev integreret i virksomheder, hvor det for ledere og virksomhedsejere fungerede som et ufarligt middel til at løse klassekonflikter og spændinger mellem ansatte og ledelse. Dette skete gennem et sprog, der vægtede følelser og personlighed. Samtidig blev denne emotionelle kultur budt velkommen af medarbejderne, fordi den syntes mere demokratisk og mindre autoritativ end tidligere ledelsesformer (Illouz 2007:17).

Illouz skildrer, hvordan ansatte i stigende grad bliver opfordret til at vise deres autentiske selv ved at give udtryk for deres følelser og behov, og dermed blottlægge selvet. Samtidig fordres medarbejdere, gennem ”det kommunikative imperativ”, til at være selvrefleksive og udvikle kompetencer til at anerkende og validere kollegaers følelser, være sympatiske og kunne sætte sig i den andens sted. Den sociale anerkendelse kollegaer imellem fungerer som en beskyttelse mod den blottæggelse af indre følelser og behov, som virksomhederne efterspørger (Illouz 2007:19–21). Kommunikationsmodellens krav om selvrefleksivitet, empati og anerkendelse af samtalepartneren kræver, ifølge Illouz, at den ansatte suspenderer sin emotionelle involvering i relationen (Illouz 2007:38–39). Ved at indoptage standardiserede måder at tale til og anerkende kollegaer, mistes kontakten til følelser som signal om, hvor selvet er positioneret i

en given situation. Håndteringen af følelser gennem teknikker for kommunikation resulterer, ifølge Illouz, således i en løsrivelse fra dem (Illouz 2007:38–39).

Hochschild og Illouz har begge en kritisk tilgang til, hvordan virksomheder instrumentaliserer følelseskulturer for at fremme økonomisk produktivitet, samt hvad der tabes i denne proces (Hochschild 2003, 2022; Illouz 2007). Opdyrkelsen af familiære relationer på arbejdspladsen og en anerkendende kommunikationskultur, kan umiddelbart fremstå som en (udelukkende) ønskværdig forbedring af arbejdsmæssige forhold. Imidlertid kan fremkomsten af disse interaktions- og følelseskulturer risikere at virke som en substitut for en mere grundlæggende diskussion om politiske og økonomiske problemstillinger i arbejdets organisering. De kritiske perspektiver på kultiveringen af bestemte følelseskulturer og kommunikationsformer i virksomheder bidrager med en refleksion om kapitalismens og virksomhedernes rolle. Er det at stille yderligere krav til ansattes kommunikation blot en del af dette kommunikative imperativ, som gennem teknikker om inklusiv interaktion og anerkendelse af kollegaers og behov afvikler mere grundlæggende sociale konflikter?

Hvis man anlægger Illouz' perspektiv, kan man argumentere for, at de følelser af vrede og irritation, som medarbejdere uden høretab oplever, fungerer som signalfølelser. De peger på, at medarbejderne er under et arbejdsmæssigt pres, der ikke er foreneligt med at udvise af tålmodighed, venlighed og tidskrævende interaktionelle gestus. Et studie af sammenhængen mellem social støtte blandt kollegaer og arbejdsmæssige stressfaktorer viser desuden, at graden af social støtte er negativt korreleret med arbejdsmæssige stressfaktorer (Jex et al. 2003). Ud fra dette perspektiv bør løsningen på manglende interaktionelle gestus ikke nødvendigvis findes i en ændring af virksomheders følelseskultur og interaktionsformer. Dette ville blot lægge et yderligere pres på den enkelte medarbejder, og muligvis skubbe større politiske og økonomiske problemstillinger, såsom arbejdspress og arbejdstid, i baggrunden.

Arbejdsmæssige stressfaktorer, som manglende tid og hænder, var også temaer, som spillede en rolle i de konflikter og følelsesmæssige belastninger, som medarbejdere uden høretab oplevede, når de forsøgte at inkludere kollegaer med høretab. På tegnestuen arbejdede de ansatte sideløbende på flere projekter i et arbejdsflow, der let kunne trues af uforudsete forsinkelser. Også i børnehaven var de ansatte under pres. Med smittefare fra syge børn og pressede normeringer var det ikke ualmindeligt, at der om morgenen var sygemeldte ansatte, og børnehaven manglede adskillige hænder til at fuldføre de nødvendige opgaver.

For kollegaer uden høretab blev den tid, det krævede at opsummere samtaler eller gentage beskeder, til en yderligere belastning, der gjorde det sværere at udføre deres forventede arbejdsopgaver. Dette kom til udtryk i interviewene, hvor medarbejdere sagde ting som: ” (...) *det er en ekstra tid, vi lægger i at forklare ting igen og igen*”, ”(...) *der har været en masse spørgsmål, og jeg er ikke rigtig kommet videre med mit eget*” og ”*Det er der, jeg synes, det kan være lidt udfordrende. (...) Hvor man ikke føler, at man har tid til at tænke det ud.*” Set i dette lys er arbejdet ikke organiseret på præmisser, der muliggør et inkluderende arbejdsmiljø. Andersen og Brownlie understreger netop vigtigheden af, at virksomheder skaber tid og rum til, at medarbejdere kan interagere på måder, hvor hjælp og støtte muliggøres (Anderson and Brownlie 2019).

På samme måde som følelser af vrede og irritation hos medarbejdere uden høretab kan være et signal om arbejdsmæssigt pres, kan følelser af afvisning og følelsesmæssig eksklusion hos medarbejdere med høretab være et signal om utilstrækkelig kompensation i form af støtteordninger og hjælpemidler, der sikrer lige adgang til arbejdsmarkedet. Ifølge FN's handicapkonvention har mennesker med handicap ret til at ”*arbejde på lige fod med andre, hvilket omfatter retten til at kunne tjene til livets ophold ved beskæftigelse, som de selv frit vælger eller påtager sig på et arbejdsmarked og i et arbejdsmiljø, der er åbent, inkluderende og tilgængeligt*” (UN 2006:19). Danmarks implementering af handicapkonventionen evalueres løbende, og i 2024 modtog Danmark kritik fra FN på en række områder, herunder beskæftigelsesområdet. I kritikken udtrykkes der bekymring over, at Danmark mangler langsigtede programmer, der sigter på 1. at øge arbejdsgiveres bevidsthed om inklusion af medarbejdere med handicap. 2. at uddanne socialrådgivere i handikapspecifik viden og 3. at lave tilgængelige beskæftigelsesprogrammer for mennesker med handicap (UN 2024:13).

Afhandlingens resultater understøtter kritikken fra FN og viser, at medarbejdere med høretab ikke indgår på arbejdspladsen på lige fod, men at ulighed i interaktioner skaber en række udfordringer og risiko for eksklusion. For de fleste medarbejdere med høretab var hjælpemidler en nødvendig del af hverdags- og arbejdslivet, samtidig med, at dialogen med arbejdspladsen om tilpasning af behov kunne være risikofyldt og ambivalent. Alle interviewede medarbejderne med høretab, på nær én, benyttede høreapparater eller Cochlear-implantater. Derudover havde flere mobile mikrofoner og andre teknologiske hjælpemidler, mens få havde ordninger som fleksjob eller personlig assistent.

For medarbejderne kunne det at udtrykke behov for yderligere kompensation sætte dem i en sårbar position på arbejdspladsen. Flere havde oplevelser af at blive fravalgt i rekrutteringsprocesser på grund af deres høretab, og andre beskrev, hvordan en åbenhed over for arbejdspladsens ledelse omkring deres behov og udfordringer kunne få negative konsekvenser, eksempelvis i forbindelse med fyringsrunder. Forskning i diskrimination af medarbejdere med handicap viser, at der eksisterer diskrimination i ansættelsesprocesser (Bjornshagen and Ugreninov 2021; L'Horty et al. 2022), lønmæssig diskrimination (Baldwin and Choe 2014) samt en øget risiko for ufrivilligt at miste sit job (Mitra and Kruse 2016). Tidligere studier identificerer desuden uopfyldte behov for kompensation hos medarbejdere med høretab (Haynes and Linden 2012) samt problemer med at opnå ønskede hjælpemidler (Clausen 2003; Rosenmeier and Hansen 2016). På den måde bliver muligheden for optimal kompensation ikke blot begrænset af manglende kompensationsmuligheder, men også af strukturel diskrimination fra arbejdspladserne samt frygten for at blive diskrimineret.

På den måde kan de interaktionelle kvaler og emotionelle omkostninger ved afbrudt interaktion, som jeg identificerer i afhandlingen, dels signalere et presset arbejdsmarked for alle medarbejdere, som ikke understøtter et inklusivt arbejdsmiljø, og dels signalere manglende kompensations- og støtteordninger, der vanskeliggøres af strukturel diskrimination, begrænsede muligheder for kompensation og frygten for diskrimination. De kritiske perspektiver bidrager med at tydeliggøre, hvordan skabelsen af bestemte følelseskulturer og interaktionsformer i virksomheder også tjener virksomheders interesse, samt hvordan et for snævert fokus på dette risikerer at individualisere politiske spørgsmål som arbejdstid og handicaprettigheder.

Selvom ansattes følelses- og interaktionsudvekslinger instrumentaliseres fra virksomheders side, er de samtidig fundamentale for det menneskelige behov for at blive inkluderet i fællesskabet og danne sociale bånd. Afhandlingens anden artikel fremhæver, hvordan udvekslinger af sympati er grundlæggende for opbygningen af relationer mellem kollegaer, og hvordan fraværet af sympati – i form af inkluderende interaktionelle gestus – kan igangsætte kæder af situationel eksklusion på arbejdspladsen. Illouz pointerer ligeledes, at det er umuligt at adskille den logik, der kommerialiserer kommunikationsformer fra kommunikationens evne til at forbedre visse forhold i virksomheder og samfundet som hele (Illouz 2007:109–10).

De tre perspektiver – det mikrosociologiske, det praksisorienterede og det kritiske emotionsperspektiv – bidrager med tre forskellige elementer i diskussionen om, hvordan den

interaktionelle og emotionelle kultur på arbejdspladser kan forandres hen imod et mere inkluderende miljø. Det mikrosociologiske perspektiv, som jeg anvender i afhandlingen, bidrager til en udfoldelse og forklaring af processerne i sociale situationer med afbrudt interaktion. Det praksisorienterede perspektiv bidrager med perspektiver på, hvordan ændring af sociale praksisser muliggøres, og de kritiske emotionsperspektiver bidrager med en bevidsthed om kapitalismens indflydelse på den måde ansatte kommunikerer og udveksler følelser på. Det er min overbevisning, at det er gavnligt at trække på alle tre perspektiver i bestræbelserne på at skabe et mere inklusivt interaktionelt miljø på arbejdspladser. På den måde skal ændring af sociale og fysiske infrastrukturer og normalisering af inklusive interaktionsformer aldrig træde i stedet for politiske og kollektive kampe om rettigheder.

Afhandlingens begrænsninger

I denne sektion vil jeg kort skitsere tre af afhandlingens overordnede begrænsninger. To af begrænsningerne relaterer sig til afhandlingens problemorientering, mens den sidste er en metodisk begrænsning ved afhandlingens design. En mere detaljeret gennemgang af de metodiske og teoretiske styrker og begrænsninger findes i de indledende afsnit om teori og metode.

Den første overordnede begrænsning i afhandlingen er, at dens problemorientering mod afbrudt interaktion i mindre grad åbner op for en undersøgelse af de processer, der muliggør succesfulde interaktionsritualer. I interviewene efterstræbte jeg imidlertid at generere beskrivelser af både succesfulde og mislykkede interaktionsritualer. Dette gjorde jeg blandt andet ved at spørge specifikt ind til situationer, hvor medarbejderne med høretab følte sig som en del af det sociale fællesskab. I afhandlingens anden artikel fortæller Tea eksempelvis, hvordan hun følte sig inkluderet på en firmatur, hvor hendes kollegaer spurgte hende, hvor hun helst ville sidde i bilen for bedst at kunne følge med i interaktionen, og efterfølgende aktivt inddrog hende i samtalen. Og i afhandlingens tredje artikel fortæller Cecilie om, hvordan hun føler sig inkluderet i et fagligt netværk med mennesker med forskellige funktionsvariationer, hvor hensynet mellem deltagerne i netværket fungerer som en succesfuld udveksling af følelsesgaver, der styrker de sociale bånd. Flere medarbejdere med høretab nævnte desuden, at de oplevede, at det er nemmere at indgå i gruppeinteraktioner med andre mennesker med høretab, fordi de er mere opmærksomme på inkluderende interaktionelle gestus. Jeg har således efterstræbt at genere empiri, som udfoldede en bred variation af interaktionsritualer, og søgt at implementere beskrivelser af dem i artiklerne for at give et nuanceret billede af, hvordan

interaktionel inklusion også kan lykkes. Yderligere forskning i de betingelser, som muliggør succesfulde interaktionsritualer på tværs af funktionsvariationer, ville imidlertid bidrage med en vigtig viden til feltet.

Den anden begrænsning i afhandlingen, som jeg ønsker at fremhæve, relaterer sig til problemorienteringen mod arbejdspladsen som undersøgelsesfelt. Afhandlingen undersøger primært, hvordan de emotionelle konsekvenser af afbrudt interaktion indvirker på individets forhold til fællesskabet og gruppen gennem processer af inklusion og eksklusion på arbejdspladsen. Mit empiriske materiale peger imidlertid på, at de følelsesmæssige konsekvenser ikke kun har betydning for medarbejdernes arbejdsliv, men også rækker ind i deres privat- og familieliv.

Jeg ville gerne i højere grad have udfoldet, hvordan det emotionelle efterslæb som følge af interaktionelle kvaler på arbejdspladsen også indvirker på den private sfære. På tværs af det empiriske materiale identificerede jeg fortællinger om medarbejdere med høretab, der brugte så mange ressourcer på at følge med i interaktioner på arbejdspladsen, at deres fritid måtte tilrettelægges derefter. Det betød eksempelvis, at nogle medarbejdere undgik sociale aftaler på hverdage, trak sig fra deres familie efter arbejde for at "lade op", takkede nej til krævende sociale arrangementer eller brugte weekenderne på at restituere efter en arbejdsuge med krævende interaktioner. På denne måde blev indordningen af privatlivet under arbejdslivets betingelser for nogle medarbejdere den nødvendige forudsætning for at kunne opretholde deres arbejdsliv. En undersøgelse af de omkostninger, som medarbejdere med høretab betaler på hjemmefronten for at leve op til arbejdsmæssige krav, kunne bidrage til en yderligere nuancering af de vilkår, som mennesker med kommunikationshandicap lever under.

Den tredje og sidste overordnede begrænsning i afhandlingen, som jeg vil fremhæve, relaterer sig til afhandlingens metodiske design. Afhandlingen belyser ikke, hvor udbredte de beskrevne processer af afbrudt interaktion er, og heller ikke frekvensen og fordelingen af deres konsekvenser. I afhandlingens første artikel afdækker jeg de interaktionelle kvaler, som er forbundet med afbrudt interaktion for medarbejdere med høretab. Mit kvalitative empiriske materiale peger på, at de kvaler, der relaterer sig til sociale sanktioner for overtrædelser af den normative sociale orden – dem jeg kalder de normative dimensioner – i højere grad rammer medarbejdere i lavstatuspositioner, mens de kvaler, der relaterer sig til at kunne følge med i samtaler og opbygge emotionel energi – dem, jeg kalder de mekaniske dimensioner – synes mere ligeligt fordelt på tværs af sociale hierarkier. Det kunne derfor være interessant at

undersøge kvantitativt, hvorvidt medarbejdere med høretab i højstatuspositioner beskyttes af et ”statusskjold” (Hochschild 2003:174), der skærmer dem mod sociale sanktioner for brud på den normative sociale orden. En sådan undersøgelse kunne nuancere den interaktionelle stratifikation, som afhandlingen belyser.

Samlet set peger afhandlingens begrænsninger på behovet for yderligere forskning i de betingelser, der muliggør succesfulde interaktionsritualer, samt de bredere konsekvenser af et arbejdsliv præget af afbrudt interaktion for medarbejdere med høretabs privatliv. Derudover kunne en kvantitativ undersøgelse af interaktionelle kvaler blandt medarbejdere med høretab bidrage med en større forståelse af, hvordan sociale hierarkier har betydning for interaktionelle og emotionelle kvaler forbundet med afbrudt interaktion på arbejdspladsen. I de følgende sektioner præsenteres afhandlingens tre forskningsartikler.

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Types of struggles in Disrupted Interaction: A case of hard-of-hearing employees

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In review in *Symbolic Interaction*

Abstract

Everyone experiences disrupted interactions in their everyday life. However, research indicates that people with functional impairments are particularly exposed to patterns of interactional inequality at work. Despite this, little is known about the specific disrupted interactions in everyday life and the various types of interactional struggles this group encounters. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in two Danish workplaces and 29 interviews with Danish hard-of-hearing employees, colleagues, and managers, I identified four types of struggles in disrupted interactions: 1) Concealing interactional disruptions 2) Managing conflicts 3) Keeping track of the conversation 4) Reintegrating into interactions. This article highlights how some hard-of-hearing employees are at constant risk of defacement, micro-conflicts, and failed interaction rituals, constituting a form of social stratification. The article contributes to existing micro-sociological literature on interaction by conceptualizing different types of struggles in disrupted interaction.

Keywords: Disrupted Interaction, Interaction Rituals, Hearing Loss, Emotional Energy, Symbolic Interactionism

Introduction

Everyone experiences disrupted interactions in everyday life, but some encounter these interactions more frequently than others. These groups include people with various speech, sensory, or cognitive disabilities, individuals engaged in mediated interactions, and those interacting in contexts with language barriers. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that over 1.5 billion people have some degree of hearing loss, and this number is expected to rise (WHO 2021). Furthermore, hearing loss is associated with unemployment (Christensen and Amilon 2023; Shan et al. 2020), early retirement (Helvik, Krokstad, and Tambs 2013), and difficulties in communication at work (Granberg and Gustafsson 2021a). This article addresses the types of interactional troubles that disrupted interactions cause, focusing on a case study of Danish hard-of-hearing employees.

Micro-sociology has shown that human interaction can be conceptualized as rituals governed by their own rules (Goffman 1976; Collins 2014). Goffman's work has shed light on how interactants in social encounters conform to the normative social order of the conversation while saving face for themselves and others (Goffman 1967, 1990). Collins has argued how individuals are attracted to rituals that provide them with feelings of confidence, enthusiasm, and group membership, while they are repelled by rituals that drain them (Collins 2014:118–

19). However, less attention has been paid to the phenomenon of disrupted interaction and its consequences (Schegloff 1992; Tavory and Fine 2020). Utilizing Collin's theory on interaction rituals and Goffman's theory on social norm breaches, this article poses the question: What types of interactional struggles must employees with hearing loss face in their effort to participate in social situations at the workplace?

The article is based on qualitative interviews with hard-of-hearing employees from 19 different workplaces, as well as interviews with non-hard-of-hearing colleagues and managers. Additionally, the article draws on four months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted at two workplaces. I find that employees with hearing loss face four distinct types of interactional struggles during disrupted interactions: 1) Concealing interactional disruptions 2) Managing conflicts 3) Keeping track of the conversation, and 4) Reintegrating into interactions. These findings contribute to existing micro-sociological literature on interaction by offering a conceptualization of different types of struggles in disrupted interaction. Furthermore, it contributes by demonstrating how concrete patterns of interactional stratification unfold as well as how certain groups of employees are subjected to significant interactional and emotional work.

Background

Research in the field of disability has shown that people with functional impairments are exposed to patterns of interactional inequality at work (Lindsay et al. 2023; Mik-Meyer 2016). Such inequality encompasses being discursively constructed as 'others' (Mik-Meyer 2016), having difficulties interpreting subtle verbal and non-verbal gestures (Dammeyer et al. 2019; Granberg and Gustafsson 2021b; Naraine and Lindsay 2011), and encountering the risk of social exclusion (Hansen 2008; Jepsen and Liebst 2021; Naraine and Lindsay 2011; Olsson, Dag, and Kullberg 2021).

Only a few studies, consistent with this article's investigation, have employed a micro-sociological framework to explore the interactional challenges of people with functional impairments. Hansen (2008) examines the circumstances of young people with hearing loss and the strategies they employ to cope with the repercussions of their impairment. He identifies three strategies used by young people in situations of communicative breakdown: 1) *Requesting repetition*, 2) *Pretending to have heard what was said*, and 3,) *Continuing as if nothing had happened* (Hansen 2008:332). In another qualitative study exploring the communicative challenges faced by individuals with hearing loss using cochlear implants,

Jepsen and Liebst outline a micro-sociological model of impaired interactions as a source of emotional energy drain and subsequent disintegration (Jepsen 2021; Jepsen and Liebst 2021). Based on qualitative interviews, Jepsen and Liebst suggest that impaired rhythmic entrainment in face-to-face interaction may hinder social integration processes for cochlear implant users, resulting in auditory engulfment and the risk of social isolation. They describe “auditory engulfment”, a notion inspired by Thomas Scheff, as a sensory overload of sounds, noises, and multiple voices in group interaction. According to the authors, this state will likely lead to withdrawal and eventually, social isolation characterized by low emotional energy (Jepsen and Liebst 2021).

In summary, existing studies shed light on patterned interactional inequality among people with functional impairments, as well as individual strategies for handling disrupted interactions. However, little is known about the concrete disrupted interactions that unfold in everyday life and the diverse interactional struggles faced by this group.

One notable exception is Davis’s (1961) study, which, through interviews with 16 visibly disabled individuals, investigated how the categorization of disabled persons as “different” and “odd” poses a threat to interactions with non-disabled. Davis explains how the stigma attached to disability causes the non-disabled to fixate on the perceived deviant attributes of disabled individuals. In an effort to conceal this fixation, non-disabled people exhibit signs of discomfort, such as making certain everyday words taboo, directing their gaze elsewhere, or displaying artificial levity (Davis 1961:123). Davis further outlines three stages through which a social relationship typically progresses, allowing the visibly disabled person to “break through” the categorization as stigmatized: 1) fictional acceptance, 2) the facilitation of reciprocal role-taking around a normalized projection of self, and 3) the institutionalization in the relationship of a definition of self that is normal in its moral dimension. Davis refers to this process as either normalization or deviance disavowal, depending on whether it is viewed from the perspective of the visibly disabled person or the non-disabled person (Davis 1961:26–27). Davis’s study provides valuable insights into the dynamics of strained interactions, disability, and social encounters. However, while Davis focuses on the interactional consequences of visible disabilities and their associated stigmatization, this analysis examines the mechanical disruptions caused by invisible disabilities and the breaches of social norms that arise.

Situating this article within existing research, it is useful to reference Anderson and Snow’s framework on how interactionist studies of social inequality address three key sets of questions.

The first examines how systems of inequality unfold in everyday life, both materially and symbolically, and how these systems manifest in patterned ways. The second investigates the consequences of being subjected to patterned interactional affronts or deference. Finally, the third set examines how individuals manage these interactional inequalities in their everyday life (Anderson and Snow 2001:396).

This article focuses on the interactional struggles in workplace interactions experienced by employees with hearing loss, addressing the first set of questions by analyzing how disrupted interactions unfold in the work environment. It also engages with the second set by exploring the consequences of frequent disrupted interactions for hard-of-hearing employees. While the third set of questions – regarding individual coping strategies – has been extensively examined elsewhere (Barker, Leighton, and Ferguson 2017; Hansen 2008; Most 2002), this article contributes to understanding the concrete patterns of interactional stratification in everyday work life and the social consequences of ongoing disrupted interactions.

Theoretical framework: Interaction rituals, rules of talk, and face-work

Following the tradition of micro-sociology from Goffman (Goffman 1971, 1990, 2020) and Collins (Collins 2014, 2020), this article investigates interaction situations as the starting point, and hence as the foundation for, the exploration of workplace inclusion and solidarity (Collins 2014:3–4). According to Collins, *interaction rituals* are a process, wherein individuals, to a varying extent, become submerged in shared emotions and caught up in a state of intersubjective focus between interaction partners (Collins 2014:32). This process is predominantly a bodily one, as individuals unconsciously synchronize their movements, tone of voice, and speech pace with others in a fine process of micro adjustments termed rhythmic entrainment (Collins 2014:47;67). Interaction partners need, according to Collins, to be physically assembled to affect each other's bodies, focusing their attention on the same object or activity and sharing an emotional state. Moreover, delineating who constitute insiders and outsiders within the group is necessary, he argues (Collins 2014:48).

When individuals get caught up in a strong interaction ritual, the shared focus and emotional state within the group mutually reinforce each other, intensifying the loop of bodily attunement and rhythm (Collins 2014:48). This process creates an intense emotional state, termed *emotional energy*, wherein participants are infused with feelings of confidence, elation,

enthusiasm, and the initiative to take action. This feeling also manifests at the group level as solidarity, which knits groups and communities closer together (Collins 2014:49). Collins explains how some social encounters elevate us, leaving us excited, while others leave us emotionally drained and disengaged. The theory is particularly well suited to unfolding the dynamics at play in workplace interactions, where barriers such as poor acoustics, language differences, or functional impairments may impede communication. Living with a hearing loss or another functional impairment influencing communication can make the social coordination in interaction rituals difficult and troublesome, impacting the hard-of-hearing employee and everyone else involved in the conversation.

While Collins's theory of interaction rituals is well suited to exploring mechanical aspects of synchronicity and rhythmic entrainment or their absence, it pays less attention to the social norms and cultural context surrounding these rituals. For this purpose, I employ Goffman's theory (Goffman 1967) of face-work and embarrassment. Goffman describes how people in social encounters, whether they intend it or not, take up a *line*, which is a pattern of gestures and interactions through which they voice their views on others in the conversation, themselves, and the situation as a whole (Goffman 1967:5). The positive social value that persons call for, by presenting the line they do, is their *face*. If conversation partners accept the presented line, and the line is internally consistent and not challenged by other people in the encounter, the person *maintains face* or is considered *in face* (Goffman 1967:5). *Face-work* encompasses all efforts individuals undertake to preserve face, involving tailoring verbal and nonverbal expressions to align with the desired presentation of self. Through such efforts, individuals aim to avoid *incidents*, where their face is threatened or challenged in any manner (Goffman 1967:12).

In an encounter, a collaborative effort is needed to maintain not only one's own face, but also the faces of others, and thereby temporarily to make allowances for the line and self-presentation put forward by conversation partners. These rules of interaction work to avoid situations where participants experience deprivation of face, a so-called *defacement* (Goffman 1967:10–12). To be defaced entails feelings of shame and embarrassment, not only for the individual involved but also for those witnessing the situation (Goffman 1967:8–9). Even acknowledging the feelings of shame is in itself shameful, and therefore individuals in these circumstances practice a special kind of face-work, termed *poise*, where they manage the shame by suppressing it and concealing it from others (Goffman 1967:9,13).

According to Goffman there are several ways to be defaced; if, for any reason, a person fails to maintain the presented line due to conflicting information, that person becomes in *wrong face*. Alternatively, defacement may occur when a person lacks a suitable line for the ongoing social encounter, rendering that person *out of face* (Goffman 1967:8). To avoid defacement and other incidents, people often avoid altogether placing themselves in situations where the risk of shameful incidents is high (Goffman 1967:15). Nonetheless, such incidents frequently take place in everyday interactions. When they do, individuals typically feel inclined to address the threat posed to their own or others' faces to correct the incident and restore ritual equilibrium (Goffman 1967:19).

Threats in social encounters can also arise from various forms of alienation within the interaction. Goffman identifies four types of alienation – preoccupation, self-consciousness, other-consciousness, and interaction consciousness – three of which are particularly relevant to this article. Self-consciousness refers to when individuals become overly aware of their own performance in the interaction, rather than being fully engaged. This shift in attention often occurs when individuals experience a threat to their face, and, by extension, their social status (Goffman 1967:118–19). Other-consciousness, on the other hand, arises when the conversation partner – or one of their attributes – becomes the center of attention, which diverts focus from the interaction itself (Goffman 1967:120–24). In contrast, alienation by interaction-consciousness describes a situation where one becomes overly concerned with how the interaction is unfolding, such as fixating on finding the next topic of conversation, rather than engaging spontaneously (Goffman 1967:119–20). Goffman's framework is fruitful in illuminating the consequences of breaching social norms in social encounters at the workplace, together with employees' efforts to conform to societal expectations and avoid embarrassment and social sanctions.

Building on Goffman's framework, Davis explores how the categorization of visibly disabled individuals as deviant poses a threat to social interactions with non-disabled people (Davis 1961:122). He describes how non-disabled individuals often become overly focused on the visible disability, which can strain the interaction and make it more rigid. Simultaneously, the non-disabled individuals attempt to appear oriented to the visibly disabled person as a whole, rather than fixating on the disability. This effort, aimed at saving face for both parties, can inadvertently transgress social boundaries and lead to incidents (Davis 1961:123–24).

Davis thus demonstrates how the stigmatization and denial of the status of social normalcy for people with disabilities threaten social encounters and exert a form of alienation by other-consciousness.

In sum, I combine Collins's concepts of interaction rituals and emotional energy, including their focus on bodily social coordination and rhythmic entrainment, with Goffman's and Davis's concepts of face-work, embarrassment, and alienation, as well as their focus on social norms and culture. In this way, I am thus able to explore the different struggles of disrupted interaction utilizing Collins's focus on the mechanics of interaction combined with Goffman's and Davis's focus on norms and culture (King 2019).

Methods

Interviews and fieldwork sites

I conducted interactionist semi-structured interviews (Holstein and Gubrium 1995) with hard-of-hearing employees across a range of Danish workplaces and, additionally, interviews with non-hard-of-hearing colleagues and managers from the selected field sites. Utilizing a strategic sampling method (Staunæs and Søndergaard 2005), I selected participants with varying job roles, genders, educational levels, and workplace sizes to include a variety of different workplace interactions.

I recruited the hard-of-hearing participants through three channels: 1) A post on a Facebook group administered by "The Danish Association of the Hard of Hearing"; 2) Referrals from a consultant at Castberggård, a private service for working-age individuals with hearing loss; and 3) Snowball sampling through existing interviewees. A few days before the interviews, I asked participants to identify and reflect on three work-related situations where their hearing loss had either positively or negatively influenced situations at work. I requested them to recall and provide detailed accounts of these situations. This preliminary exercise aimed to encourage participants to think about specific situations and ensure the production of palpable data (Small and Calarco 2022:80–98) regarding situations and interactions, consistent with the micro-sociological approach of the study. Before conducting the interviews, I obtained oral consent from all participants, providing them with information about the research project, data storage protocols, procedures for modifying identifiable information, and their right to withdraw from the study at any point.

I regard the interview data and my field notes as different kinds of narrated produced material (Atkinson and Coffey 2003:424–25). While the interview data provides culturally produced accounts of interaction situations and the meaning they hold for employees, the field notes reflect my own narrated enactments of social situations at the two workplaces. The meaning ascribed to these interactions is itself produced through social interaction and informs how employees navigate future encounters (Blumer 1969:2–5). Through interviews, I generated more data on the interviewees' felt emotions connected to successful and unsuccessful interactions – insights that were not always accessible during fieldwork. Moreover, the interviews enabled me to identify patterns across individual characteristics and work contexts, facilitating the categorization of similar and dissimilar elements of interaction and emotion across the field (Maxwell and Miller 2008).

In addition to the interviews, I conducted fieldwork at two Danish workplaces (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). This allowed me to study sequences of events and their interrelation, such as the sequences involved in micro-conflicts caused by disrupted interaction (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). I selected an architectural office and a daycare centre⁶ as the two field sites. These workplaces differed in both the auditory environment and the educational backgrounds of employees, which provided me with knowledge of a variety of interaction situations. I prioritized hours of exposure in the field (Small and Calarco 2022:18–20) over the number of sites, spending a combined total of 150-175 hours at the two locations. Access to these sites was facilitated by participants who had previously been interviewed for the study.

As a non-hard-of-hearing person, I entered the field with a limited understanding of the experiences associated with hearing loss. This outsider status required me to spend additional time understanding the daily lives of my interviewees and the language tied to hearing loss. Overall, I believe my presence likely led colleagues at both field sites to be more attentive to accommodating the needs of their hard-of-hearing colleagues. At one site, the hard-of-hearing employee felt that, especially at the outset, my presence made her colleagues more patient and understanding. I assume employees strived to present their preferred selves during my observations, leading me to believe that the processes of conflict and aggression I observed may have been more pronounced in my absence.

⁶ Childcare services for children aged 2 years and 10 months to 5 years.

Thus, both the fieldwork and the interviews were co-produced and influenced by me as a researcher. However, I do not view this co-production as a source of bias but rather as a necessary condition for the generation of knowledge (Holstein 1995:4). Fieldwork and interview data are treated equally in terms of their capacity to provide information about social situations (Atkinson and Coffey 2003:425).

At the architectural office, employees work in an open-plan setting with 12 unassigned workstations. Typically, employees dine in the building's shared canteen. The office atmosphere is characterized by a continuous buzz of activity, with some employees on the phone, others discussing work projects, and some engaging in informal collegial conversations.

At the daycare center, employees are organized into smaller teams, each assigned to a specific room. They typically have lunch with the children and take breaks in rotation in a small staff room with two sofas and a table in between. The auditory environment is characterized by the lively sounds of children playing, which can often reach high volumes. Interactions among educators focus primarily on coordinating daily activities, meetings, and breaks.

I have changed identifiable characteristics about informants' places of work, ages, names, ethnicities, and geographical areas. Knowing that hearing loss can be a stigmatized functional impairment, I appreciated it was crucial to be attentive to issues of stigma during fieldwork. I approached the process by adopting a contextual and situational approach to ethics, where ethical issues like consent and repercussions of involvement in the everyday life of the participants were dealt with continuously (Kvale and Brinkmann 2015:112–15).

Empirical material

The interview sample comprises 19 hard-of-hearing employees from 19 different workplaces, 5 non-hard-of-hearing colleagues, 2 non-hard-of-hearing managers, and 1 hearing consultant. The colleagues and managers without hearing loss were selected from the two fieldwork sites. Additionally, I re-interviewed the two hard-of-hearing employees I followed during fieldwork, bringing the total to 29 interviews. The interviewees represented diverse educational backgrounds: 1 was unskilled, 2 were skilled, 12 had medium higher education, and 12 had extensive higher education. Of the interviewees, 20 were women and 7 were men. All hard-of-hearing employees had varying degrees of diagnosed hearing loss, and all but one used different assistive technologies at work. Generally, the assistive technology did not fully compensate for

the interviewee's hearing loss, causing challenges in situations with background noise or group interactions.

First, I interviewed the hard-of-hearing employees in autumn/winter 2022. Subsequently, I conducted interviews with non-hard-of-hearing colleagues, managers, and the hearing consultant during the fieldwork phase from January 2023 to April 2023. On average, interviews with hard-of-hearing employees lasted 80 minutes, slightly longer than those with colleagues, managers, and the hearing consultant. All interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed. Quotations from interviews used in this paper have been translated from Danish to English by the author. I visited the fieldwork sites 1-2 times a week for about 6-7 hours per visit during the fieldwork phase. I spent approximately 90-105 hours at the daycare center and subsequently around 60-70 hours at the architectural office.

Analytical strategy

The research was informed by a theoretical perspective on interaction rituals and social cohesion (Collins 2014), which guided the decision to examine the verbal and non-verbal interactions constituting workplace interaction rituals. After thoroughly reviewing the empirical material, I created a first round of coding across interviews and field notes using the Nvivo software. The first round of coding included codes such as “communicative disconnections” and “inclusion/exclusion”. Through an abductive process (Timmermans and Tavory 2012) of being attentive to the empirical material and the addition of supplementary theoretical perspectives on face loss from Goffman (Goffman 1967), a second round of coding was conducted (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). This round included codes such as “hiding interactional disruptions” and “managing conflicts”. Using these codes, I investigated the types of interactional struggles faced by employees with hearing loss in their efforts to participate in social communities.

The four types of struggles identified serve as analytical categories, condensed forms of disrupted interaction derived from numerous empirical situations (Halkier 2011). All four types are identifiable across differences in job positions, gender, and age. In reality, various types of struggles can overlap, and often, multiple types are at play during a failed interaction ritual. However, these types of struggles may not encompass all facets of disrupted interaction, as the construction of the types of struggles of disrupted interaction inevitably involves a reduction of empirical complexity (Halkier 2011). Through the typology, I wish to contribute with

analytical generalizations that can unfold complex processes of disrupted interaction in contexts other than the one studied.

Four types of struggles in disrupted interaction

This analysis presents four types of struggles in disrupted interaction among hard-of-hearing employees: 1) Concealing interactional disruptions, 2) Managing conflicts, 3) Keeping track of the conversation, and 4) Reintegrating into interactions.

Concealing interactional disruptions

The first struggle involves efforts to conceal interactional disruptions. This concealment can be achieved through various means, each requiring different forms of facework by the participants. Some hard-of-hearing employees consistently bear the burden of maintaining the flow of interaction without frequently requesting repetition, while others experience this struggle only in specific situations. Length of disruptions plays a crucial role in this type of struggle, as hard-of-hearing employees may conceal minor disruptions during interactions in which they largely comprehend the content or conceal fundamental disruptions during more extended interactions.

One aspect of this type of struggle is the threat of failing in the delicate process of mutual adaptation entailed by a successful interactional ritual, thereby containing an inherent risk of offending interaction partners or threatening their faces. The following excerpt featuring Peter illustrates this pattern and shows how extended concealment of disconnection from the interaction involves the risk of inadvertently offending colleagues in a professional context. Peter is a hard-of-hearing employee and holds a managerial position in a medium-sized company. He does not use hearing aids or any other assistive technology. In the following passage, Peter recounts a business trip to London:

Peter: (...) We were sitting in a London restaurant with really poor acoustics; I was quite unfortunate. We, the management team, arrived first and took our seats, allowing the board members to join us. Then, the chairman of the board ended up sitting on the side where my hearing is bad. The acoustics were horrible. (...) and then he sits with [puts his hand in front of his mouth] -in front of his mouth, and doesn't articulate at all. In essence, I could hardly hear what he was saying. At no point did I mention to him, "You know what?"-, I could have told him I was deaf; it would have been almost true in this situation. It was, of course, a bad experience because he expected thoughtful responses to his remarks, and I couldn't provide them. So of course, it was a bad experience. One ends up giving the impression to others of being strange.

This form of interaction, in which the hard-of-hearing employee does not make the conversation partner aware of the ongoing interactional disruptions, demands a continuous interpretation of the other party's cues and a corresponding adjustment in expressions. In this context, the hard-of-hearing employee is required to adapt the presentation partly to non-verbal cues and partly to fragments of the conversation. In contrast to interactions without interactional disconnections or those where disruptions are explicitly addressed, the hard-of-hearing person has limited opportunities to adjust responses in a way, that is meaningful and contributes to the conversation. Inappropriate responses, untimely smiles, or failure to follow up on the conversation partner's remarks can be interpreted as lack of interest or disrespect, unintentionally causing offense and damaging the social relationship. As Peter states "*One ends up giving the impression to others of being strange*". The hard-of-hearing interviewees handle the struggle of concealment in various ways; some of them only conceal minor interactional disruptions, while others, like Peter, engage in long-lasting performances through nods, smiles, and vague responses to mask the disconnections. Yet another strategy is to assume control of the conversation by taking the floor, thereby concealing any difficulties one may face in understanding the conversational partner.

In this way, the struggle of concealing interactional disconnections involves the risk of inadvertently straining professional relations. At times, these offenses escalated into conflicts or micro-aggressions among hard-of-hearing employees and their colleagues, a type of struggle that I will elaborate on in the subsection "Managing conflicts".

A second aspect of this type of struggle is the pervading threat of exposing the concealment and, consequently, experiencing a deprivation of face. The following excerpt with Charlotte, a hard-of-hearing woman working as a manager in human relations, exemplifies this pattern. She has an everyday work life heavily dominated by meetings, which may involve internal management but also lawyers, collaborators, or board members. She says:

Charlotte: (...) another thing that happens is that people often get the impression that I'm a bit stupid. Because when I hear a sentence, there's maybe 20% of it that I can't hear because either I don't catch it or because the word being said is unfamiliar. And then I miss the context a bit. So, you know, sometimes you can ask a question, and people just sit there looking at you as if to say: "Well, that was fairly clear, and I just said (...)" And then when you're also blonde and a woman, there can quickly be a perception of, 'Didn't you understand that?' You know, a bit like "Are you stupid?". And that [feeling] is also within me; I mean, it's also the feeling I have, that: "Oh, I didn't comprehend that". "Well, I didn't catch that statement either".

In this situation Charlotte becomes in wrong face; information about her lack of understanding of the topic of conversation is brought forth, and her line as a competent and professional manager is challenged. For Charlotte, being a woman in a management environment primarily dominated by men adds to the repercussions of the situation, tapping into gendered stereotypes. Even though her colleagues know about her hearing loss, Charlotte does not think they ascribe the breaches in the interaction to that fact. Instead, she worries about the threat of being perceived as unintelligent. When internalizing the valuation of herself as one who is failing to comprehend what is said, she places the responsibility for the status loss on herself, which cues feelings of shame and embarrassment (Kemper and Collins 1990:57). Freja, a hard-of-hearing employee, describes another example of the risk of defacement when concealing interactional disruptions:

Freja: (...) I had a team meeting, an evening meeting. Well, my ability to discriminate words with one of my ears isn't so good. (...) When I get tired, it's really hard to hear. The others were having some conversation. Generally, I don't participate in a conversation unless I'm 100% sure what it's about. At that moment, I was 100% sure they were talking about Indian food. I don't know why. So, I just blurted out: "Oh, I love Indian food too". All my colleagues looked at me in a way like "good for you". Then I could just sense that it wasn't at all what we were talking about. So, because they knew I didn't hear well, we could laugh about it a bit. But it was just one of those situations where I thought "fuck" I thought I had it, and then it was just completely off.

Freja's colleagues attributed her hearing impairment to her being in wrong face, which prevented her from being perceived as unintelligent or strange, as in Charlotte's case. Instead, she became the subject of laughter among her colleagues. By framing the incident as a humorous situation, Freja attempted to preserve her face, minimize shame, and restore ritual equilibrium. Freja's statement about not participating in conversations unless she is "*100 % sure*" about the topic points to the significance of the threat of defacement in these situations and is an example of how far some hard-of-hearing employees are willing to go in terms of avoiding risky interactions.

In general, the repercussions of the risk of defacement increase in proportion to the significance of the unheard content and the duration of the ongoing performance. Thus, the struggle of concealing interactional disconnections involves the risk of defacement in professional settings.

The third aspect in the struggle to conceal interactional disruptions is the emotional costs for hard-of-hearing employees. Helle, a hard-of-hearing employee, frequently finds herself compelled to nod politely at her conversation partner while struggling to lip-read and maintain

an appropriate facial expression during lunch breaks. Particularly when her colleagues are seated on her “*bad side*”, she finds interpreting interactions “*almost impossible*”. Helle explains that she discloses her disconnection from the interaction only when she perceives from the other person’s facial expression that her response is “*completely off track*”. Otherwise, she continues to conceal the disrupted interaction. She reflects that, in the past, she felt frustrated and foolish in such situations, but over time, she has grown accustomed to missing out on interactions. Although her emotions have changed over time, concealing interactional disruptions continues to carry emotional costs for Helle:

Helle: It’s tedious. But it’s also exhausting. I mean, besides the fact that I know I’m missing out on something, it is what it is. But I get so tired. So, I don’t really get a break.

Helle exemplifies a pattern in which the struggle of concealment hinders hard-of-hearing employees from participating fully in the rhythmic entrainment and shared emotional mood of social interactions, thereby increasing the risk of emotional exclusion from the group. Helle’s expressions of feeling “*tedious*”, “*exhaust[ed]*” and “*tired*” during these lunch breaks indicate the failure of the interaction ritual on her part, resulting in low emotional energy. In dyadic interactions, concealing interactional disruptions inhibits the establishment of successful interaction rituals, potentially leading to superficial or unbalanced exchanges dominated by one party. This type of struggle also increases the risk of the creation of two parallel tracks of emotions: the outward display sought to mirror the group/conversation partner’s emotions, contrasted with the inner sentiments of frustration or sadness experienced by the hard-of-hearing employee. The following excerpt, in which Charlotte, a hard-of-hearing employee, recounts her experience of eating lunch in the large workplace canteen, illustrates this process:

Charlotte: Over there [sighs], some days I choose not to go. There are times when I skip lunch altogether because, well, I just can’t handle it on those days. It’s not that I’m completely drained after being there for half an hour. But, you see, when you join a group of people, you often find yourself on the sidelines, hearing them laugh and chat, while you’re not a part of it. It doesn’t feel good, you know? It’s not something I cultivate, because I don’t want to. It doesn’t do me any good. But it doesn’t feel good, right? Constantly being reminded of what you’re missing. You’re missing out on something now. And now, and now, and now, and now, and now.

Charlotte often finds herself disconnected from lunchtime conversations, relegated to observing her colleagues’ interactions from the periphery. This situation exemplifies a recurring pattern where concealing interactional disruptions results in emotional dissonance between emotional display and inner sentiment. Charlotte feels disheartened and laments her inability to participate in group discussions on equal terms with her colleagues. The statement “*It’s not*

something I cultivate, because I don't want to" suggests that she attempts to work down these feelings of sadness while observing colleagues laughing and chatting. For some employees, the experience of emotional dissonance is too painful and thus is actively avoided if possible. One example is Pia, a hard-of-hearing employee, who recalls how many years ago, she chose not to participate in work-related events featuring music, alcohol, and large crowds due to her difficulty in following conversations in such settings. She explains:

Pia: Christmas parties, drinking, and all those things – lots of people, lots of music, all that – it's probably fine, it's perfectly okay, but I can't keep up. I'm completely out of it, I just sit there. And I don't want to. I mean [sighs], I don't want to pretend, you know. I don't want to sit there with some plastered-on smile, pretending I understand what's going on, you know. That's how it's been for many years. I made the choice to opt out of it a long time ago.

In this way, the emotional strain stemming from emotive dissonance at such work-related events prompted Pia to withdraw. Hence, the emotional costs of the struggle to conceal interactional disruptions entail the risk of emotional exclusion from the group, diminished emotional energy, and at times emotional dissonance.

For most interviewees, some degree of concealing disrupted interaction was unavoidable. Drawing attention to every unheard word or minor misunderstanding would disrupt the flow of the interaction. Symbolic interactionist theories similarly view a certain level of deception in everyday encounters as necessary. Through "polite fictions", adherence to interactional rules, and well-mannered avoidance, individuals facilitate the interaction ritual and sustain a shared definition of reality (Scott 2012:252). This perspective brackets out the moral aspects of deception, focusing instead on the interactional consequences –such as whether employees successfully managed to maintain their preferred face or whether the concealment was too risky, leading to exposure and defacement (Scott 2012:253;266).

Susie Scott, however, argues that the risks and consequences of deception vary depending on the closeness of the relationship (Scott 2012:256). While deception between fleeting acquaintances or among strangers can serve as a pro-social strategy to gloss over inconsistencies and foster consensus (Scott 2012:257), deception poses greater risks and becomes more emotionally charged in closer relations (Scott 2012:275). Similarly, the struggle to conceal interactional disruptions may function pragmatically and can be necessary for smoothing conversations, particularly in brief encounters. However, in building strong relationships with colleagues, pronounced concealment may hinder the formation of deeper bonds.

Moreover, the struggle for concealment can lead to alienation by other-consciousness as the concealment requires the interactant to appear to be spontaneously involved in the conversation. To avoid exposing the deception, hard-of-hearing employees focus on their interaction partner in attempting to project a suitable face for the situation. This effort not only involves the risk of emotional dissonance, as previously shown, but also may further alienate the employee from the interaction itself, given the cognitive effort required to interpret the interaction partner's cues. This dynamic resembles Davis's description of threats posed to interactions between visibly disabled and non-disabled individuals (Davis 1961:123), but from the perspective of employees with an invisible disability. In this way, the invisibility of the disability alters the interaction dynamics, with breaches of interactional rules potentially being misattributed to impoliteness or a lack of cognitive abilities, as in Charlotte's case. Furthermore, the exposure of concealment, followed by defacement, may lead to alienation by self-consciousness. Such moments of shame may cause the employee to shift their attention from the ongoing interaction to being internally preoccupied with what just occurred.

In sum, the struggle to conceal interactional disruptions carries the risk of offending interaction partners, deprivation of face, and incurring emotional costs. Additionally, it poses the threat of various forms of alienation from the interaction.

Managing conflicts

The second struggle involves efforts to manage conflicts arising from disrupted interactions. By *conflicts*, I refer to both overt conflicts and minor misunderstandings that lead to seemingly insignificant feelings of frustration and annoyance. In this subsection, I explore how emotions such as anger, frustration, and annoyance can emerge for both hard-of-hearing employees and their colleagues during these conflicts.

The struggle to manage conflicts sometimes arises when disrupted interaction leads to different realities for hard-of-hearing employees and their colleagues. Such disparities in realities may occur, for instance, when an interaction is not heard and the hard-of-hearing individual does not respond as anticipated. For instance, Ole, a hard-of-hearing employee, was perceived as grumpy by his colleagues because he did not respond to their "*Good morning*" at the start of the workday. Another example is Martin, a hard-of-hearing teacher, whose student thought he was ignoring and disregarding her, because of his lack of responses to her utterings. In these cases, it is not always obvious to any of the individuals in the encounter that it is the disrupted interaction causing the conflict. Sometimes, this conflict isn't openly expressed and may

remain concealed from the hard-of-hearing employee. The lack of response can evoke feelings of rejection and neglect in the non-hard-of-hearing colleague, while the hard-of-hearing colleague may be ascribed unappealing character traits, as demonstrated in the examples with Ole and Martin. If the conflict remains undisclosed, the hard-of-hearing colleague misses the opportunity to restore ritual equilibrium. However, the colleague's feelings can affect the relationship, causing the hard-of-hearing employee to sense rejection and irritation, which may lead to feelings of hurt or reciprocal rejection. In this way, hidden conflicts can emerge, negatively affecting the professional relationships of the hard-of-hearing employee.

The struggle to manage conflicts can also manifest more openly. An example of this is the following situation with Freja, a hard-of-hearing educator employed at a special needs school. She describes a situation where she is aiding a child who displays outwardly reactive behavior, while her colleague calls out to her from a toilet further down the hallway, where he is attending to another child. However, Freja does not hear her colleague's call and only becomes aware of it when another colleague offers to take over with the child so that Freja can attend to the colleague in the restroom:

Freja: The first thing I hear him [Freja's colleague] saying is: "I don't want to wipe her." (...)

Interviewer: Can you describe what happens specifically in the situation? Like how he gets angry?

Freja: Well, he then – I end up saying to him, "Try to listen, I want to help you, but I'm not going to take on your problems, I'm not going to do a task for you that you can't be bothered to do, so you'll have to handle it yourself." Then I go back to this boy who is still causing havoc, and then he [the colleague] turns around and shouts that I'm the worst colleague in the world, and it damn well can't be right that I won't help him.

The conflict escalates, prompting the non-hard-of-hearing colleague to leave while shouting about contacting the manager. Meanwhile, Freja feels "*provoked*" by the colleague's reluctance to assist the child in using the restroom. A female colleague of Freja later clarified that the male colleague had been calling for help with the toilet situation but couldn't reach Freja. This situation exemplifies a disrupted interaction creating two distinct situational realities. From Freja's perspective, there's the reality of a colleague approaching her with the statement, "*I don't want to wipe her*", which elicits feelings of anger and injustice. Conversely, the male colleague perceives himself as calling for help without being heard, leading to a sense of rejection. Freja explains that he felt belittled because he had been trying to communicate his difficulty and inexperience, which she hadn't heard.

Another example of conflicts arising from clashing realities is the following fieldnote from the daycare center, where the hard-of-hearing educator, Rikke, corrects an assistant educator:

At the bottom of the playground, Rikke prepares some afternoon snacks for the children. Malte [assistant educator] helps the children to sit at the table. A boy complains to Malte about itching on his leg. Malte squats down and unzips the boy's jacket while asking, "Have you peed, or is it just itching on your leg?"

Malte: No, you haven't peed. [friendly tone]

Rikke: You can't say that he isn't allowed to do that! [angrily admonishing tone] If he's done it, that's how it is!

Malte: I didn't say that!

In this situation, Rikke perceives her colleague scolding a child for wetting his pants, prompting her to defend the child. However, Rikke misinterprets the situation and reprimands Malte in a harsh tone in the presence of others. This conflict remains unresolved beyond the quoted exchange, with neither Rikke nor Malte taking steps to restore ritual equilibrium. Situations like this are prone to initiating spirals of emotions (Scheff 1988:396–97), akin to the example with Freja, where feelings of being attacked and blamed escalate into resentment or anger. Disrupted interaction thus fosters divergent perceptions of reality, which can lead to both covert and overt conflicts and give rise to feelings of rejection and anger.

While significant open conflicts were rare, conflicts typically revolved around frustration and annoyance stemming from failed everyday interaction rituals. In this type of conflict, divergent perceptions of reality among employees were not the primary cause; rather, conflicts arose due to failed interaction rituals, leading to feelings of irritation, frustration, and occasionally aggression towards hard-of-hearing colleagues. Stine, a 34-year-old non-hard-of-hearing employee, describes her feelings of annoyance when her hard-of-hearing colleague repeatedly asks the same technical questions:

Stine: I must admit that I sometimes get irritated. Because I can also become like, well, I've actually said it in five different projects over the last three months. I don't I'm supposed to have to say it again. I must honestly admit that I do [get irritated]. Even though you're allowed to ask the questions again and again, there's obviously some natural limit where you think, "Can I really keep circling around this?" So I must say, I can get irritated.

This quote illustrates a recurring pattern where colleagues of hard-of-hearing employees experience negative emotions when encountering repeated friction in an interaction. Stine's question, '*Can I really keep circling around this?*' implies her doubts about her obligation to persist in trying to make the interaction ritual succeed. Her feelings of annoyance and frustration indicate not only low emotional energy, but also what Boyns and Luery (2015) refer

to as negative emotional energy. This points to adversely charged emotions against a social encounter such as irritation, frustration, and unfriendliness (Boyns and Luery 2015:154). These emotions are not concealed from hard-of-hearing colleagues, who, in interviews, described how disrupted interactions triggered feelings of irritation, and sometimes even hostility and aggression, among their non-hard-of-hearing colleagues. Aya, a non-hard-of-hearing employee, recalls a workplace situation where these emotions were openly displayed:

Aya: I can remember a particular episode that was, in fact, somewhat uncomfortable to witness. (...) Leila [hard-of-hearing employee] presented her project... I think she had misunderstood some technical terms. Some people said, "Try starting over. Your focus is completely wrong. There's something we need to clarify first." She didn't really understand anything that was being said. She couldn't hear it. People got a bit frustrated because they were trying to explain, but she couldn't hear it or understand what was being said. It ended with a rather harsh tone from one of my colleagues, who was like "Who has been helping her?" [with the project] (...) I'm not sure she fully understood it... (...) Then we went to lunch, and then I heard a few days later that she had actually cried afterward, that it had been quite overwhelming because the tone had been quite harsh.

This is another example illustrating the pattern wherein failed interaction rituals trigger negative emotional energy among non-hard-of-hearing employees. In this instance, there are not only underlying feelings of frustration and annoyance, but also a confrontational and harsh tone displayed in front of several other colleagues during a meeting. Leila, the hard-of-hearing employee in the example, describes the situation as one that "*crossed a line*", and she feels like she was being treated as unintelligent by her colleagues. She explains how this situation activates feelings of being "*less interesting*" and "*less worthy*." In this situation, Leila's colleagues pursue Leila with their negative adversely charged emotional dispositions. In contrast, Leila's emotional state is characterized by low positive emotional energy towards the group, manifesting as sadness, low self-confidence, and a desire to withdraw from the situation.

Hence, the struggle to manage conflicts entails efforts to deal with those conflicts arising from disrupted interaction. I have illustrated how disrupted interaction gives rise to conflicts caused by clashes of realities and failed interaction rituals resulting in feelings of frustration, annoyance, and aggression among non-hard-of-hearing colleagues. Furthermore, I have demonstrated how these conflicts influence professional relations and have the potential to exclude hard-of-hearing employees from the work community.

Keeping track of the conversation

The third type of struggle in disrupted interaction involves the continuous and focused effort to keep track of conversations. Informants, regardless of their varied positions and characteristics, described how factors such as who is speaking, what is being said, the tone of

voice, and traces of irony required close attention to follow the conversation. Keeping track of conversations at work, especially in group settings, often proved to be a substantial interactional burden. Many rely on lip-reading as a supportive tool to understand spoken words, while simultaneously working to fill in missing words in sentences. If hard-of-hearing employees lag even a few seconds behind in identifying who is speaking, they may miss important visual cues. Mette, a hard-of-hearing employee, describes her experience as follows:

Mette: But I think for me, it's almost like flipping a switch – now I have to concentrate! I can truly feel that it requires an insane amount of energy to listen and guess [at what's being said]. Because often that's how it is—I might hear the beginning and the end of a sentence, and then you can fill in the rest. But it requires an incredible amount of brain power, and that's what you have to do all the way through the conversation while participating in it and keeping up at a normal pace. I can participate almost everywhere, but there are many places where it just takes an insane amount of energy. And to do it on those terms.

This is an example of a pattern in the empirical material where employees are hyper-focused on the interaction in a way that, in Mette's words, "*requires an insane amount of energy*." Mette describes her struggle to keep up with the pace and premises of non-hard-of-hearing conversation partners at work. Many interviewees describe how, even when the interaction is successful in the sense that they follow along and understand the content of the conversation, participating in settings such as group discussions or conversations with background noise remains incredibly energy intensive. This means that in challenging auditory environments, even those conversations assessed as successful in some ways resemble the emotional burdens of failed interaction rituals: the feeling of emotional drain and the urge to withdraw from the interaction. As Charlotte describes it, "*I can feel that I am good at drawing energy from being with other people, but I can also feel that listening so much throughout an entire day can be quite draining as well.*"

Another example of the pattern of hyper-focus in keeping track of the conversation is the following excerpt with the hard-of-hearing employee, Mads. He describes the energy and focus he expends at group meetings using the metaphor of driving on a highway at maximum speed:

Mads: So I sit in the middle of the room, to have the best chance to lip-read. I have to turn around; I'm like a carousel if you look at me. Other people are on their phones and they can hear [simultaneously] (...) I have prepared the microphone [assistive tool on the table], and I arrive a quarter of an hour early to get the best spot. It is insanely fucking hard. Some people mumble and do this [makes a mumbling sound], placing their hands over their mouths. (...) I sit in the middle, and there's a window where the light comes in, so the faces in front of the window are darker. That means it's difficult to lip-read. And so on, and so on, and so on. (...) I have to expend an incredible amount of energy on this. So, when I go in [to the office] when the meeting is over, I am like in a situation where it's just completely quiet, from a hearing loss perspective, but my brain is still active. So, it is like I'm driving like- Most days at work, I'm

undoubtedly at 130 [km/hour], and by ten o'clock it's like being on the German autobahn [where there is no speed limit].

In this way, Mads invests significant effort in focusing on interactions to distinguish them from each other. Prior to this quote, Mads employs the metaphor of being “*speed-blind*” to explain that after a group meeting, his mind remains on the “*autobahn*”, even though the next task requires no listening. This mirrors the experiences of other interviewees, where the repercussions of a challenging conversational context extend into subsequent situations. Furthermore, it was not uncommon for interviewees to experience a tremendous depletion of energy after work, leading some to avoid social encounters with friends or withdraw from conversations with family members.

At times, the struggle to keep track of the conversation is so taxing for the interviewees that they miss crucial parts of the interaction, leaving them on the periphery of the interaction ritual, or they avoid the interaction altogether to conserve energy. An example of this pattern is seen in the following excerpt with Ole, a hard-of-hearing employee, who describes how his job sometimes necessitates participation in large meetings. In response to whether he could follow the discussions in these meetings, Ole replies:

Ole: No, it was a bit difficult. I could understand some of it, and then it worked out fine. But suddenly, I started to get tired. I used up too much energy trying to understand too much. I couldn't do that at all. So, I just started thinking about something else, and then I had to ask about it afterward.

The struggle to keep track is often a prerequisite for engaging in interactions, and it is a highly conscious one, requiring immense focus and energy. Ole describes in the interview, how he would prefer not to be present at those meetings due to the fatigue and energy drain they cause. This reflects a pattern in the data where interviewees sometimes avoid audibly taxing situations, such as lunch breaks or large meetings.

Additionally, the struggle to keep track of the conversation poses the threat of a particular kind of alienation by interaction-consciousness. In this state, employees are not preoccupied with how the interaction unfolds, as described by Goffman (Goffman 1967:119–20). Instead, they become intensely focused on deciphering it. As a result, the demanding cognitive effort required for interpretation takes precedence, overshadowing the spontaneous involvement in the interaction. Consequently, the struggle to keep track of the conversation involves being hyper-focused on following the beat and content of the interaction, which can lead to energy drain and alienation by interaction-consciousness.

Reintegrating into interactions

The fourth type of struggle in disrupted interactions involves efforts to actively reintegrate oneself into the conversation after disconnection. These efforts may include asking for repetition, initiating a conversation, or inquiring about the current topic of the interaction. In this struggle, hard-of-hearing employees use fragments of the interaction as a lead to re-enter the conversation or seek assistance from their colleagues to get back on track in the interaction. In the following excerpt, Pia, a hard-of-hearing employee, describes a break during her workday where she and her colleagues gather to socialize. When asked how interactions during this break proceed, she elaborates:

Pia: No, well, yes, the more people there are, the harder it gets. So, a lot goes over my head, and I find myself having to ask, “What are you talking about now?”. I mean, I have to be bold. It’s something you learn with age, you become bolder and bolder [laughs] (...) Sometimes, I go for it, other times, I just simply haven’t the strength to do it. You get so tired, and that also comes with age, you get more tired, and you can’t bear to keep going. So often, you just sit there trying to keep up as best as you can. Or start a conversation yourself, so you know what it’s about.

This example illustrates a recurring pattern in the empirical data regarding the struggle to reintegrate after disrupted interactions. On the one hand, the struggle towards reintegration can be rewarding, potentially leading to successful inclusion in strong interaction rituals. On the other hand, interviewees like Pia describe how this interactional effort takes a toll on them. Sometimes, the costs associated with reintegration efforts are too high for employees to undertake. This is illustrated in the following excerpt with Ole, who describes meetings at his workplace where he struggles to keep up with the conversation. When asked about how he feels about asking for repetition, he responds:

Ole: (...) I have actually done that in the past. I feel like I’ve become someone who can’t be bothered to say it again. Because they all know anyway. It’s easier when it’s just two people. When there are more people involved, and you have to educate others to repeat themselves, and things like that. I don’t want to do that anymore. I used to do it in the past. I spend so much time and energy telling everyone that I would like them to repeat it.

Interviewer: Is it because it’s too exhausting?

Ole: Yes, it’s too exhausting to have to ask for repetition today.

Consequently, the struggle to reintegrate may, in some situations or over time, be too taxing for hard-of-hearing employees.

Another pattern identified in the data shows that hard-of-hearing employees balance their reintegration efforts against the risk of disrupting the interaction. For example, Leila, a hard-

of-hearing employee, explained the difficulties she encountered in keeping up with informal office talk, which hindered her ability to “*get a sense of what’s going on*”. She states:

Leila: I actually think I interrupt and ask less... Maybe I should do it more [laughs], I don’t know. But I don’t want to be annoying and always ask “What? What are you saying?”. It’s a difficult balance to find, how much to ask.

Another hard-of-hearing employee, Peter, expresses similar concerns when asked if he requests repetition during lunch in the large canteen at his workplace:

Peter: Not if six or seven people are laughing at something, and then I have to have everything explained again, maybe even two or three times, because it’s so noisy (...) I don’t do that because it’s actually disruptive for others too, so no, I don’t do that.

In this way, finding a socially acceptable balance for reintegrating oneself into the conversation is part of the collaborative effort to align with the normative order of the interaction and avoid disrupting the flow. As Leila emphasizes, this balance is also a matter of protecting one’s face and avoiding being perceived as “*annoying*” by conversation partners. This is supported by my fieldwork observations, where hard-of-hearing employees may ask for repetition once or twice but then cease, regardless of whether they have fully grasped the missed content or not.

Thus, the struggle to reintegrate into interactions involves efforts to return to the conversation after a disconnection. While reintegration efforts offer an opportunity to successfully become part of interaction rituals, they can also be taxing for employees. Furthermore, this struggle entails the balancing act of intervening in the conversation without disrupting the flow of the interaction ritual and avoiding face-threatening situations.

Discussion

How should we understand the consequences of interactional struggles for groups particularly exposed to disrupted interactions at work? Moreover, what are the implications of employing Goffman’s and Collins’s theoretical frameworks to investigate interactional inequalities? This section integrates the findings of this article into existing research on disrupted interaction and reflects on the broader implications of the theoretical framework.

The findings of this article align with prior research demonstrating that hard-of-hearing employees face challenges in participating in social events and informal workplace interactions (Hansen 2008; Olsson et al. 2021), which can lead to exclusion, loneliness, and isolation (Jepsen and Liebst 2021; Shukla et al. 2020). Difficulties in obtaining appropriate workplace accommodations (Granberg and Gustafsson 2021b; Haynes and Linden 2012; Punch 2016) and

a lack of awareness among managers and colleagues regarding the needs of hard-of-hearing employees (Haynes and Linden 2012; Svinndal, Jensen, and Rise 2020) are factors that might exacerbate the interactional struggles identified in this analysis.

While much of the literature on interaction rituals focuses on intense rituals with strong emotions, such as festive events, sports gatherings, violence, religious assemblies, and political meetings (e.g., Collins 2004; Cottingham 2012; George 2018; Tutenges 2023), this study contributes to the limited literature on failed interaction rituals characterized by disruptions and friction. Existing research within this field examines failed interaction rituals in mediated settings (Bailenson 2021; Collins 2020; Vandenberg 2022; Vandenberg, Berghman, and Schaap 2021), inequality in successful interaction rituals within educational contexts (Husu 2021; Jensen and Vitus 2020), and strategies for repairing disrupted interactions (Most 2002; Schegloff 1992; Tavory and Fine 2020). These studies highlight how delayed real-time feedback and the absence of non-verbal cues in virtual settings hinder synchronicity and interactional flow (Bailenson 2021; Collins 2020), as well as the potential consequences of unequal access to successful interaction rituals, such as loneliness (Husu 2021) and violence (Jensen and Vitus 2020).

The insights offered by Tavory and Fine on disrupted interaction provide particularly valuable insights for theorizing disruptions in everyday encounters. They distinguish between two types of disruption: *disruption-for* interaction, which strengthen social ties, and *disruption-of* interaction, which weakens them (Tavory and Fine 2020:366–67). Redefining Goffman's perspective on alignment in social interaction, Tavory and Fine argue that disruptions are not merely obstacles to be avoided but also resources that foster intersubjectivity (Tavory and Fine 2020). Although this article primarily addresses unequally patterned disruptions-of interactions in workplace settings, there were instances where disrupted interactions between hard-of-hearing employees and colleagues fostered successful interaction rituals. In such cases, disruptions created opportunities for the exchange of sympathy (Clark 1997), potentially strengthening social ties. However, these examples were rare in the empirical material.

This emphasis on disruption-of interaction in this article may stem from differing conceptualizations of disrupted interaction. Tavory and Fine define disruptions as “*perceived misalignment of the dramaturgical structure of interaction in coordinating expected lines of action*” (Tavory and Fine 2020:366). From their perspective, disruptions occur when participants challenge the dramatic structure of a situation, often informed by a learned sense

of how much strain the interaction and social ties can withstand (Tavory and Fine 2020). For example, challenging a conversation partner's opinion could constitute a disruption-for-interaction if it fosters a deeper emotional connection.

In contrast, my use of the term disruptions aligns more closely with Schegloff's use of "misunderstandings" or "problematic understandings", encompassing missed words or unintentional breaches in interaction (Schegloff 1992:1300–1301). This conceptual difference may explain this article's emphasis on the negative effects of disrupted interactions on social relations.

Using Goffman's and Collins's theories on interaction, this analysis identifies two key dimensions of struggles arising from disrupted interactions. The first, grounded in Goffman's concepts of face-work, embarrassment, and alienation, involves experiencing difficulties in conforming to the normative order of social encounters, avoiding offending others, and protecting one's face. The second, rooted in Collins's concepts of interaction rituals and emotional energy, involves challenges in achieving rhythmic entrainment and building mutual emotional connection. The former pertains to the normative social order, while the latter addresses the mechanical rhythms of the interaction.

Among these, the normative dimension of disrupted interactions may exert a more stratifying influence than the mechanical dimension. While most people experience challenges in keeping track of conversations and synchronizing emotionally during disrupted interactions, social sanctions for violating the normative social order are likely distributed unevenly across social hierarchies. Several factors may influence how social sanctions, such as defacement and negative emotional responses, are distributed among hard-of-hearing employees. One factor is workplace status. Employees in high-status positions might experience what Hochschild terms a *status shield* (Hochschild 2003:174), which protects them from colleagues' negative emotions during conflicts and reduces social sanctions for norm violations.

Another factor is what Clark terms *place*, a micro-level equivalent of social status that is more fluctuating and negotiated within encounters (1997:229–31). Place is determined by cultural capital, interactional skills, and micropolitics (Clark 2004). Subtle negotiations of place may thus shape how interactional struggles unfold in everyday encounters.

Consequently, the Goffmanian struggles relating to social sanctions for violations of the normative social order may disproportionately affect employees in low-status positions or with

less secure places in the social hierarchy. By contrast, the Collinsian struggles related to rhythmic entrainment and emotional build-up may be distributed more evenly across social categories. Further research is needed to explore the distribution of interactional struggles, particularly how status positions intersect with communication disabilities.

Conclusion

This article addresses the types of interactional struggles arising from disrupted interactions, focusing on hard-of-hearing employees. Using micro sociological theory, this study identifies four types of struggles associated with disrupted interactions: 1) Concealing interactional disruptions, 2) Managing conflicts, 3) Keeping track of the conversation, and 4) Reintegrating into interactions

These findings imply that certain groups of employees are exposed to immense interactional and emotional work and show how concrete patterns of interactional stratification unfold. While interactional disruption can be a crucial condition for intersubjectivity and relational ties as argued by Tavory and Fine, the disruptions investigated in this article most often proved to be a struggle for both hard-of-hearing employees and their colleagues, sometimes straining the relations. This makes them “*disruptions-of*” the interaction rather than “*disruptions-for*” the interaction (Tavory and Fine 2020:373). The study underscores how some hard-of-hearing employees find themselves at constant risk of defacement, micro-conflicts, and failed interaction rituals, imposing a tremendous interactional and emotional workload on them. Furthermore, this article demonstrates how these interactional struggles, for some groups, dominate social encounters to an extent that constitutes a form of social stratification. This article contributes to existing micro-sociological literature on interaction by offering a conceptualization of different types of struggles in disrupted interaction.

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Giving and getting sympathy at work: Unraveling the micro-processes of exclusion of hard-of-hearing employees

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Abstract

Research has shown that certain minority groups such as employees with physical or psychological disabilities, remote workers, non-native speakers, and language minorities experience exclusion in the workplace. However, little is known about how the processes of exclusion unfold in everyday work interactions. Drawing on the concepts of sympathy and interaction rituals, this study examines the role of inclusive interactional gestures in the inclusion and exclusion of employees with hearing loss. The article is based on ethnographic fieldwork in two workplaces and 29 interviews with hard-of-hearing employees from 19 different organizations, as well as with colleagues and managers without hearing loss. I find that inclusive interactional gestures play a crucial role in including employees with hearing loss in workplace communities. The findings show how a lack of these gestures can lead to situational exclusion, which can, over time, result in broader exclusion from workplace culture and symbols. The analysis sheds light on hard-of-hearing employees' troubles in participating in the exchange of sympathy in the workplace, impairing their opportunities to extend sympathy gifts and strengthen social ties among their colleagues. The paper discusses the methodological choices and their influence on the analysis findings.

Introduction

This article aims to contribute to micro-sociological research on exclusion by examining the processes of social exclusion, particularly in relation to exchanges of sympathy in the workplace. Drawing on insights from the sociology of emotions (Clark 1997) and microsociology (Collins 2014), I examine the role of inclusive interactional gestures in the inclusion and exclusion of employees with hearing loss. I analyze these efforts through the concept of sympathy as emotional gift-giving, as articulated by Candace Clark (1997). In contrast to other emotions, sympathy is not a single emotion, but rather a complex of different sentiments and gestures that can unfold in a variety of different ways (Clark 1997:33). Sympathy exchanges have the capacity to strengthen social bonds and facilitate social integration. In this way, groups and cultures establish rituals and norms that encourage the display of sympathy and can provide social glue to the group, for instance, by sending flowers to a sick colleague (Clark 1997:17; 57). Similar to money and other resources, sympathy is not unlimited; it demands time, mental energy, and emotion work (Hochschild 2003), prompting individuals to allocate it based on culturally established principles (Clark 1997:132).

Social exclusion in the workplace has proven to result in severe consequences, not just for individual employees, but also at the company level (Hitlan et al. 2006; O'Reilly and Banki 2016; Scott, Thau, and DeWall 2013). Research shows that employees with disabilities face exclusion at several different levels ranging from the possibility of acquiring a job (Lindsay et al. 2023; Watson 2012) to navigating the physical environment (Padkapayeva et al. 2017) and social inclusion in work groups (Fevre et al. 2013; Lindsay et al. 2023; Mik-Meyer 2016; Naraine and Lindsay 2011). While a body of literature has investigated the impact of social exclusion, less attention has been given to its antecedents and processes (O'Reilly and Banki 2016; Robinson, O'Reilly, and Wang 2013).

In examining workplace interactions, this paper draws on Randall Collins's interaction ritual theory as a theoretical framework in addition to Clark's notion of emotional gift-giving. Collins conceptualizes social encounters as rituals, which to a varying degree absorb individuals in shared emotions and charge them with emotional energy. To facilitate a ritual, individuals need to be physically assembled, focusing on the same object or activity, tapping into the same emotional state, and establishing a demarcation of ritual insiders and outsiders (Collins 2014:48). The concept of interaction rituals is useful to shed light on micro-processes of interaction when investigating the mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion. The central question this paper addresses is the following: Which role do inclusive interactional gestures play in the inclusion and exclusion of employees with hearing loss in the workplace?

This article draws on four months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Denmark across two workplaces, supplemented by 29 interviews with hard-of-hearing employees, their non-hard-of-hearing colleagues, and managers. I find that small inclusive gestures of sympathy often decisively influence situational inclusion or exclusion for hard-of-hearing employees. The findings demonstrate how a lack of these gestures can lead to situational exclusion, which, over time, can result in broader exclusion from workplace cultural symbols – such as jokes and narratives – ultimately leading to social exclusion. The analysis sheds light on hard-of-hearing employees' troubles in participating in the exchange of sympathy in the workplace, impairing their opportunities to extend sympathy gifts and cultivate sympathy debts among their colleagues. Finally, the paper discusses the methodological choices and their influence on the analysis findings.

The article begins by outlining existing research on workplace social exclusion and the exclusion of employees with disabilities. It then presents the theoretical framework on

sympathy and interaction rituals, followed by a presentation of methodological procedures. The analysis first investigates the role of sympathy gestures in workplace inclusion for employees with hearing loss and then examines the processes of exclusion that occur when sympathy is withheld. Finally, the methodological choices in the article and their impact on the analysis findings are discussed.

Workplace social inclusion and exclusion

Social exclusion at the workplace can be broadly defined as “any experience in which an employee perceives as though he or she has been ignored, avoided, and/or rejected by at least one other organizational member, and experiences a thwarted sense of belonging as a result” (O’Reilly and Banki 2016:134). The subject of workplace social exclusion has been researched under a variety of different terms including *workplace ostracism* (Robinson et al. 2013), *workplace discrimination* (Fevre et al. 2013; Lindsay et al. 2023), *language exclusion* (Hitlan et al. 2006), and *workplace incivilities* (Cortina 2008; Han et al. 2022). Workplace ostracism is defined by practices of ignoring, shunning, or avoiding actions to engage colleagues when cultural norms prescribe it (Robinson et al. 2013), whereas discrimination refers to “unwanted, exploitative or abusive conduct” (Lindsay et al. 2023:20). Furthermore, language exclusion refers to situations where colleagues speak a language unfamiliar to co-workers who do not understand it (Hitlan et al. 2006), while workplace incivilities refers to ambiguous and low-level acts that violate social norms and hurt employees without a clear intent (Cortina 2008).

Workplace social exclusion has demonstrated a significant negative impact on employees and work organizations. Employees exposed to practices of social exclusion experience a significant negative impact on their sense of belonging in the workplace (O’Reilly and Banki 2016) and lower levels of organizational commitment (Hitlan et al. 2006). Furthermore, social exclusion is connected to decreased psychological well-being, higher employee stress, and negative emotional outcomes (O’Reilly and Banki 2016; Robinson et al. 2013). O’Reilly et al. (2015) even find that ostracism is more strongly related than harassment to health problems, lower job commitment and job satisfaction, psychological withdrawal, and employee turnover (O’Reilly et al. 2015). The often subtle nature of social exclusion makes it more difficult for organizations to formulate rules and directives against it, unlike more overt forms of discrimination and aggression (Robinson et al. 2013).

According to Winters et al. (2013), this distinction also differentiates inclusion from diversity. While diversity can be mandated through organizational rules, inclusion relies on voluntary

actions (Winters 2013:206). Diversity refers to the representation of both visible and invisible differences such as gender, age, sexual orientation, race, and disability, which describes a state within an organization (Shore et al. 2011:178). In contrast, the authors define inclusion as actions that create an environment and a workplace culture that “acknowledges, welcomes, and accepts different approaches, styles, perspectives, and experiences” (Winters 2013:206).

In summary, research on workplace social exclusion indicates that social exclusion is associated with a range of negative impacts at both the individual and organizational levels. However, where there is a body of research on the effects of social exclusion, so too is there a lack of research investigating the antecedents and processes of workplace social exclusion (Scott et al. 2013:69). The following section delves into the research on social exclusion among employees with disabilities.

Social exclusion of employees with disabilities

Research has demonstrated that employees with disabilities experience various forms of workplace social exclusion (Fevre et al. 2013; Lindsay et al. 2023; Mik-Meyer 2016; Naraine and Lindsay 2011). Indeed quantitative studies establish that employees with disabilities encounter disability-related discrimination – such as ill-treatment, pay discrimination, lack of job support, social exclusion, and hiring discrimination – as well as disproportionately occupying semi- and unskilled occupations (Barnes 2005; Fevre et al. 2013; Lindsay et al. 2023). Few studies, however, have qualitatively explored the mechanisms underlining exclusionary processes. The following section presents key studies relevant to this discussion.

Mik-Meyer (2016) explores the process of othering, focusing on how in interviews non-disabled employees discursively construct their colleagues with visible impairments. The study identifies contradictory discourses of ableism and of tolerance and inclusivity, prescribing it problematic to talk about visible differences of impairment between colleagues. The efforts to avoid discussing visible differences paradoxically reinforce othering, as employees navigate the tension by referring to other marginalized groups (e.g., cross-dressers, LGBTQ+ individuals, immigrants) when discussing their colleagues with disabilities (Mik-Meyer 2016). Mik-Meyer thus reveals how non-disabled co-workers, despite intentions to be inclusive, discursively reinforce visibly impaired colleagues as different. This study contributes to understanding the discursive cultural frameworks through which employees make sense of disability in the workplace.

Another qualitative study by Naraine and Lindsay (2011) investigates social barriers to the inclusion of blind and low-vision employees. Their findings suggest that these employees sometimes felt alienated and excluded in social encounters at work, particularly in contexts reliant on visual and nonverbal communication. The authors argue that many workplaces fail to recognize the lack of social support as a barrier to inclusion (Naraine and Lindsay 2011). While Mik-Meyer (2016) examines the discursive dimensions of exclusion, Naraine and Lindsay (2011) identify six empirical barriers to social inclusion: lack of accessible transportation to social events, difficulties navigating social venues, barriers to networking, challenges in obtaining food and drink, reliance on assistance from colleagues, and feelings of exclusion.

Jepsen and Liebst (2021) contribute a theoretical model to the discussion by investigating how impaired rhythmic entrainment affects social integration among hard-of-hearing and deaf employees using cochlear implants. This study emphasizes how impaired rhythmic entrainment hinders social integration and leads to mental and emotional energy drain. The authors argue that situations of social exclusion may lead to avoidance behavior among deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals, which in turn exacerbates the experience of being excluded.

These studies shed light on the social exclusion of people with disabilities, emphasizing the importance of everyday interactions in workplace inclusion. Mik-Meyer (2016) highlights how contradicting discourses of ableism and inclusivity shape workplace discursive frameworks of disability, while Naraine and Lindsay (2011) identify concrete social barriers faced by blind and low-vision employees. Jepsen and Liebst (2021) add a theoretical dimension by examining how impaired rhythmic entrainment influences social integration.

Despite these contributions, none of the studies explore social exclusion as it unfolds in everyday work life. This article addresses the subject by employing fieldwork to analyze sequences of social events and their interrelations in the investigation of reasons for and consequences of social exclusion of hard-of-hearing employees. Unlike previous studies that rely primarily on interview data either from employees with disabilities or their non-disabled colleagues, this research incorporates multiple perspectives, combining interviews with hard-of-hearing employees, their colleagues, and ethnographic fieldwork. This methodological approach allows for a micro-exploration of the mechanisms behind exclusionary practices, uncovering the meaning-making processes and emotional aspects of both interacting parties.

Additionally, this study seeks to advance our understanding of social exclusion by examining the role of sympathy gift exchanges in workplace interactions.

Theory

Sympathy exchange, social bonds, and the socioemotional economy

Candace Clark conceptualizes sympathy as a social emotion, which, like love, guilt, and shame, always involves at least two people. She describes the process of giving sympathy as consisting of three components: First, empathy, which in this case is defined as the ability of the sympathizer to take the role of the other; second, other targeted emotions related to the other's hurt or pain; and third, display (Clark 1997:33). While empathy is a precondition for sympathy, it can exist without one of the subsequent elements. Empathy, together with sentiments without a display, is referred to as "covert" sympathy, while empathy, together with a display without sentiments, is referred to as "surface" sympathy (Clark 1987:34). While both giving and getting sympathy can feel good and create and enhance social bonds, receiving it can, however, also be a belittling experience, and giving it can feel like an exhausting obligation (Clark 1997:17). Thus, the outcome of giving and getting sympathy is a matter of how it is done, to whom, and in which context.

While sympathy is an immaterial resource, it is nonetheless not unlimited. It requires time, energy, and sometimes "emotion work" (Hochschild 2003) to extend it, so people constrain their expenditures according to culturally given rules and principles (Clark 1987:132). Sympathy gifts are often expected to be repaid in future either by gratitude, deference or sympathy to the giver or their relatives (Clark 1987:20). Every individual can expect a limited amount of sympathy from others, referred to as *sympathy credits*. A sympathy credit is the right to claim or collect sympathy from others. The number of credits each person holds – their *sympathy margin* – is contingent upon the individual's social value and their history of giving and getting sympathy. One person's sympathy margin can be narrow or wide depending on how many sympathy credits they have already cashed in, how they have re-earned credits by reciprocating emotional resources to others, and how their social worth is negotiated in the social context (Clark 1997:150–51). However, everyone can run out of credits or overdraw their account, if they do not follow the culturally given rules of exchange. In these cases, sympathizers may withhold both displayed and felt sympathy and refuse to comply with claims for sympathy (Clark 1997:150–51).

This article explores only the type of sympathy that is displayed, encompassing both “surface” sympathy, which lacks sympathetic sentiments, and sympathy, which includes empathy, sentiment, and display. I choose to focus on displayed sympathy due to its capacity to foster situational inclusion in the workplace, or, when withheld, to create situational exclusion. In the context of hard-of-hearing employees, I conceptualize displayed sympathy as actions that facilitate the inclusion of hard-of-hearing employees in conversations. These actions may include speaking more slowly and clearly, maintaining deliberate eye contact during communication, repeating responses when necessary, or summarizing the main points when such employees join a group discussion. Displayed sympathy can take various forms and may be expressed both intentionally and without much thought.

Interaction ritual, group membership, and stratification

This article investigates situations as a point of departure in the exploration of workplace inclusion and exclusion. Following the tradition of micro-sociology, this perspective suggests that social structures such as stratification and status hierarchies are continually constructed, reproduced, and changed through interaction situations. Events in one situation have spillover effects on subsequent ones, forming a chain of interactions that eventually shape larger, macro-level patterns (Collins 2014:5). These macro-level patterns in turn feed back into micro-level situations (Kemper and Collins 1990:33). Looking at what unfolds in the interaction situations contributes to the understanding of how such mechanisms of stratification are constructed, enacted, and changed.

In interaction rituals, individuals unconsciously synchronize their bodies with each other through micro-adjustments in movements, tone of voice, speech pace, and bodily movements (Collins 2014:47;67). Under favorable ritual conditions, this process of “rhythmic entrainment” has the capacity to generate feelings of solidarity, elevation, and group belonging (Collins 2014:49). These emotions constitute high emotional energy while feelings such as boredom, interaction fatigue, and the desire to escape the situation comprise low emotional energy. In this way, the emotional outcome of social encounters varies on a scale from high to low emotional energy, depending on the level of success or failure of the ritual (Collins 2014:108). While individuals do not walk around thinking about the level of success of their social encounters, they most definitely feel the impact emotionally (Collins 2014:119).

Rituals also have the potential to create group ties and solidarity through rituals that entrain group members. Strong rituals and their emotional outcomes can be stored in symbols that

reinvoke them and transform them from short-term into long-term emotions. Symbols can be physical objects, or they can be narratives and group identities (Collins 2014:81;87). The distribution of emotional energy in an interaction ritual tends to be self-reinforcing. The people who find themselves at the center of the ritual, gaining high emotional energy, are already emotionally advantaged in the next situation. In the same way will individuals at the periphery of the ritual be systematically disadvantaged in prospective situations (Collins 2014:131; King 2019:43).

This theory of social interaction proves particularly valuable in unveiling some of the micro-processes of exclusion, acknowledged in quantitative research but remaining black-boxed in terms of the reasons and mechanisms underlying them. Using the concept of interaction rituals to investigate the inclusion and exclusion of employees with hearing loss allows for an analysis of how chains of interactions shape workplace culture, revealing who occupies central roles in these rituals and who remains on the periphery.

Material and Methods

Interviews & fieldwork

I have conducted semi-structured interviews (Holstein and Gubrium 1995) with hard-of-hearing employees from various Danish workplaces, along with fieldwork at two workplaces in order to generate empirical material about emotions, interaction situations, and the meaning ascribed to them by employees. At the two fieldwork sites, I additionally interviewed managers and colleagues without hearing loss. Through shadowing (Czarniawska 2007), I was able to examine inclusive interactional gestures—or the absence thereof—exchanges in interaction, and nonverbal communication as they unfolded in the two workplaces. The fieldwork also provided empirical material on sequences of social situations and their interrelations.

Through the interviews, however, I was better able to access other aspects of social situations. Here, I could explore the meaning ascribed to interaction situations and gain insight into the interviewees' emotions, biographies, and personal contexts, which extended further back in time. I interviewed employees with hearing loss from a total of 19 different workplaces, which allowed me to compare interaction situations and emotions across different workplaces, status positions, genders, and organizational cultures (Maxwell and Miller 2008).

I used a strategic sampling (Staunæs and Søndergaard 2005) of hard-of-hearing employees to compose a group of interviewees positioned differently in the field in terms of jobs, gender, education, and size of workplace. My aim was to include a wide range of interaction rituals

and emotion cultures, as well as to encompass interviewees with different status levels at their workplace. Interviewees were recruited through three channels: 1) a post in a Facebook group managed by the Danish Association of the Hard of Hearing; 2) a consultant at Castberggard; and 3) snowball sampling through existing interviewees.

I sent out an information letter about the research project and an outline of the different themes covered in the interview such as the interviewee's background, hearing loss story, and work life. The letter also stated that names and locations would be altered to ensure confidentiality and that participants could withdraw their consent at any time. A couple of days prior to the scheduled interviews, I asked the participants by email to reflect on three work-related situations where hearing loss played a role, either positively or negatively. I emphasized that interviewees should try to recall details, emotions, and interactions from the chosen situations. The preparation of situations aimed to get interviewees to think about concrete situations rather than abstract reasoning, to produce palpable data (Small and Calarco 2022:80–98). The section containing descriptions of the three situations formed the core of the interviews and often prompted accounts of other situations that were either similar to or entirely different from the prepared ones.

In this article I adopt a situational and contextual ethical framework, wherein ethical considerations are a part of each phase of the research process (Kvale and Brinkmann 2015:112–15). I have altered the participants' workplaces, ages, names, and geographical locations to protect confidentiality.

Access to the workplaces where I did fieldwork was facilitated through individuals with hearing loss whom I had previously interviewed for the project. I chose an architectural firm and a daycare center as the two locations for conducting my fieldwork. These sites offered distinct auditory environments and employees with different educational backgrounds, providing a broad spectrum of interaction situations. In deciding the number of fieldwork locations, I prioritized the amount of time spent at each site over the number of locations (Small and Calarco 2022:18–20). My goal was to build strong relationships with individuals at both workplaces, spending a total of 150-175 hours across both sites to develop an in-depth understanding of interactions among employees.

In this article, I primarily use field notes from a single day at the architectural office to show how situational exclusion in one social situation can have consequences that influence a subsequent social situation. The excerpts are presented in their original sequence and were

selected for their ability to illustrate the consequences of accumulated exclusion. However, the interview material, as well as empirical material from the other field site, was crucial for comparing situational exclusion across the data and identifying similarities and differences in the empirical patterns (Maxwell and Miller 2008).

The first field site, an architectural firm, is located in a large building that accommodates several offices, all sharing a common canteen. The office itself is an open-plan area where desks are arranged in rows with screens positioned back-to-back. Employees are not assigned permanent seats and have the flexibility to work remotely if desired. All employees in the office hold long-cycle higher education qualifications and collaborate across various professional disciplines. The office is filled with the constant background noise of conversations, ranging from work-related discussions to casual exchanges. The noise level noticeably increases when phone calls are being made, which is frequent.

The second field site, a daycare center⁷, is housed in a two-story building with an outdoor playground. The employees primarily consist of educators with equivalent educational backgrounds, supported by untrained helpers and educator assistants. Employees work in smaller, designated teams that are assigned to specific rooms. Interaction between employees mainly revolves around the coordination of daily tasks, meetings, and scheduled breaks. They eat lunch with the children and take breaks in turns in the staff room.

Empirical material

The interview sample includes 19 hard-of-hearing employees from 19 different workplaces, along with 5 non-hard-of-hearing colleagues, 2 non-hard-of-hearing managers, and 1 hearing consultant. The colleagues and managers without hearing loss were selected from the two fieldwork sites. Additionally, I did follow-up interviews with the two hard-of-hearing employees I observed during fieldwork, leading to a total of 29 interviews.

The interviewees had diverse educational backgrounds: 1 was unskilled, 2 were skilled workers, 12 held medium-cycle higher educations, and 12 had long-cycle higher educations. 20 of the participants were women and 7 were men. All hard-of-hearing participants had been diagnosed with hearing loss, and all except one used different forms of assistive technology in the workplace. Interviews with hard-of-hearing employees were conducted before the

^{7 7} Childcare services for children in Denmark aged 2 years and 10 months to 5 years.

fieldwork phase (autumn/winter 2022), while interviews with their colleagues, managers, and the hearing consultant took place during the fieldwork. On average, interviews with hard-of-hearing employees lasted 80 minutes, whereas those with colleagues, managers, and the hearing consultant were generally shorter. All interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed.

The fieldwork component of the research took place between January and April 2023. Fieldwork visits were conducted 1-2 times per week, with each visit lasting about 6-7 hours. Approximately 90-105 hours were spent at the daycare center over two months (January and February 2023), followed by around 60-70 hours at the architectural firm (March and April 2023). On each visit, I took detailed field notes, which I later elaborated and transcribed on my computer if it was not possible to do so at the field site.

Data analysis

The initial research question was informed by a theoretical perspective on interaction rituals and social cohesion (Collins 2014), which guided the decision to examine the verbal and nonverbal interactions constituting workplace interaction rituals. After thoroughly reviewing the empirical material, I created a first round of coding across interviews and field notes, including codes such as “inclusion/exclusion,” “workplace culture and symbols,” and “consideration.” The empirical material drew my attention to the need for interactional consideration, as well as the display or withholding of it, since it emerged across the data as a key point of conflict in social interactions for employees with hearing loss. I then applied Clark's perspectives on sympathy to explore what was at stake in the empirical data. Through an abductive process (Timmermans and Tavory 2012:170) that involved paying attention to surprising elements in the material and incorporating supplementary theoretical perspectives on sympathy and emotional gift-giving (Clark 1987), I conducted a second round of coding. This round included sub-codes such as “examples of situational exclusion” and “the role of consideration.” All coding was done using the Nvivo software.

The coding of the empirical data enabled me to compare similarities and differences between interaction rituals and situational inclusion and exclusion across diverse workplace settings (Maxwell and Miller 2008:469). My analysis of fieldwork notes involved a connecting approach, where I reviewed the notes in their original order, focusing on significant situations and their interrelations (Maxwell and Miller 2008:467). This analysis strategy was crucial for

understanding how exclusion in one situation can potentially carry over into subsequent ones, forming a chain of situational exclusion.

The role of sympathy in the process of inclusion and exclusion

In the following analysis, I examine the role of sympathy in integrating employees with hearing loss into workplace communities. The analysis demonstrates how sympathy gestures facilitate participation in interactions and explore the consequences when such gestures are withheld.

The role of sympathy in workplace inclusion

Admittedly, displaying sympathy can be used, either consciously or unconsciously, to subordinate the recipient within the social hierarchy or impose an emotional debt (Clark 1987:317, 1997:229). Yet in my analysis most interviewees with hearing loss felt that their colleagues did not show sufficient consideration regarding their hearing loss.

The display of sympathy by colleagues without hearing loss often determined whether hard-of-hearing employees were enabled to participate in conversations. The following account by Eva, a hard-of-hearing woman in her 40s who works as a caregiver at a specialized psychiatric residential facility, illustrates how displays of sympathy from colleagues serve as conversational cues that enable her to join group discussions. When asked if she finds it difficult to participate in group conversations at work, she responds:

Eva: Yes, I do, especially with colleagues. It's really, really tough. Right away, it's perceived as if I'm poking my nose into something when I just ask what they're talking about. Either because they feel I'm interrupting or trying to control the conversation.

Interviewer: What is your strategy? Do you do it anyway, or do you lean more towards not doing it?

Eva: Yes, it varies a lot; it depends on what I can sense. If there are four people talking, and I join, sometimes I just stand there. Can I even make sense of what they're talking about? Maybe someone looks up and makes eye contact with me, even though they know it's not certain that I know what they're talking about. Perhaps she gives a clue about what we're discussing. And other times, it's not possible to make eye contact with anyone, or there's no one [pause], so I just leave.

This example illustrates some important challenges confronted by hard-of-hearing employees when trying to engage in group conversations without prior knowledge of the topic. Lacking awareness of the subject matter places them in a precarious position, without an appropriate "line" for the social encounter, thus risking being "out of face" (Goffman 1967:5). Eva's experience further underscores the risk of violating interactional norms and being perceived as "controlling" or as someone who "pok[es] [her] nose" into others' affairs when asking about a topic.

Chancing being out of face or violating interactional norms is a risk confronted by any newcomers to a group conversation pre-present speakers have not included them through the use of “previous activity formulating,” as described by Pillet-Shore (2010:159). The act of “doing” inclusion provides newcomers with necessary contextual resources to participate in the conversation, sparing them the risk of appearing intrusive (Pillet-Shore 2010:159). However, the consequences of denied inclusion are particularly pronounced for employees with hearing loss, who lack the same opportunities as non-hard-of-hearing employees to attune to the conversation as passive observers. Eva’s account demonstrates how the sympathy gift of “previous activity formulating” offers an entry point that enables her to participate in discussions from which she might otherwise be excluded. As Jesper, a hard-of-hearing engineer, observes, small gestures often determine whether situational inclusion or exclusion occurs:

Interviewer: In what situations do you feel most like a part of the social community?

Jesper: (...) When I can keep up with the conversation [laughs]. But it’s really hard to pinpoint specific situations. Because it could be that the person is just speaking a little bit slower today. That could have made all the difference.

These examples represent a pattern that underscores how small gestures—such as making eye contact, slowing the pace of speech, or actively inviting colleagues into the conversation—can decisively influence the situational inclusion or exclusion of hard-of-hearing employees.

The non-hard-of-hearing employees in this study did not intend to exclude their hard-of-hearing colleagues. However, their lack of sympathy gestures contributed to situational exclusion, creating interactional struggles for employees with hearing loss. An example of this dynamic is illustrated by Louise, a human relations manager, who describes attending lunch in her workplace’s large canteen where she frequently experiences being excluded from conversations:

Louise: Over there (sighs) [in the big canteen], some days I choose not to go. There are times when I skip lunch altogether because, well, I just can’t handle it on those days. It’s not that, after being there for half an hour, I’m completely drained. But, you see, when you join a group of people, you often find yourself on the sidelines, hearing them laugh and chat, while you’re not a part of it. It doesn’t feel good, you know? It’s not something I want to think about too much, because I don’t want to. It doesn’t do me any good. But it doesn’t feel good, right? Constantly being reminded of what you’re missing. You’re missing out on something now. And now, and now, and now, and now, and now.

Louise describes the social environment at her workplace as “very strong,” characterized by playfulness and joking among colleagues. She feels part of the community, and overall, her colleagues are willing to accommodate her needs when requested. However, Louise still

encounters situations of exclusion, as described in the excerpt. These instances are exhausting for her, and she feels sorrow when not enabled to participate in social gatherings on equal terms with her colleagues. Furthermore, the disrupted interactions place additional interactional work on her in social encounters. This includes concealing conversational disconnections, managing misunderstandings and conflicts that arise from disrupted interactions, keeping track of conversations, and reintegrating after moments of disconnection.

These interactional struggles add a considerable emotional and social workload for hard-of-hearing employees (Thing 2025b). Similarly, Ince (2022) describes how African Americans shoulder the interactional burden in racialized interaction rituals by working to smooth interactional awkwardness and facilitate racial diversity efforts. While successful interactions required cooperation from both non-hard-of-hearing and hard-of-hearing employees, the consequences of failed interaction rituals were not equally distributed. As in Ince's study, the impact of failed interaction rituals fell disproportionately on hard-of-hearing employees, who faced greater risks of exclusion from both the immediate social encounter and the broader work community.

Louise's experiences illustrate a recurring pattern in the empirical data, where situational exclusion is a common part of hard-of-hearing employees' daily lives. While these experiences posed added interactional struggles, they did not, for most interviewees, lead to broader exclusion from the workplace social environment.

From situational to general exclusion

However, for others, chains of situational exclusion led to a more pervasive exclusion from the social community within the workplace. The following fieldwork excerpt, featuring Tea, a woman working as an architect, illustrates a recurring pattern in which chains of situational exclusion led to a general disconnection from colleagues, shared cultural symbols, and interaction rituals. The field note, which I have divided into sections, begins just before the daily morning meeting, where employees discuss project-related challenges, and ends just after the lunch break:

The noise level rises in the open-plan office in the minutes leading up to 11 a.m., when the morning meeting usually takes place. Some of the employees stand up behind their desks. Tea stands up and takes the small round microphone, which can be connected to her hearing aids, and walks over to the television screen on the wall, where the project is presented. (...) The employees discuss the project and building regulations.

A: Are we in agreement?

B: If he uses one of the solutions the other houses have used.

C: It hurts me, and I'm not even an architect.

One employee says, "He can always use Nikolai as an adviser," triggering loud laughter. The next employee presents another project, sparking conversations in small groups among colleagues. The sounds now come from various places. Tea has returned to her desk, with her back to most of her colleagues. I don't think she has heard much of what has been happening in the meeting. The meeting is dissolved.

During the morning meeting, the rapid pace of interaction, along with scattered and overlapping conversations across the office, makes it impossible for Tea to follow her colleagues' discussions. The meeting structure does not facilitate a supportive hearing environment, and none of the colleagues provide her with keywords to aid her understanding. As a result, she withdraws to her desk while her colleagues continue discussing in smaller groups.

Beyond the professional content, Tea is also excluded from the jokes shared during the meeting, which play on the architects' aesthetic sensibilities and their encounters with inadequate advisers. Other employees describe the workplace environment as highly social and direct, where colleagues "cut right to the chase." The tone is marked by friendly teasing and is occasionally "direct" and "harsh." This joking culture revolves around employees' professional identities and shared narratives of experiences with clients and projects, evoking laughter and smiles among the rest of the team.

The joking culture is a vital aspect of daily life at the architectural office and is highly valued by employees. I view these jokes as symbols that unify the workplace and reinforce group membership. Infused with membership significance, these jokes resonate because most employees have encountered dissatisfied clients or challenging projects, and sharing such experiences fosters a collective identity. As jokes and stories are told and retold, feelings of group membership and professional pride are reinvoked, charging up employees with emotional energy. These jokes and stories function as membership symbols. Knowing them and actively participating in their retelling are important aspects of belonging to the office community. Tea tells me that she feels excluded from this community and expresses sadness about not understanding the sources of her colleagues' laughter.

Shortly after the morning meeting ends and everyone has returned to their desks, the following situation unfolds:

Leif reads from the canteen's menu on the computer screen at the other end of the office: "Curried herring, that's right up your alley, Lotte", and continues with the reading. Lotte responds, "I think I'll

buy something instead because that sounds disgusting”. A third colleague jumps into the conversation and says, “Where should we eat?” and a fourth one says, “Should we go?”

I sit next to Tea at the other end of the office. The interaction happened incredibly fast, and within a few seconds, everyone except Tea’s manager Jonas, Tea, and me has left the office. When Tea turns around, everyone is gone. She tells me that she will find out where people are eating today. She stands up and looks around. I follow her down the hallway to the kitchen, which is empty. She says that everyone is gone but that those who are here today usually eat in the small kitchen instead of the canteen. She turns around and says that she will check the lounge. Finding the lounge empty, she walks back through the hallway, where she meets a younger female colleague. Tea asks her, “Are you going to the canteen?” She answers, “No.” Tea struggles to hear her answer and asks again if she’s going to the canteen. The colleague repeats “No,” followed by a pause of several seconds, after which she says, “I’m going to the bakery” and then continues walking. Tea tells me that the others probably are getting food in the canteen and will bring it up to the kitchen afterward and says that she’s going down to get food for herself.

At the morning meeting, Tea was disconnected from the work discussions and inside jokes exchanged by her colleagues, meaning she was already behind in keeping up with the employees’ interactional rhythm. Subsequently, her colleagues offer her the necessary contextual resources to participate in lunch plans, resulting in the continuation of her interactional disconnection. In the final sequence of the field note, it becomes evident how exclusion in one situation can spill over into the next, creating a chain of situational exclusions.

I [researcher] am alone in the kitchen for some time. Then Jonas, the manager, and a few others arrive with food from the canteen. They sit on the bar chairs around the table. Shortly after, the team that went to the bakery for food returns. They discuss the price of the sandwich at the bakery: “45 DKK?! Has baking become that expensive?”

Tea comes back from the canteen as the last one joining those in the kitchen. All the bar chairs are taken, so she stands up at the end of the table and begins to eat. She says to a colleague beside her: “Did you buy it in the canteen?” while nodding at the colleague’s plate. The colleague shakes her head and says, “No, it’s from home.” She doesn’t look at Tea while answering but down at her food. I interpret it as a dismissive response. I don’t think Tea can hear what she’s saying when she isn’t looking at her while speaking.

Conversation flows quickly around the table in the small kitchen, and a story about a costomer who made a terrible mistake on a building project continues from the morning meeting. They are discussing disputes with insurance companies, and telling stories about buildings attacked by mold and natural disasters. The employees complement each other, speaking in frequencies with short pauses or overlap. Tea has not joined the conversation since she asked the younger colleague about her food. She stands and observes the others. (...)

People start to stand up and pack away their leftovers. Tea asks a colleague to her left if she should take his plate down to the canteen together with her own dishes. The colleague declines, saying that he is going down anyway. Tea turns to Jonas the manager, who is sitting to her right, and asks if she should take his plate down. Jonas says yes, and he places his plate on top of Tea’s. Tea goes to the canteen, and I return to the office.

In the latter field note excerpt, the disconnection from social interactions continues as Tea struggles to follow the threads of the ongoing conversation. The continued absence of

“previous activity formulating” from her colleagues makes it even more difficult for Tea to join the conversation. During my fieldwork, she often expressed how discussions like this – marked by rapid exchanges and overlapping interactions – were nearly impossible for her to keep up with. Her colleagues engage in chains of interaction rituals that reinforce their group membership and energize them by sharing work stories about customers or reviving inside jokes about bad advisers (“He can always use Nikolai as an advisor”) and professional narratives (“It hurts me, and I’m not even an architect”.) Meanwhile, Tea finds herself caught in chains of situational exclusions.

The three field notes from a day at the architectural office illustrate a pattern in the data where hard-of-hearing employees become caught in chains of situational exclusion, leading to an overall estrangement from workplace cultural symbols, such as jokes and narratives. In both formal and informal interactions, they miss out on specific knowledge related to work life and personal stories. Collins describes this as particularized cultural capital and identifies it as one of the most important forms of interaction rituals in the world of work, particularly in how cultural symbols acquire membership significance (Collins 2014:86–87). Jokes and narratives function as cultural symbols that, through telling and retelling, become recharged with emotional energy and strengthen group cohesion. Knowledge about the exchanged narratives – who plays which roles in them, how the plot unfolds, and what emotions are involved – is therefore crucial for participating in rituals that create group solidarity.

Lacking this particular knowledge creates a distance from the work community. Some hard-of-hearing employees described the experience as being able to sense tensions between colleagues or the atmosphere of a group conversation but without understanding what is actually happening. This disconnection from workplace symbols is self-reinforcing; unfamiliarity with jokes and stories leaves individuals without a conversational entry point. For example, when Tea is excluded from lunchtime conversations due to her earlier disconnection during the morning meeting, she cannot catch up on prior stories or jokes as her colleagues do on their way to the canteen or around the lunch table.

It is important to note that Tea did not feel excluded at work all the time. There were moments when her colleagues made efforts to include her through small gestures of interactional sympathy:

Interviewer: Can you remember a situation where you felt included as part of the community [at work]?

Tea: Yes, but it doesn't happen very often, as I mentioned, because there's a lot that I don't understand. But sometimes, when we're in smaller groups, I can hear what's going on, when people are laughing, and then I can laugh along. Or when I can sense that there is an interest in having me included, and they ask me something to involve me. Then I feel that they're thinking about making me feel more included.

Interviewer: Can you remember a specific situation?

Tea: There are very small things, as I mentioned earlier. When we were driving to a colleague's summer house, the fact that they showed "we're aware that you can't hear us, so you can decide where you want to sit" [in the car]. And they tried to summarize the dialogue when they talked to each other. Then I could have a conversation with them and felt included.

I include this passage to illustrate the heterogeneity in Tea's case and to demonstrate that she sometimes felt part of the work community, partly due to improved auditory environments and partly because her colleagues made efforts to include her through sympathy gestures. Tea's colleagues believed it was important to include her in conversations during work and breaks. However, they also expressed how disrupted interactions could be emotionally draining for them, requiring emotion work to suppress unwanted feelings of irritation and frustration or to cultivate sentiments of sympathy, patience, and calmness (as elaborated in Thing b 2025). While Tea did not always feel excluded, this does not negate the fact that most of the time she felt disconnected from the workplace symbols – such as inside jokes and narratives – resulting in a general exclusion from the workplace community.

Tea's case illustrates a pattern in the data where hard-of-hearing employees become caught in chains of situational exclusion, leading to an overall estrangement from workplace cultural symbols and the workplace community.

Troubles in the exchange of sympathy

This section examines two distinct troubles faced by hard-of-hearing employees in workplace sympathy exchanges.

The first trouble regarding sympathy exchanges between hard-of-hearing employees and their non-hard-of-hearing colleagues is the difficulty in generating sympathy debts, thereby widening one's sympathy margin through sharing and receiving personal stories. According to Clark, creating a sympathy margin is essential for receiving the sympathy needed from others.

In the architectural office, there is a culture of exchanging personal stories, covering topics such as children, holidays, and more sensitive issues like illness, dieting, and conflicts with customers. These conversations usually take place among a few colleagues but are overheard by others nearby, who may later follow up on the topics discussed. Like many individuals with

significant hearing loss, Tea lacks passive hearing, meaning she cannot gather information about her colleagues' private and professional lives from second-hand conversations. Instead, she must stop her work, look at the speaker, and concentrate on following the interaction – a task often unfeasible in the presence of background noise or when the speaker is not facing her directly.

The following field note excerpt illustrates a sympathy exchange between colleagues in the office. Such exchanges can strengthen social bonds among those involved, while other employees who listen passively may use the information in subsequent sympathy exchanges.

Jonas, the manager, is sitting at the desk in front of me and Tea. A female employee enters from the hallway to ask him a work-related question. She is breathing heavily and appears out of breath. Jonas asks if the stairs were difficult to climb. The woman's face contorts into a grimace, and she gasps as she holds back tears, explaining that she just received the results of a medical test showing her husband is not ill. She begins to cry and says she can't handle any more illness or death. Jonas remains seated in his office chair behind the desk while the woman stands beside him. He replies that it is good the test was negative, though he seems slightly uncomfortable with the situation. The woman returns to her desk. A female colleague sitting nearby leans over and asks her about the process of the test and how long they had to wait for the results. Still crying, the woman talks about another family member's illness. The two women discuss their fear of illness and the experience of waiting for the test results for a few minutes.

According to Clark, interactions like these are an important way social actors cultivate sympathy credits and widen their sympathy margin. Tea was sitting by my side, able to see her colleague as she approached Jonas but unable to decipher the content of the interactions. By being cut off from the daily interaction rituals in the office, she misses essential information about her colleagues' personal lives, which is necessary for offering more personalized sympathy gestures. When I spoke with Tea, she expressed sadness at not being enabled to keep up with colleagues' informal exchanges about personal problems and everyday office talk. She felt as though her colleagues were keeping secrets from her.

Tea's case exemplifies a recurring pattern in the data whereby hard-of-hearing employees are excluded from the interaction rituals through which they could acquire the contextual knowledge needed to generate sympathy debts. Such contextual knowledge includes references to stories about illness, everyday struggles, or difficult clients.

During my fieldwork, I observed that Tea was exceptionally considerate and attentive to my needs. She always helped me find a seat, invited me to join her for coffee or lunch, and inquired about my weekend. On one occasion, I got my foot tangled in a computer cable and ended up falling right in the middle of the open workspace. Even though I tried to laugh it off, Tea responded with genuine concern, asking if I was all right. My point is that it is not a lack of

willingness on Tea's part to offer sympathy gestures to her colleagues; rather, because she is often excluded from the biographical details and personal stories exchanged among colleagues, her gestures are limited to more superficial acts, like offering to take plates to the canteen after lunch or to get coffee. In this way, the lack of resources for generating sympathy debts contributes to a self-reinforcing cycle of exclusion.

Sarah, a hard-of-hearing physiotherapist, provides another example of how challenges with passive listening can result in a lack of information about colleagues' personal lives. She often avoids eating lunch with the majority of her colleagues due to difficulties in following conversations during lunch breaks while also concentrating on eating. However, once a week, she makes an effort to join the group in order to be part of the social environment at the workplace:

Interviewer: What are your thoughts on contributing [to the lunch talk]? Is it something you have to push yourself to do?

Sarah: Yes, it actually is. Yes. Also, because I need to know something about the people I'm with, and I sometimes find it a bit embarrassing that so many months have passed and I still don't know much [about my colleagues]. There are some people I've barely spoken to. On the other hand, I also think, "When should I find out?" So I do ask occasionally, though in a rather cautious manner.

In this way, the lack of information about her colleagues makes it harder for Sarah to form a closer bond with them and engage in strong sympathy exchanges.

This is a pattern in the empirical material, where hard-of-hearing employees are left out of informal office conversations in which colleagues share personal and professional concerns – information necessary for cultivating sympathy debts among colleagues. The pattern leaves them with a narrower sympathy margin, making it even more difficult to claim sympathy from colleagues regarding their hearing loss and, in turn, increasing their vulnerability to further exclusion. The trouble in generating sympathy debt thus contributes, for some hard-of-hearing employees, to a vicious circle of exclusion and withheld sympathy from hearing colleagues.

The second trouble faced by hard-of-hearing employees in workplace sympathy exchanges is the ongoing need for interactional sympathy gestures in a work environment dominated by non-hard-of-hearing employees.

Based on empirical studies of sympathy exchanges, Clark finds that owners of long-term problems, such as elderly or chronically ill people, may struggle to receive the consistent sympathy their situations warrant (Clark 1997:165). In workplaces where interactional norms did not support the inclusion of hard-of-hearing employees, many of the hard-of-hearing

interviewees had to repeatedly ask their colleagues to make various interactional adjustments. This process was generally energy-consuming, and some eventually gave up repeating their requests.

According to Clark, even legitimate sympathy claims can deplete sympathy accounts if too much sympathy is claimed for a single issue or over too long a time. Thus, the combination of the two troubles generating sympathy debt exchanges of personal stories together with the ongoing need for sympathy gestures related to hearing loss places hard-of-hearing employees in a precarious position within the workplace's socioemotional economy.

Discussion & conclusion

The article highlights how small gestures of sympathy can decisively influence the situational inclusion or exclusion of hard-of-hearing employees. It demonstrates that situational exclusion is a recurring aspect of their daily work lives, subjecting them to interactional struggles. For some, these situations do not necessarily lead to broader exclusion from the workplace community. However, for others, chains of situational exclusions result in cumulative estrangement from workplace cultural symbols, such as jokes and narratives, ultimately leading to social exclusion.

The analysis also reveals how a limited capacity for passive listening in hearing-dominated environments can exclude hard-of-hearing employees from interactions where colleagues share personal and professional concerns. Restricted access to the information necessary for cultivating sympathy debts risks creating a self-reinforcing cycle of exclusion. Furthermore, an ongoing need for inclusive gestures from colleagues may put some hard-of-hearing employees at risk of depleting their sympathy accounts.

The findings align with existing qualitative research on workplace exclusion, which shows how individuals with disabilities experience social exclusion in workplace interactions (Christensen and Amilon 2023; Hansen 2008; Naraine and Lindsay 2011; Richards 2012). Some processes of situational exclusion resemble those described by blind and low-vision employees in Naraine and Lindsay's (2011) article. However, while Naraine and Lindsay primarily attribute the lack of co-worker support to "traditional misconceptions and fears" about blindness (2011:400), this article highlights the properties of the interaction rituals as a supplementary cause of exclusion. The present analysis demonstrates how some hard-of-hearing employees are relegated to the periphery of workplace interaction rituals due to companies' physical and social infrastructures. This process parallels an account in Naraine and Lindsay's article, in

which an interviewee describes not feeling “purposely excluded” when colleagues shared vacation photos (2011:397). Nonetheless, able-bodied interaction rituals, such as circulating at social events and using body language and gestures, left interviewees in their study excluded.

Using hard-of-hearing employees as what Stake (1995:445) terms an “instrumental case” may provide insight into disrupted interactions and failed interaction rituals more broadly. Employees with hearing loss offer exceptionally rich information on the mechanisms of disrupted interaction, failed interaction rituals, and the associated risks of social exclusion, constituting an “extreme case” (Flyvbjerg 2006:229). This case study thus helps illuminate interactional processes of social exclusion in the workplace and their consequences. However, I will highlight two limitations of the article related to the choice of case.

The first limitation is that the analysis may overemphasize disruptions in the flow of interaction as the cause of failed interaction rituals due to the choice of employees with hearing loss as the case. This effect might have been less pronounced if a different group had been chosen. This could mean that the article’s findings apply more to other groups facing challenges in the interactional flow, such as individuals with speech, sensory, or cognitive impairments; employees engaged in mediated interactions; remote workers; or employees experiencing language barriers.

For example, research on mediated interactions shows that delayed real-time feedback and the absence of non-verbal cues can weaken the ability to achieve synchronicity with others (Bailenson 2021; Collins 2020; Vandenberg 2022; Vandenberg, Berghman, and Schaap 2021), resulting in failed interaction rituals. Furthermore, the lack of physical presence with colleagues sometimes causes remote workers to experience social exclusion (O’Reilly and Banki 2016:137). However, while mediated interaction rituals and those of remote workers differ from those studied in this article in terms of lack of co-presence, some overlaps might exist in the weakened ability to achieve rhythmic entrainment with colleagues and its accumulative effect.

Another example of a group that may face challenges in the interactional flow is migrant employees. Research on migrants’ experiences of accessing and retaining work while not speaking their first language in some respects also resembles the findings of this article. Research shows that employees speaking their second or third language risk inadvertently breaking social norms, due to late acquisition of necessary linguistic habitus (Angouri 2023:4). Sounding and speaking differently than the majority at the workplace may entail social

sanctions, termed the “linguistic penalty” (Angouri 2023:4). While the experiences of migrant and hard-of-hearing employees may differ significantly, depending on their other social categorizations, they may share similarities in lacking ritual privilege in social interactions and the resulting risk of being socially estranged from work communities. Some of the mechanisms of the troubles in the emotional gift exchange and the processes of exclusion might therefore be transferable to other groups of employees facing challenges in the interactional flow.

Another limitation of the case is its limited focus on mechanisms of successful sympathy gift exchange between minority and majority groups. The bottom-up recruitment process for hard-of-hearing participants may have led to a greater representation of individuals who experience hearing loss as a significant challenge in their daily lives. A top-down recruitment strategy through organizations might have yielded more examples of interactional inclusion. A strategic sampling of exemplary cases of interactional inclusion in workplaces could provide valuable insight into the processes through which sympathy exchanges between minority and majority groups result in successful interaction rituals. However, further research is needed to explore how such sympathy exchanges can strengthen social bonds between minority and majority groups of employees.

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The cost of sympathy – Coworkers' attempts to include hard-of-hearing employees in the workplace

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Abstract:

Research demonstrates that disabled people, across different functional impairments, face social exclusion within the workplace. However, there remains a lack of understanding regarding the mechanisms and reasons behind these exclusionary processes. Drawing insights from the sociology of emotions and microsociology, I examine interactional attempts to include hard-of-hearing employees in conversations through the lens of sympathy. Through ethnographic fieldwork conducted in two workplaces and 29 interviews with hard-of-hearing employees from 19 different workplaces, as well as with colleagues and managers without hearing loss, I find that demonstrating sympathy carries costs such as restrained emotional buildup, emotional exhaustion, and efforts to manage emotions. The analysis suggests that the lack of social inclusiveness cannot be attributed solely to stigmatisation and a lack of knowledge about disabilities among workplace colleagues. It also stems from the unwillingness of colleagues to actively engage in the interactional challenges associated with displaying sympathy due to failed interaction rituals. These results underscore the significance of companies fostering environments that facilitate strong interaction rituals for employees with diverse functional impairments and suggest structural changes at the company level to avoid reliance on individual employees to achieve workplace inclusion.

Key words:

Sympathy, Workplace Inclusion, Hearing Loss, Disability, Interaction

Introduction

This article seeks to enhance micro-sociological understandings of the situational exclusion experienced by employees with disabilities in the workplace. Specifically, I draw on insights from the sociology of emotions (Clark 1987, 1997; Hochschild 2003) and microsociology (Collins 2014) to examine coworkers' attempts to include hard-of-hearing employees in conversations. I analyse these efforts through the concept of sympathy as emotional gift-giving, as articulated by Candace Clark (1997). Sympathy is a complex of emotions that are especially important in times of trouble because it has the power to connect people, or if claims are not met, to separate them (Clark 1997:5). Like money and other resources, sympathy is a limited and scarce resource; it requires emotion work and mental energy, so people limit their expenditures according to culturally defined principles (Clark 1997:132). These processes establish a socioemotional economy—a system akin to the monetary economy—for the exchange of emotional resources or 'gifts' (Clark 1997:20).

Research demonstrates that disabled people, spanning various functional impairments, face exclusion within the workplace (Fevre et al. 2013; Lindsay et al. 2023; Robert and Harlan 2006). This exclusion is not limited to the physical environment; it also extends to social arenas, affecting the ability to be part of social communities and engage in informal conversations (Dammeyer et al. 2019; Mik-Meyer 2016b; Naraine and Lindsay 2011). Nevertheless, there remains a lack of understanding regarding the mechanisms and reasons underlying these exclusionary processes. This form of social exclusion, extensively documented at a macro level, is continuously produced and negotiated on a micro level within interaction situations (Collins 2014). Displaying sympathy towards hard-of-hearing colleagues may involve speaking more slowly and articulately than usual, showing patience, or purposefully maintaining eye contact during an interaction. Sympathy gifts such as these are displayed and withheld in patterned ways, holding significant implications for hard-of-hearing employees.

In addition to Clark's concept of sympathy as emotional gift-giving, I employ Randall Collins' interaction ritual theory as a theoretical framework to investigate workplace interactions. The notion of interaction ritual describes a process where individuals, with varying degrees of success, become entrained in each other's bodily rhythms and emotions by directing their attention to a mutual focus (Collins 2014:47). This notion encompasses a wide range of situations, provided that four main ingredients exist: 1) the presence of two or more people; 2) boundaries indicating insiders and outsiders of the group; 3) a shared focus of attention on an object or activity; 4) a shared emotional state or mood (Collins 2014:47–48). The concept of interaction rituals proves particularly valuable in unveiling some of the micro-processes of exclusion of hard-of-hearing employees acknowledged in quantitative research but remaining black-boxed in terms of the reasons and mechanisms underlying them. The central question this article addresses is the following: What is the cost of displaying sympathy towards hard-of-hearing employees in the workplace?

The article is based on four months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Denmark at two workplaces, as well as 29 interviews with hard-of-hearing employees, their non-hard-of-hearing colleagues, and managers. The findings illustrate that demonstrating sympathy carries costs such as restrained emotional buildup, emotional exhaustion, and efforts to manage emotions. The costs associated with displaying sympathy hinder colleagues' active involvement in efforts to include hard-of-hearing employees in conversations, resulting in situational exclusion for this group. The article indicates that social exclusion is not solely a product of stigma and colleagues' lack of awareness about disabilities. Failed inclusion of hard-

of-hearing employees also arises from colleagues' reluctance to engage in the interactive challenges of demonstrating sympathy due to failed interactional rituals. It will be argued that companies should focus on creating environments that facilitate strong interaction rituals for employees with diverse functional impairments.

In the next section, I will outline existing research within the field of workplace inclusion of people with disabilities after which the theoretical framework and methodological procedures are presented. The analysis initially delves into the workplace feeling rules related to displaying sympathy towards hard-of-hearing employees, followed by an exploration of the associated costs of displaying sympathy.

Workplace ableism and interactional exclusion

Since the introduction of the 'social model of disability' (Oliver 1990), disability research has increasingly shifted its focus from individuals with functional impairments to their surrounding social environments. The 'social model of disability' emerged as a critique of the 'medical model', which primarily concentrates on the functional impairments of individuals rather than on social and relational aspects (Oliver 1990). Through the lens of the 'social model of disability', social science research has begun examining how society has disabled people with various functional variations through discriminatory processes (Barnes 2005; Fevre et al. 2013; Lindsay et al. 2023; Mik-Meyer 2016b). This body of research has revealed that employees with disabilities are more likely to face ill-treatment at work compared with their non-disabled counterparts (Fevre et al. 2013) and to encounter workplace ableism, defined as 'unwanted, exploitative or abusive conduct against people with disabilities that violates their dignity and security or creates intimidating or offensive environments' (Lindsay et al. 2023:22).

Another line of research has shed light on how organisational cultures and settings shape discriminatory practices (Robert and Harlan 2006; Schur and Kruse 2009; Stone and Colella 1996). An illustrative example is found in the study by Robert and Harlan (2006), which demonstrates how processes of discrimination operate within organisations. They distinguish between two types of discrimination mechanisms: interpersonal and organisational. Interpersonal mechanisms of discrimination function by altering colleagues' and managers' beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions of disability, leading to behaviours such as marginalisation, fictionalisation, and harassment. In contrast, organisational mechanisms of discrimination facilitate these behaviours through policies, procedures, rules, decisions, and systems of resource and reward allocation (Robert and Harlan 2006:602).

Other streams of research have explored how people with sensory disabilities face challenges in interacting with colleagues at work (Naraine and Lindsay 2011; Olsson et al. 2021; Rosenmeier and Hansen 2016). Interpreting subtle verbal and non-verbal gestures can be particularly challenging, increasing the risk of social exclusion (Hansen 2008; Jepsen and Liebst 2021; Naraine and Lindsay 2011; Olsson et al. 2021). Research on employees with hearing loss indicates a lower employment rate compared with the general population (Christensen 2006; Dammeyer et al. 2019; Shan et al. 2020) and highlights issues related to loneliness (Rosenmeier and Hansen 2016) and challenges with informal communication at work (Bengtsson, Clausen, and Pedersen 2024; Christensen 2006; Christensen and Amilon 2023; Dammeyer et al. 2019; Rosenmeier and Hansen 2016).

It is thus well established that disabled employees frequently encounter discrimination and exclusion in the workplace. Furthermore, current research consistently demonstrates that hard-of-hearing employees, as well as employees with sensory disabilities more broadly, encounter significant difficulties in being part of the social community at work and participating in informal conversations during breaks and social events. However, there is currently a limited understanding of the interactional processes leading to situational exclusion.

Disability, assistance, and the emotions involved

The concepts of care, assistance, help, or support have been extensively debated in disability studies and feminist scholarship in the last decades (Shakespeare 2006:135-52). The concept and definitions of ‘care’ are inherently political in a society that values personal autonomy and individuality (Kittay 2011:55; Shakespeare 2006:137). The disabled people’s movement prefers terms like help, support, or assistance (Watson et al. 2004:336) to remove the emotional aspects from practical tasks (Shakespeare 2006:139). This perspective emerged as a reaction against disabled people’s social dependence on kindness and charity (Shakespeare 2006:135-6;145) expressed in the parole ‘Piss on pity!’ (Hughes 2012:71). Hence, assistance accompanied by certain types of emotions can result in a form of social oppression (Mik-Meyer 2016a). Feminist scholars have critiqued this move away from emotionally connotated terms for help for eclipsing how care takes place in relationships between people, which inevitably involves emotional involvement and reciprocity (Kittay 2011; Watson et al. 2004). Kittay proposes an ethic of care that acknowledges how all human beings, to varying degrees, inevitably depend on their relations and an ethic that strives towards cooperation rather than interdependence and autonomy (Kittay 2011:55).

The emotions of pity, compassion, empathy, and sympathy have some similarities, and some of these terms are used interchangeably (Clark 1997:294; Frevert 2011:177). While the emotion of pity had a positive connotation when it was first used in the 13th century to describe feelings of sorrow for the suffering of others, the meaning has changed over time to imply condescending or contemptuous feelings towards individuals' misfortunes (Gerdes 2011:233). Hughes (2012) describes pity as one of the 'building blocks of the emotional infrastructure of ableism' (Hughes 2012:68), as it is a hierarchizing emotion in which the giver elevates oneself to a position of superiority and subordinates the recipient (Hughes 2012:71).

In contrast, empathy is described by psychologists and neuroscientists as the capacity humans evolve when they are old enough to differentiate between themselves and others (Frevert 2011:150). It is the capacity to enter another person's emotional state by putting oneself in their position. In this way, empathy does not necessitate any positive concern for the other (Frevert 2011:178). In her analysis of the history of emotions, Frevert describes empathy as the basis for emotions such as sympathy and compassion (Frevert 2011:179), aligning with Clark's conceptualisation of empathy (Clark 1997:34-35).

On the contrary, compassion is defined as an emotion that entails an orientation to intervene and help, without necessarily feeling what the other person feels. It is a pro-social emotion triggered by the other (Frevert 2011:150; 179). Hochschild (2003) argues that compassion is an emotion felt towards someone considered equal, whereas pity is an emotion felt towards someone considered inferior (Hochschild 2003:235). However, in her research on the exchange of sympathy, Clark contends that her respondents used the words *compassion*, *pity* and *sympathy* interchangeably in relation to individuals occupying various places in status hierarchies (Clark 1987:294).

Clark characterises sympathy as a multifaceted emotional complex, which can consist of a variety of different sentiments (Clark 1997:17). Clark's concepts of sympathy and emotional gift-giving enable the analysis of gestures, which may or may not be accompanied by sentiments. For instance, the gesture of giving flowers can be viewed as a sympathy gift, regardless of whether it is accompanied by sympathetic sentiments. Similarly, interactional gestures such as reiterating, speaking slowly, or demonstrating patience can be considered sympathy gifts, irrespective of the accompanying emotions. The concept of sympathy is especially suitable to unfold the processes of inclusion within, for instance, a work context, where employees are asked, directly or indirectly, to show different kinds of consideration

towards their colleagues. In this way, the theory of sympathy touches upon issues of justice and morality as culturally scripted rules that can entail certain costs (Clark 1997:16). Like extending pity, offering sympathy can also be used to belittle the recipient, by highlighting the donor's good character and the recipient's inferior place (Clark 2004:404; 411). Thus, the act of giving or withholding sympathy changes meaning based on how it is performed (Clark 2004:405).

In alignment with the feminist critique (Kittay 2011), I aim to recognise the emotional dimensions inherent in exchanges of assistance between colleagues with and without hearing loss. Despite nearly all hard-of-hearing interviewees in this study (except one) using assistive technologies, interpreters, and a personal assistant, they still need cooperation from colleagues to be included; for instance, they require coworkers to speak slowly, reiterate, or maintain eye contact. I examine these gestures as sympathy gifts and explore the emotional aspects of these exchanges and the existing feeling rules.

Sympathy and the socioemotional economy

By engaging in the sharing of problems and offering sympathy, these exchanges foster the development of social bonds and networks, providing the social glue that knits groups and societies closer together (Clark 1997:17). The process of giving sympathy can be enacted in numerous ways but consists of three components: empathy, sympathy sentiment, and display (Clark 1997:32-33). In defining empathy, Clark draws upon Mead's concept of role-taking and confines it to the ability to place oneself in another person's position. While empathy is a crucial element in the sympathy process, it cannot make up sympathy without one of the other components (Clark 1997:34-35). The second component, sympathy sentiments, encompasses other-oriented emotions that emerge in response to others' problems or distress (Clark 1997:44). The final component, display, involves the outward expression of sympathy, an interaction that can strengthen social bonds and reinforce group solidarity (Clark 1997:57). Giving sympathy can be draining, an obligation prescribed by culturally written rules. Individuals may find themselves required to manage and work up sympathy to align with prevailing feeling rules, a concept Hochschild refers to as *emotion work* (Hochschild 2003). When such efforts prove ineffective, individuals may resort to *surface acting*, wherein only the outward display of the emotion is performed, rather than an authentic sentiment (Clark 1997:13).

Typically, sympathy is accompanied by social expectations, requiring the sympathizee to display gratitude or deference, or to reciprocate with future sympathy. Different logics of exchange exist among close friends, colleagues, or strangers, but most often an element of reciprocity is in place (Clark 1997:132). The socioemotional economy operates under culturally specific rules and logics that guide individuals in determining what is considered fair and appropriate (Clark 1997:132), referred to by Hochschild as *feeling rules*. Hochschild defines feeling rules as cultural scripts that direct how one *should* feel in different situations. (Hochschild 2003:56). These rules become apparent when breached, and others or we ourselves sanction our emotional display or declare a ‘rule reminder’ (Hochschild 1979:564), such as ‘we should all sympathize with her difficult situation’. Alternatively, they become visible when we try to manage our expressions and feelings in ways that better correspond to what is expected of us (Hochschild 2003:57). These rules and logics are negotiated, produced, and reproduced in everyday interaction, a process that in itself is a morality constructing one (Clark 1997:22).

In the following analysis, only the type of sympathy that is displayed will be explored, encompassing both ‘surface’ sympathy without sympathy sentiments (Clark 1997:34) and sympathy with all three components: empathy, sentiment, and display. I choose to focus on displayed sympathy based on its capacity to create situational inclusion in the workplace, or if withheld, situational exclusion. Acknowledging that sympathy giving typically involves an emotional exchange, the present analysis focuses primarily on the costs associated with displaying sympathy⁸. This paper investigates how a limited ability to engage in passive listening in a hearing environment excludes hard-of-hearing employees from informal office conversations, where colleagues share personal and professional concerns. This lack of information, necessary for cultivating sympathy debts among colleagues, risks contributing to a self-reinforcing cycle of exclusion.

Interaction ritual and emotional energy

According to Randall Collins, successful interaction rituals create a state of intersubjectivity among participating individuals, where their shared focus and emotional state mutually reinforce each other (Collins 2014:48). To the extent that the ritual is successful, it generates group solidarity, emotional energy, symbols that characterize the group, and a sense of morality (Collins 2014:49). Collins describes emotional energy as a spectrum, ranging from

⁸ For further insights into the exchange and replenishment of sympathy for hard-of-hearing employees see Thing unpublished

high emotional energy characterised by confidence, enthusiasm, and positive self-feelings, to the middle range characterised by normality and, finally, the low end of the spectrum characterised by depression, lack of initiative, and negative self-feelings (Collins 2014:108). Similar to our attraction to strong, successful rituals, we are repelled by rituals that have previously exhibited low emotional energy (Collins 2014:51). The judgement of whether or not a ritual is successful, as well as the inclination to seek strong rituals over failed ones, is often not a result of conscious calculation but rather a felt experience (Collins 2014:119). Taking a micro-sociological perspective on the subject of inclusion does not negate the existence of social structures such as ableism and their stratifying effect. On the contrary, this perspective argues that social structures are continually constructed, reproduced, and changed through micro-situations. The events that unfold in one situation have a spillover effect on subsequent situations, creating chains of situations that eventually constitute macro patterns (Collins 2014:5). These patterns, such as status hierarchies, are enacted in interactions at the micro-level (Kemper and Collins 1990:).

Material and methods

Interviews, fieldwork sites, and permissions

I have conducted interactionist semi-structured interviews (Holstein and Gubrium 1995) with hard-of-hearing employees, their colleagues, and their managers from different Danish work environments. Additionally, I have conducted fieldwork at two workplaces in Denmark. The interview sample consists, then, of 19 hard-of-hearing employees from 19 workplaces, 5 non-hard-of-hearing colleagues, 2 non-hard-of-hearing managers, and 1 hearing consultant. The colleagues and managers without hearing loss were sampled from the two fieldwork sites. Additionally, I conducted follow-up interviews with the 2 hard-of-hearing employees observed during fieldwork, resulting in a total of 29 interviews.

I strategically sampled (Staunæs and Søndergaard 2005) hard-of-hearing employees positioned differently in the field in terms of job descriptions, gender, education, and the size of the workplace, to include different circumstances that could influence interactions at work.

The hard-of-hearing interviewees were recruited through three separate channels: 1) A post in a Facebook group owned by The Danish Association of the Hard of Hearing; 2) A consultant at Castberggård, which is a private service for individuals of working age with hearing loss; 3) Snowball sampling through existing interviewees. I sent an information letter regarding the research project and practical information to the selected interviewees. The letter outlined the

interview subjects, encompassing each interviewee's background, hearing loss story, and professional life. A couple of days before the scheduled interview, I requested that the participant reflect on and prepare three work-related situations where hearing loss played a role, either positively or negatively. I requested the interviewees to recall as many details as possible from these situations. This preparatory step aimed to guide interviewees to think about concrete events and to produce palpable data (Small and Calarco 2022:80-98) about situations and interactions, in line with the micro-sociological framing of the project. I obtained oral consent from all interviewees before the start of each interview after informing them about the research project, the storage of data, the process of changing identifiable characteristics, and the right to withdraw from the study at any given point.

While I did not have a predefined number of interviewees in mind at the outset, I ended the interview process of hard-of-hearing employees after conducting 19 interviews, when it became apparent that similar stories, emotions, and situations were recurring (Staunæs and Søndergaard 2005). Nonetheless, I still lacked knowledge about the other side of the interaction as well as the process of disrupted interaction. Subsequently, I commenced interviews with colleagues and managers, while also planning the fieldwork.

The fieldwork provided detailed data on interactions within their natural context, including information on sequences of events and their interrelation (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). Interviews complemented this by offering insights into emotions associated with both successful and unsuccessful interactions – details not always observable externally. The interview data also facilitated the identification of patterns across individual characteristics and work environments, involving the categorisation of similar and dissimilar emotions and experiences across the field (Maxwell and Miller 2008).

I selected an architectural firm and a daycare centre⁹ as the two sites for the fieldwork. The fieldwork sites varied in both auditory environments and employees' educational backgrounds, offering a diverse range of interaction situations. In choosing the number of fieldwork sites, I prioritised hours of exposure (Small and Calarco 2022:18-20) over the number of sites. I aimed to establish good contact with individuals at both workplaces, spending a combined total of

⁹ Childcare services for children aged 2 years and 10 months to 5 years in Denmark.

150-175 hours at the field sites to gain a grounded understanding of interactions among colleagues.

I obtained access to the workplaces through individuals with hearing loss whom I already had interviewed. I acquired informed consent and established trust with the hard-of-hearing employees before seeking permission from their workplace managers. This bottom-up recruitment strategy aimed to prevent any pressure on employees to participate in the research.

The first fieldwork site, an architectural firm, is situated in a large building that houses various offices sharing a common canteen. The workplace is divided into several open-plan offices, where desks are arranged in rows facing each other, with computer screens back to back. In the office where I conducted fieldwork, there are 12 workstations. Employees do not have assigned seats and have the option to work from home. All employees hold higher education degrees, and they collaborate across different professional backgrounds. There is a constant hum of voices in the office, some engaged in professional discussions while others share personal anecdotes. The noise level rises significantly when someone is on the phone, which often is the case.

The other field site, a daycare centre, is a two-storey building with an outdoor playground area. The employees primarily consist of educators with similar educational backgrounds, alongside helpers without postsecondary education and educator assistants. Each employee has a designated area in one of the daycare centre rooms, so the employees are grouped into smaller teams. Interaction between employees is mainly limited to coordinating daily activities, meetings, and breaks. The employees have lunch with the children and take breaks in rotation in a staff room.

Data

The interviewees were positioned differently in the field. In terms of educational background: 1 had no formal vocational or higher education, 2 had completed vocational training, 12 had a medium-cycle higher education/ professional bachelor education, and 12 had a long cycle higher education. 20 of the interviewees were women while 7 were men. All hard-of-hearing employees in the study had diagnosed hearing loss to varying degrees, with all but one using assistive technologies at work. However, for most people with hearing loss, assistive hearing technologies cannot fully compensate for the loss, and situations will arise where it is difficult to keep up with verbal communication. Thus, hearing loss as a functional variation becomes a social problem when hard-of-hearing employees are disabled from participating in interactions

and social communities. The disabling emerges when these employees cannot participate on equal terms within their social environment. Thus, hard-of-hearing employees speaking sign language can be in a workplace where the primary language is signing and not experience being disabled (Scully 2020). In the present study, however, I focus on employees with hearing loss who work in environments where spoken Danish predominates, which is the case for most hard-of-hearing employees in Denmark. The sample also includes deaf informants with cochlear implants.

Interviews with hard-of-hearing employees took place before the fieldwork phase (fall/winter 2022), while interviews with colleagues, managers, and the hearing consultant were conducted during the fieldwork phase. The interviews with hard-of-hearing employees lasted, on average, 80 minutes, while the interviews with colleagues, managers, and the hearing consultant were slightly shorter on average. All interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed.

My observations at the two field sites took place from January 2023 to April 2023. During the fieldwork phase, I visited the fieldwork sites 1-2 times a week for about 6-7 hours per visit. I spent approximately 90-105 hours at the daycare centre over two months (January & February 2023) and subsequently around 60-70 hours at the architectural firm (March & April 2023).

Data analysis

When analysing the material, I used a combination of categorising and connecting moves (Maxwell and Miller 2008). I coded all of the empirical material consisting of interview transcripts and field notes using the Nvivo software. The first round of coding included codes such as 'Communicative disruption', 'Inclusion/exclusion' and 'Consideration'. A second round of coding was conducted through an abductive process (Timmermans and Tavory 2012), which involved being attentive to surprising elements in the empirical material and adding supplementary theoretical perspectives on sympathy and emotional gift-giving (Clark 1987) throughout the fieldwork. This round included sub-codes such as 'the cost of consideration' and 'the meaning of consideration'. Finally, a third round of coding was conducted on selected codes from the second round. In this phase, sub-codes were developed related to 'the cost of consideration' forming the foundation for the present analysis. These sub-codes are abductively constructed, informed by the overall concept of failed interaction rituals, and include 'restrained emotional buildup', 'emotional exhaustion', and 'efforts to manage emotions'. The codes allowed me to compare similarities and differences between interaction rituals and experiences of inclusion and exclusion across different work contexts (Maxwell and Miller

2008). At the same time, my analysis of the fieldwork and fieldwork notes was characterised by what Maxwell and Miller term ‘connecting strategies’, where I read the notes in their original order and identified key situations and the relationships among them (Maxwell and Miller 2008:467). This strategy allowed me not to lose sight of the context and sequences of events and the relationships between them, as well as to compare situations in different contexts with each other.

Informed by existing research and an interview with a hearing consultant, I recognised hearing loss as a stigmatised functional impairment often associated with shame. Thus, it was crucial to conduct fieldwork with sensitivity, prioritising issues of consent and stigma. The current study employs a contextual and situational approach to ethics, which is embedded in practice at every stage of the research (Kvale and Brinkmann 2015:112-15). Identifiable characteristics of informants’ workplaces, along with their age, name, geographical location, and, in some cases, gender, have been altered.

The cost of sympathy

The feeling rule of giving sympathy to hard-of-hearing colleagues

Overall, there existed a shared understanding across hard-of-hearing employees and their colleagues about the general obligation to show sympathy towards hard-of-hearing employees by actively including them. This feeling rule was expressed either directly—as one informant with hearing loss was told by his colleague ‘We also have a responsibility to be heard’—or indirectly, manifested in interviews through participants’ recollections of attempts to alleviate unwelcome emotions like frustration and annoyance stemming from interactional misunderstandings. Signe, a non-hard-of-hearing employee, shares how she consciously reminds herself to ‘maintain the good tone’ and ‘take a breath for a moment’ when faced with feelings of annoyance in situations where she must reiterate information to her hard-of-hearing colleague. Her feelings of annoyance did not align with the feeling rule of showing sympathy by being patient with her colleague with hearing loss:

Signe: So, I also have to say [to myself], that she needs to have it explained again. I have to do my best for her. And at the same time, it’s best for all of us that I explain it again, and again, and again. Because nothing good comes from the alternative. But it doesn’t change the feeling of irritation.

This is an example of a pattern in the empirical material of an established feeling rule of being patient towards hard-of-hearing colleagues in situations with communicative challenges. Thus, in situations with dissonance between the rule of displayed sympathy and inner sentiments of

annoyance, Signe performs emotion work when she tries to alter inappropriate feelings by reminding herself that everyone is best served by her showing patience towards her colleague. However, not everyone managed to work down feelings of frustration and sometimes even anger in situations with interactional disruption; almost all the hard-of-hearing interviewees had experienced situations where non-hard-of-hearing colleagues shook their heads in frustration, assumed a harsh tone, or showed obvious signs of impatience.

Some hard-of-hearing employees, like Dorthé, have developed rule reminders for their colleagues when they do not comply with the rule of showing sympathy:

Dorthé: (...) and I also have a colleague who has taken several years to learn to speak clearly and make sure to look at me when she wants to say something. And I've teased her and made humorous remarks about it and all that, right? So now she's learning.

Another example of this is Lars, a hard-of-hearing employee, who also made a point clear to his colleagues, prompting them to direct their attention towards him while they spoke:

Lars: (...) so I took a handful of [earplugs] with me, and then I placed them on the table, and then I simply said to all of them, 'Now put earplugs in your ears, and then we'll have this one-hour meeting, so you can get a bit of sense of how it is'. Then I could see how much they'd be able to rely on their eyes.

These rule reminders align with a shared understanding among both hard-of-hearing employees and their colleagues that the responsibility for maintaining the rule of sympathy is a shared one. As Sofie, a non-hard-of-hearing employee, phrases it:

Sofie: She [the colleague with hearing loss] should also bear in mind that she has to remind us about it. It's a kind of balance.

Even those colleagues who displayed the greatest reluctance to show sympathy fundamentally believed that one should be inclusive towards employees with hearing loss.

The cost of sympathy and failed interaction rituals

A pattern in the empirical material reveals that displaying sympathy sometimes incurs the cost of disrupting the interaction ritual. This disruption manifests as a shift from high-intensity interaction to low-intensity interaction, impeding the processes of entrainment and emotional buildup. This section delves into three facets of the failed interaction rituals in the context of displaying sympathy: restrained emotional buildup, emotional exhaustion, and efforts to manage emotions.

Employees at the architectural firm describe it as a social workplace that accommodates humour, fostering an environment where colleagues are familiar with each other's personal lives and feel comfortable sharing if they are having a difficult day. Thomas, the manager,

characterises the workplace culture as one marked by abundant conversation and discussion: ‘At our place, there’s a lot of talking and discussing, covering both personal, social matters and professional topics (...) there might be five conversations happening simultaneously.’ He underscores his preference for extensive interaction within his team, stating, ‘It is through interactions that we best solve our tasks.’ He acknowledges that the communication style can be direct, and some might find it harsh.

A non-hard-of-hearing employee, Henrik, describes how professional discussions in the office quickly delve into the core issues. When a colleague raises a project-related concern, a professional ping-pong follows, with colleagues promptly offering comments and input. Henrik values the direct communication style in the office, stating: ‘Some might say [that it’s] a bit of a tough tone we have, but it’s because we are focusing on the issue rather than the person’. Interactions akin to Henrik’s description frequently occur during the daily morning meetings, where professional projects and challenges are discussed. I observed numerous meetings of this kind during my fieldwork at the workplace. These sessions represent high-intensity interaction rituals, with focused interaction among colleagues. The meetings entrain employees in an interactional rhythm where they take turns in the interaction, often interrupting each other. They share a collective focus on problem-solving and professional pride, collectively revitalised through these rituals, fostering a sense of group membership in the office. However, as Henrik points out, displaying sympathy by slowing down the pace of interaction and avoiding overlaps comes with certain costs:

Henrik: I think that we have a workplace where there’s a lot of ping-pong, ding-dong, bang-bang, chit-chat, shouting all at once, and so on. In the beginning, it was hard to see her [his hard-of-hearing colleague] just looking and thinking ‘Oh no, now we have to do it this way.’ We tried saying, ‘One at a time’, but it was like it killed our spirit here at the workplace. So, we haven’t succeeded in that yet. I have also come to think that if the boss one day came and said, ‘Now we speak one at a time in meetings, you damn well better do it.’ Then I would – it would feel completely wrong.

According to Henrik, the act of displaying sympathy during professional discussions carries a cost: the disruption of the interaction ritual. In this context, the shift from high-intensity interaction to low-intensity interaction impedes the processes of entrainment and emotional buildup, effectively ‘killing’ the ‘spirit’ of the workplace. The ritual no longer exerts the same impact of infusing emotional energy into the group. When questioned about his feelings regarding the new form of interaction in the meeting, Henrik conveyed that it felt ‘too slow’. He further elaborates:

Henrik: All the things that I've been accustomed to and like about our place of work, and the reason why I've stayed here for many years, disappear when we have to show consideration like that.

By emphasising this, Henrik illustrates that the intense interactional dynamics and properties of the ritual in professional discussions are more than minor practicalities; they are fundamental to what attracts him to the workplace. In contrast, the daycare centre had a significantly different way of organising meetings. Long before any hard-of-hearing employees were hired, the workplace had established a meeting structure where employees take turns, and a moderator records the names of those who raise their hands. Fie, a non-hard-of-hearing employee, appreciates the basic structure of the meetings but emphasises that it needs to be done in moderation and not overly strict to avoid disrupting the flow of the discussion:

Fie: I think it's very good that there is a bit of structure in the meetings, and in terms of when people should speak. But I also think there's room for participating in the debate or discussion without having to wait one's turn. Because [if that is not the case] when it's one's turn, it can lose a bit of momentum, so to speak. The subject can become less relevant, you could say.

Fie's statement highlights how, according to her, a too-strict structure at meetings disrupts the natural social coordination of turn-taking in a successful interaction ritual. Fie's description of waiting for one's turn as something that can cause a '[loss of] momentum' indicates hindrances in the emotional buildup. Therefore, despite differences in intensity and form between the two workplace sites, non-hard-of-hearing colleagues across field sites express that a too-slow pace and strict interaction at meetings come with the cost of impairing the flow of the interaction ritual. Thus, displaying sympathy sometimes results in impeding the processes of entrainment and emotional buildup.

Another pattern in the empirical material reveals that practising sympathy through low-paced interactions, sometimes with numerous repetitions, carries the risk of emotional exhaustion. Sofie, a non-hard-of-hearing employee, articulates her need for breaks from this type of interaction in the following quote:

Sofie: And as much as I want to help because of her disability, her hearing impairment, I also use up extra resources on it. Sometimes I feel completely drained because I've spent two hours (...), where there have been a lot of questions, and I haven't really made progress with my own work. That's how it is, but because it's tough to explain it in that way, I've felt that it could be draining when it continues into my lunch, where I just needed to have a completely fluid conversation without having to put in so much effort. So, I can sit there feeling a bit guilty about it (...), because she can't help it. But I also notice that I've sometimes tried to distance myself from her (...). so, the impact of her hearing impairment could affect all of us more equally, preventing [a situation where] a few individuals are expending a tremendous amount of resources to communicate with her.

Sofie describes the collegial sparring with her hard-of-hearing colleague as ‘hard’ and ‘draining’, requiring ‘extra resources’ from her. For her, it is not only the resource of time, which she could have spent on her own tasks – ‘That’s how it is’— but particularly the emotional resources expended on the strained interaction. This suggests that Sofie does not become carried away by the ritual but, on the contrary, feels the outcome of a failed interaction ritual. These emotions lead Sofie to withdraw, seeking to recharge her energy in a more ‘flow[ing]’ interaction elsewhere during her lunch break. While she strives to exhibit sympathy in professional matters, she acknowledges feeling less compelled to do so in informal interactions. Sofie’s statement that she feels ‘*bad*’ about it underscores the established feeling rule that employees *should* display sympathy with their hard-of-hearing colleagues by being patient and including them in both professional and informal interactions. The excerpt from the interview with Sofie is an example of a pattern in the empirical material where a lack of emotional energy in this type of strained interaction gives rise to feelings of interaction fatigue and emotional energy drain.

Disrupted interactions, characterised by repetitions and misunderstandings, engendered micro-conflicts between hard-of-hearing employees and their colleagues. These conflicts encompassed emotions such as frustration, annoyance, and occasionally anger, impeding processes of sympathy giving. Almost every hard-of-hearing interviewee in the sample could recall instances of micro-conflicts caused by disrupted interaction; few of them escalated to outright conflicts between colleagues, while most remained small-scale discrepancies. Lillian, a hard-of-hearing woman working at a specialised psychiatric residential facility, recounts such an episode:

Lillian: Yeah, so one of the things was, for example, an employee who shook her head at me because I had informed her that our private hospital had called, indicating they needed some medication boxes. I said we needed to bring them up, and I had located them and everything. I mentioned that I was going downstairs to find the colleague responsible for delivering this medication (...) She just shook her head at me. She had mentioned earlier in the morning that someone had been assigned that task. (...) She just kept shaking her head at me, and then she said something like, ‘You can do as you please’. (...)

Interviewer: How did you feel in that situation?

Lillian: “Well, it’s not the first time with this colleague. I know she doesn’t have the patience for things I don’t hear. But I do get irritated by it. In short, I think, why should I spend my time on someone like her if she doesn’t show any understanding? But I explained and said that I didn’t hear. I can’t do much more than that. The rest is up to her.

In this example, the disrupted interaction and subsequent repetition trigger a micro-conflict, where Lillian’s colleague displays clear signs of annoyance by shaking her head. This, in turn,

offends Lillian, who feels ‘irritated’ and ‘disappointed’, an emotion she elaborates on later in the interview. The use of the word ‘disappointed’ suggests that Lillian feels rejected, and she reacts to that feeling with the rejection of the other, stating, ‘Why should I spend my time on someone who doesn’t show any understanding?’ In this way, disrupted interaction carries the risk of micro-conflicts, initiating emotion spirals of annoyance, rejection, and irritation between hard-of-hearing employees and their colleagues, hindering the exchange of sympathy. Boyns and Luery (2015) recognise the distinction not only between high and low emotional energy but also between positive and negative emotional energy. Whereas positive emotional energy is conceptualised as a favourably charged emotional disposition *towards* a social encounter, negative emotional energy is conceptualised as an adversely charged emotional disposition *against* a social encounter (Boyns and Luery 2015:154). The risks attached to these kinds of failed rituals are not merely the risk of low positive emotional energy, as expressed in the quote from Sofie who was feeling emotionally drained, or from Henrik, who felt that the spirit had died. The failed interaction rituals also sometimes result in negative emotional energy in the form of anger, frustration, unfriendliness, and irritation, as in the conflicts above. In these cases, giving sympathy by being patient and, for example, reiterating utterances requires emotion work by non-hard-of-hearing colleagues. This involves either suppressing feelings of frustration or cultivating feelings of sympathy, as illustrated in the first quote from Signe.

There were a few examples in the empirical material where the claim for sympathy created a stronger bond between colleagues. One example is Cecilie, a hard-of-hearing freelancer who also works part-time in a small company. Cecilie explains how values of care underpin the company, allowing her to structure her workdays following her need for breaks or working from home. According to Cecilie, this work culture is the reason why she is still able to have leisure time involving social events instead of using the weekends to recharge her energy. When asked about situations in which she feels included, she mentions her participation in professional networks with people with diverse functional impairments.

Cecilie: So, when [other] people themselves have some kind of disability, it’s amazing how included you feel. It’s when they have an understanding that all of us here, we all have some kind of need that needs to be considered. So, those are definitely the spaces that are the most comfortable to be in. Without a doubt. Or with my close friends, of course, whom I also work a lot with, so that helps a lot. (...) That there is spoken loudly and clearly. Even before we step into the room, someone has already considered all the different considerations that sometimes arise; Is it a good acoustic space? There’s almost never any music. I mean, there are just so many considerations that have already been taken care of, which I didn’t have to ask for. Yes, and also just the fact that it’s completely normal, and it’s actually kind of cool when you say, ‘Hey, I actually didn’t hear that, could you maybe repeat it?’

In this case, the process of claiming sympathy and offering sympathy gifts in accordance with varying needs creates the foundation for a successful interaction ritual that supports social bonds between participants. Here, then, the offering of sympathy is not something that pulls participants away from the strong ritual but, on the contrary, is the foundation for it. Additionally, Cecilie underscores how the framing of such events, with consideration given to accommodating infrastructure such as no music and good acoustics, facilitates the successful interaction ritual. However, such instances are infrequent in the empirical data and typically entail exchanges of sympathy between employees, both of whom share personal experiences of living with functional impairments.

Thus, displaying sympathy sometimes comes at the cost of failed interaction rituals. Shifts from high-intensity to low-intensity interaction impede processes of entrainment and emotional buildup, while low-paced interactions and repetitions carry the risk of emotional energy drain. Furthermore, showing sympathy may require emotion work to work down feelings of frustration and annoyance and/or to cultivate feelings of sympathy.

Discussion and conclusion

Despite a shared norm of expressing sympathy through patient and inclusive interactions, offering sympathy gifts can sometimes result in failed interaction rituals. The display of sympathy incurs various costs, encompassing impeded rhythmic entrainment, emotional energy drain, and emotion work. Shifting from high-intensity to low-intensity interaction hampers processes of entrainment and emotional buildup, while slow-paced interactions and repetitions pose the risk of emotional energy drain. Moreover, expressing sympathy may necessitate emotion work to manage feelings of frustration and annoyance and/or to cultivate feelings of sympathy.

Non-hard-of-hearing employees did not intend to exclude their hard-of-hearing colleagues. However, the costs associated with displaying sympathy sometimes hindered non-hard-of-hearing colleagues from actively participating in efforts to include hard-of-hearing employees in conversations. Whether or not non-hard-of-hearing employees displayed sympathy in interaction situations was often essential to the opportunity for hard-of-hearing employees to be included in the conversation. Additionally, the frequency of situational exclusion played a crucial role in overall workplace inclusion. Thus, situational exclusion is a part of the daily experiences of the interviewed hard-of-hearing employees, representing additional interactional struggles without necessarily resulting in general exclusion from the social work

environment. Nevertheless, situational exclusions impose additional work on hard-of-hearing employees. It takes extra effort to discern the content of both formal and informal interactions, all the while avoiding the risk of losing face or misinterpreting subtle gestures and interactions.

However, for some of the interviewed hard-of-hearing employees, chains of situational exclusion led to an overall estrangement from the work community and workplace culture (as elaborated in Thing unpublished). Understanding the mechanisms behind situational exclusion in the workplace is crucial for comprehending its underlying reasons and constitutes a step towards improving conditions for workplace inclusion.

Insights from the present study suggest that the lack of social inclusiveness in workplace interactions cannot be attributed solely to the stigmatisation and lack of knowledge about disabilities among workplace colleagues. It also arises from colleagues' unwillingness to actively engage in the interactional challenges associated with displaying sympathy due to failed interaction rituals.

According to Clark, sympathy always incurs a cost, so the notion that emotional gifts carry a cost in a working context is not surprising. What is distinctive in this case is twofold: first, hard-of-hearing employees face limitations in their options to reciprocate emotional gifts from colleagues and, second, this exchange occurs within a professional context.

Regarding the first factor, hard-of-hearing employees do not have the same opportunities as their colleagues for acquiring information through passive listening, such as overhearing informal office conversations without actively participating. For many hard-of-hearing individuals, listening requires considerable energy, direct eye contact, and a suitable auditory environment. Passive listening serves as a valuable source of information about colleagues' lives and concerns, providing crucial information for offering sympathy gifts. Consequently, it can be more challenging for hard-of-hearing employees to access the necessary information to extend personal emotional gifts to their colleagues (Thing unpublished). At the same time, hard-of-hearing employees uphold a continuous claim for sympathy concerning their hearing loss. Even if legitimate, to claim sympathy for what is perceived as too long a period can result in overdrawn sympathy accounts, causing sympathisers to eventually withhold sympathy or resort to surface sympathy with no genuine sentiment (Clark 1997:162).

During interviews and fieldwork, I encountered many situations where hard-of-hearing employees had to settle for surface sympathy. This form of sympathy can still be important, as

the display itself can contribute to generating sentiment in the sympathiser (Clark 1997:79). It can also serve the purpose of including a colleague in conversations while adhering to feeling rules. However, the authenticity and sincerity with which an emotional gift is offered matters. Hochschild refers to it as a 'bow from the heart' when individuals, through emotion work, work up the expected feelings with sincerity (Hochschild 2003:76–86). In this context, these feelings may encompass patience, calmness, and compassion. While displaying sympathy despite underlying emotions of irritation and aggression may address immediate interactional challenges – for instance when a non-hard-of-hearing employee repeats a sentence for a hard-of-hearing colleague – this form of sympathy has the potential to strain the relationship. As the analysis demonstrates, such forced gestures with underlying aggression risk generating rejection and damaging what Scheff termed 'the social bond' between colleagues (Scheff 1997).

Regarding the second factor, which concerns the workplace as a context for sympathy exchanges, employees may primarily be assessed based on their job performance rather than their ability to include colleagues in social interactions. Workplace structures and culture may exert pressure on employees in terms of efficiency and production, potentially compromising employees' willingness and emotional resources to engage in sympathy gift-giving, as shown in the analysis. Overall, the analysis revealed that the responsibility for including hard-of-hearing employees largely rested on individual employees and their willingness to do so, rather than being addressed at the company level.

The findings underscore the importance of companies cultivating environments that facilitate strong interaction rituals for all employees, including those with diverse functional impairments. This includes constructing infrastructures that accommodate practices such as small group interactions, turn-taking in meetings and breaks with minimal background noise. To address these issues, the responsibility for compensational tasks needs to be shifted from individual employees to managers and the company. It is essential to emphasise that these findings do not contradict well-established research on structural ableism and discrimination against employees with disabilities. Instead, this article aims to enhance micro-sociological understandings of the situational exclusion that employees with disabilities can face in the workplace and underscore the critical need for companies to take active measures in creating inclusive environments.

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