DIPLOMARBEIT / DIPLOMA THESIS

Titel der Diplomarbeit / Title of the Diploma Thesis

„Biological Differences between the Sexes as Taboo in Contemporary US American Media Discourse. James Damore's Google Memo"

verfasst von / submitted by

Andreas Martel

angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Magister der Philosophie (Mag.phil.)

Wien, 2020 / Vienna, 2020

Acknowledgments:

I want to thank my family. Without their help, none of this would have been possible. I cannot properly express my gratitude for their continual support. It would take me entire symphonies worth of recognition to do so. They have granted me a degree of freedom and opportunity which is beyond words. I also want to thank my girlfriend who has stood by me through the most difficult parts of my writing process. She gave me strength, when all I had left was weakness.

Table of contents

1.   Introduction

In July 2017 James Damore, a Google employee, published a memo on the company's internal servers in which he tried to explain the tech industry's lack of female employees partly in terms of biological differences between women and men (Damore Echo Chamber). The document's contents would start an international conversation and controversy which can be seen as highly indicative of a taboo about biological differences between the sexes. James Damore had "[…] decided to write the memo after attending a Google diversity program, where he had heard things which he 'definitely disagreed with'" (Schmidt). He wrote down his thoughts on a twelve-hour flight to China and had "shared the document internally multiple times" (Schmidt) before it went viral. The memo was shared "under the radar of senior management" (Nicas and Koh) on an internal mailing list called "'pc-consideredharmful'" in the month prior to it being leaked to the public (Wakabayashi Contentious and Lang PC). Damore's manifesto was released by several tech news websites on August 5th. Once it had been reported on by the website Motherboard – a subsidiary of the VICE media group which focuses on technology[1] – and published in full by Gizmodo –a "high-profile design and technology blog" (Hickerson 413)–, it went viral over the course of two days. In the memo, Damore made several statements which sought to explain the gap in equal employment between men and women in the tech sector in terms of biological differences between the sexes (Damore Echo Chamber). The memo was widely discussed in the media and several journalists argued that Damore had written a sexist manifesto in order to vent harmful and dangerous views about biological differences between the sexes. Consequently, Damore was fired on August 7th (Swartz and Weise; Weise Confirms Firing; Young). After Sundar Pichai, Google's C.E.O. had returned to America from a vacation cut short by the news of the memo, Google's highest-ranking officials held an internal conference about the document's contents. These talks focused on "'trying to balance what a Googler is free to say, with what [their] code of conduct allows'" (Nicas and Koh). On August 8th Pichai wrote a response to Damore's memo which was sent to all Google employees. The two central sentences, which were quoted extensively by the media and which summarize his response to Damore's memo are as follows:

> First, let me say that we strongly support the right of Googlers to express themselves, and much of what was in that memo is fair to debate, regardless of whether a vast majority of Googlers disagree with it. However, portions of the memo violate our Code of Conduct and cross the line by advancing harmful gender stereotypes in our workplace. (Pichai)

---

[1] For more information see: https://company.vice.com/about

Pichai terminated Damore's contract for what he had written in the memo. However, he acknowledged some of the engineer's points and promised further discussion in a companywide response to the memo (Weise Confirms Firing). The episode was summed up by Young, who called it "[…] an ironic conclusion, considering that a central topic of his memo was ideological conformity at Google". After his dismissal, Damore created a Twitter account with the handle "@Fired4Truth" (Lee and Lang).

At this point in the story, numerous political actors and activists became involved. In the time following his firing, right-wing free speech activists were able to garner large amounts of money in online pledges to cover Damore's legal fees (Ohlheiser). A companywide Google summit, in which issues of diversity and Damore's firing would have been on the agenda, was cancelled amid concerns over employee's safety. Prior to this Google town hall, questions and names of employees who had wanted to discuss the issue had been leaked to conservative commentators, and online harassment had ensued (Ohlheiser; Swartz and Weise, Dwoskin). Milo Yiannopoulos, a prominent conservative commentator, "posted Twitter biographies of eight Google employees who had criticized Damore" (Dwoskin). Shortly after his dismissal, Damore spoke to two prominent YouTube figures, Stefan Molyneux and Jordan B. Peterson, who both "have sizable followings on YouTube and track records of criticizing attitudes they describe as politically correct" (Pierson and Lien).

According to the San Francisco Chronicle, unpermitted protests which had been planned in response to Damore's firing were postponed by their initiators due to the threat of violence from counter protesters. Official sources within the cities where these protests would have taken place could not verify these threats of violence when asked for comment (Lee and Thadani). The protest marches would have been organized by Jack Posobiec, "a well-known right-wing media figure, with a significant following on social media" (Lee and Thadani). Lee and Thadani imply that Posobiec relied on claims of violence because audience interest in the protests had been minimal (Lee and Thadani). Shortly after Damore's firing and before the marches in his support, the violent protests in Charlottesville took place, where a Nazi sympathizer killed a counter protester when he drove his car into a crowd (Dwoskin and Shaban). This temporal proximity and the fact that both the Charlottesville march and the marches protesting Google's firing of Damore were supported by similar right-wing voices, led the media to link Damore to right wingers and the protests in Charlottesville, thereby linking his memo to the current political climate (e.g. Dwoskin and Shaban). Damore was consequently branded as a hero for the American right-wing within articles claiming that he had readily accepted their help (e.g.

Ohlheiser). However, it seems to be difficult to discern whether he did accept help, in any form other than picking his interview partners.

At this point, one might ask what exactly made this memo so damaging that it led to Damore's firing as well as a "vociferous public discussion" (Mims). The events outlined above are a matter of public record, however that public record has been presented in vastly different lights, with newspapers offering extremely different accounts of the memo's contents. Some reporters were generally unified in their condemnation of the memo's contents. Ohlheiser summarized it as follows:

> [Damore] argued that the company's current diversity initiatives were 'discriminatory' against those who weren't women or people of color, that the company should focus more on 'ideological' diversity, and that the underrepresentation of women in some engineering and leadership positions in Google's staff was better explained by biological gender differences rather than by institutional bias. (Ohlheiser)

Kazakoff and others offered harsh words of criticism. She outlined her understanding of the memo with the short phrase: "Damore's memo on how women are biologically unsuited for tech work" (Kazakoff). Weise wrote that Damore had been "[…] fired for suggesting women are innately less apt at computing" (Weise Women coders), and DeBoer said that he had been let go "[…] for circulating a bizarre and offensive attack on [Google's] diversity practices […]" (DeBoer).

However, among the media representations of Damore's memo were also articles which supported Damore's points. Some said that Damore's memo was an attempt to counter workplace behaviors which he regarded as illegal (Wakabayashi Contentious). Goldberg partly agreed with Damore, saying that many of his claims were supported by evidence and that "[w]hether for reasons of culture or biology (or both), women are more reluctant than men to pursue degrees in engineering and computer science" (Goldberg). Brooks said that "several scientists in the field have backed up [Damore's] summary of the data" (Brooks) and Young argued that "[…] some of the memo's suggestions – for instance, to uncouple diversity initiatives from empathy and moralism – are excellent and validated by the reactions to the memo itself" (Young). Consequently, it can be said that he found supporters for his points and some of his suggestions were welcomed and approved by public voices, separate from accusations of sexism. What can be said here is that Damore tried to explain the gap in representation between men and women in engineering jobs partly in terms of biological differences between the sexes. He cited articles and several online sources which supported his claims that women were on average more interested in people rather than things and that

biologically influenced differences in personality traits – like agreeableness – were also partly responsible for the lack of female engineers (Damore Echo Chamber 2-6). A detailed analysis of his claims can be found in chapter 5.

The quotes above indicate that the public reception of the memo was by no means unequivocal. Page summarized this tendency, addressing her readers directly: "You may have heard through some of the news coverage that [Damore] wrote a 10page, [3000 word] 'screed' of an argument that women are not as qualified as men. He didn't" (Page).

Public interpretations of Damore's text varied widely but generally fell into two categories : (1) Damore's memo is the anti-diversity rant of a sexist and should be dismissed, and (2) Damore supports diversity, but feels Google is enforcing gender diversity against a reality of biological differences. Let us examine each of these possibilities in turn.

The first possibility is that the memo really is, as its opponents have said, an "anti-diversity screed". In this case, Damore knowingly cherry-picked his data and tried to establish that women are biologically inferior to men, which would make him an outright sexist, as many of the articles have claimed (e.g. Moore and Milord). In this case, one could dismiss him as a bigot and it would be easy to disprove his evidence by citing different sources in order to invalidate his claim in an investigative manner (see also Singer). However, the first sentence of his updated memorandum might already indicate that Damore did not intend his memo to be read that way: "I value diversity and inclusion, am not denying that sexism exists, and don't endorse using stereotypes," he wrote (Damore Echo Chamber 1). In addition to Damore's own statements, this thesis has already quoted several other voices who agreed that his memo is in fact no such sexist manifesto.

The second possibility is that Damore tried to establish a case that gender diversity is a good thing, but tried to argue that the current way in which Google is trying to reach its goal of more diversity is doomed to fail because of small, but undeniable biological differences between the sexes. In this case, anyone striving for more diversity would again have to analyze his points and see whether there is any merit to the memo's claims. However, claims of sexism would be more difficult to make in this scenario. This hypothetical James Damore would actually prefer a diverse workplace and would not argue that women are not suited for engineering jobs. Rather, he would argue that women are on average not as interested in the things an engineer does as their male colleagues. This would make women less likely to train for jobs in the tech industry, but it would not make them incapable. In a free democratic society, every individual should be free to choose whatever career they want for themselves based on

their interests. Whether these interests are formed biologically, or through cultural pressure is a different question for a different thesis.

One also has to question whether it is even possible or necessary to determine whether or not Damore is a sexist. For the sake of this thesis, it is not possible to determine that absolutely. It is, however, necessary to establish what he said in the memo on the subject of women in the workplace and on biological differences between the sexes, in order to analyze the way in which the media represented his views.

Concerning the media coverage about his memo, again there are a number of possibilities as to why the coverage was so different in a number of newspapers. One possibility is that the journalists did not read the memo, yet reported on its contents none the less. This would represent a case of neglect on the part of the journalists. One could at most infer confirmation bias in these instances, but all larger inferences would have to be disregarded since the journalists in this scenario did not really engage with the text they had to cover.

The second possibility is more interesting. From the coverage, we can assume that some people in the media did read the memo as a sexist text, and inferred that Damore's principle goal was to establish that women were incapable of engineering work and that he wanted to secure his and other men's dominant place within the field. In order to determine whether this was the case, one would need to look for textual evidence in the memo that would support such a reading. If support for such a reading were found in the text, then the memo could indeed be deemed sexist. If, however, no such textual evidence is found, then a third, and very interesting possibility presents itself, which was also evoked by journalists like Brooks and Friedersdorf:

If the memo offers little evidence of overt sexism and people understood what Damore was saying but chose to mischaracterize his views, then the question would be: why? In this third possible scenario, Damore's media characterization as a sexist could only happen knowingly, since the journalists in this scenario would read and understand the text as non-sexist but choose to present it as a sexist text anyway. Why would journalists knowingly mischaracterize a memo on diversity and the biological differences between men and women? Some authors argued that this was in fact the case and that this misrepresentation was indicative of an underlying taboo around the topic, which is used in order to protect those who are perceived as downtrodden in a sexist, male-dominated society, or part thereof (e.g. Brooks and Friedersdorf).

This thesis draws on different ideas from discourse analysis as well as the study of taboos in order to investigate a particular discourse and power relations within that discourse. It draws on the tools and terminology of Critical Discourse Analysis (e.g. Mills 8-9, Walsh 29-30, Widdowson 70-71 and Chimombo and Roseberry). Walsh defines the goals of CDA as follows:

> As the name suggests, the goal of the critical discourse analyst is the overtly political one of encouraging interpreters of texts to develop a critical awareness of the way linguistic choices often have ideological effects, and in particular the contribution they make to the unequal distribution of power relations in society. (Walsh 29)

The thesis uses some of CDA's tools and borrows its terminology, while presenting a close reading of the newspaper articles in question. First, it is important to note that there is a certain discursive structure within the articles analyzed below. "A discursive structure can be detected because of the systematicity of the ideas, opinions, concepts, ways of thinking and behaving which are formed within a particular context, and because of the effects of those ways of thinking and behaving" (Mills 15). This discursive structure manifests itself in the continual iteration of similar arguments outlined in chapter 5. Another basic assumption of CDA that underlies this thesis is the "[…] theoretical premise that all natural linguistic and semiotic communication rests upon the possibility of choice or selection from a set of alternatives, albeit within certain constraints" (Walsh 30).

In order to establish whether the media representation of Damore's memo is indicative of a wider taboo around biological differences between the sexes, this thesis investigates seventy-nine articles published in major American newspapers around the time of the Damore scandal. The focus on journalistic texts follows from the fact that "[…] journalism nowadays is a privileged standpoint for public communication that has been growing increasingly along the past decades" (Smith and Gómez 37). In order to establish whether the taboos displayed in the texts are put forward by the editorial staff of the papers, or the body of journalists at the paper, this thesis disregards open forums and comments except when they are edited and appear in the opinion parts of the paper. The newspapers were selected according to the number of their daily readers (Watson and Miaschi). Some of them were retrieved using the website *pressreader,com.* According to Reese and Danielian, certain news organizations are more influential than others when it comes to certain types of news issues. For international news, other journalists generally look at The New York Times, while The Washington Post is regarded as the leading paper with regards to US-specific issues (240-241). Print media institutions do not only influence each other in the setting of their agenda, but large print media outlets also influence TV coverage of news items (Reese and Danielian 247). Due to this fact, I will be focusing on newspapers with a large readership because they tend to set the agenda for smaller ones which, together with

their comparatively large reach, implies their relative weight in the national debate on certain issues. This thesis investigates newspaper articles from the most-read newspapers rather than focusing on articles which exemplify the point. However, although the articles were not selected for their exemplary display of the investigated taboo, they still betray this tabooing tendency.

In this thesis I investigate the coverage of Damore's memo in the media and argue that it is indicative of an emerging taboo on the topic of biological difference between the sexes. I highlight the ways in which the coverage was influenced by other contemporary debates relating to issues of biological differences between groups. By analyzing a total of seventy-nine articles as well as Damore's memo, I gather evidence of a social taboo on issues of biological differences between the sexes. In chapter 2, I will outline the methodology of discourse analysis and broadly introduce the relevant aspects of the concept of "discourse". In chapter 3, I introduce the term taboo in its historical context before I highlight the ways in which it is used in contemporary debates. Chapter 4 supplies an overview of contemporary debates on issues of nature and nurture, feminist discourses, as well as conservative political movements. In chapter 4, I also outline similar cases, which are indicative of taboos and give a short introduction to political correctness. Chapter 5 is a close reading of the relevant texts which starts with establishing a common understanding of Damore's memo and its contents. The topics covered in the close reading of the articles are as follows: First, I provide an overview of textual evidence for the breach of a taboo with a special focus on euphemism, dysphemism, politeness and language which relates to values and morals. The next section covers language related issues in the article with a special focus on issues of political correctness, free speech and hate speech. The third and final section of this chapter takes a closer look at Damore's characterization, charges of sexism and alleged political group affiliations. Throughout the following sections this thesis tries to establish that we are in fact talking about a form of taboo which relates to the biological differences between women and men.

In times of "alternative facts" and a President of the United States who repeatedly attacks the media, it is important to investigate the role of the press in the construction of shared narratives. Biases and blind spots in the media are especially important where jointly constructed narratives relate to shared values and ideas that influence our behavior. Therefore, the central question of this thesis is whether the media's representation of Damore is indicative of broader social taboos about biological differences between women and men. This thesis tries to establish that James Damore transgressed a social taboo, that his case was misrepresented in wide parts of the American media because of this transgression and that there is a general

tendency to link the transgression of this taboo with the American political right-wing and conservatives.

2.   Methodology

2.1.   Discourse analysis

Since this thesis draws on CDA, a short definition of the meaning of the concept of discourse is in order. It should be understood, that this definition is by its nature reductionists, as discourse is a fluid and multi-faceted concept (Mills 1-6): "The term discourse [italics in original] is used in somewhat different ways by different scholars, but underlying the differences is a common concern for language beyond the boundaries of isolated sentences" (Widdowson 86). The theoretical concept of discourse was introduced by Michel Foucault who "[…] is generally accepted as having been the most influential social theorist of the second half of the twentieth century" (Powell 1). He contributed to such diverse topics as "madness, social discipline, body-image, truth, [and] normative sexuality" (Powell 2) and his critical reception has only gained momentum after his death in 1984 (Powell 1 and Lemke 1-2). Foucault himself used the term discourse in at least three different ways. He used it in order to talk about general rules which govern all statements with an impact on broader society. He used it to describe a specific set "[…] of utterances which seem to be regulated in some way and which seem to have a coherence and a force to them in common" (Mills 6), and he used the term discourse in order to talk about "the rules and structures which produce particular utterances and texts" (Mills 6). This thesis will only focus on a few of his arguments regarding discourse analysis which are relevant in relation to the subject of James Damore. A short outline of the most relevant features of discourse analysis is also necessary since discourse analysis undertakes "the close study of language and language use as evidence of aspects of society and social life" (Taylor 4). This thesis endeavors upon a similar study: it compares the media discussion about Damore, which is a part of social life, to ideas about taboos, which is an aspect of society, by looking at language in use.

Let me first establish a working definition of discourse along the lines of inquiry of this thesis. Since this thesis looks at a very specific event as portrayed in the news, one could define the discourse this thesis investigates as a set of texts which were published in large US-American newspapers around the time of the appearance of Damore's memo and which relate to the memo's contents and Damore's subsequent firing. However, discourses are more than just collections of texts.

Discourses have a multitude of facets which are relevant with regards to Damore's memo. First of all, it is important to note that discourses are never self- reliant and self-contained groups of utterances. They always depend on other discourses in order to establish themselves (e.g. Mills 43). For Foucault,

> […] discourses are not simply groupings of utterances, grouped around a theme or an issue, nor are they simply sets of utterances which emanate from a particular institutional setting, but […] discourses are highly regulated groupings of utterances and statements with internal rules which are specific to discourse itself. (Mills 43)

Any discourse relies on its members' adherence to a certain set of rules and for this reason discourse is often viewed "as the general domain of the production and circulation of rule-governed statements" (Mills 7-8) within cultural theory. It is for of this reason that adherence to discursive practices is important in the interactive process of creating meaning. One example of the interplay between meanings and discursive practices would be the so called Sokal hoax (e.g. Topper 1-5): the physicist Alan Sokal tried to prove that some parts of the humanities relied on methods he deemed dubious in order to establish scientific findings. He submitted an article to a peer-reviewed cultural studies journal called *Social Text*. The article was "generously peppered with erroneous claims and tongue-in-cheek remarks identifiable as such to any undergraduate math or physics major" (Topper 2), but also adhered to a set of postmodern and poststructuralist textual practices which were predominant in the discourse he was trying to emulate. The journal published it and after the fact, Sokal wrote an essay, relaying his hoax to the public. In his opinion, he thereby proved that conforming to an ideological view, as well as the right jargon, were more important than facts in the field of cultural studies (Topper 2-3). Sokal's hoax has given impulses to debates around the notion of truth in the social sciences (Hynes et al. 299-300). The responses to his hoax have, in turn, shown that the notion of truth in the social sciences is beyond simple differentiations between objective truth and subjectivity and that they follow "a quest for certitude combined with recognition of their own historicity" (Hynes et al. 294).

When asked about his motives Sokal "held that his purpose was […] to expose certain fashionable forms of irrationalism and epistemic relativism as incoherent and vacuous, and to combat the spread of these pathological ideas […]" (Topper 4). In this way, Sokal's hoax was successful because he followed the rules of the discourse he tried to expose as scientifically fraudulent (Mills 64). This also illustrates the fact that statements within a discourse are supported by "[…] a set of structures which makes those statements make sense and gives them their force" (Mills 45). Adherence to the underlying structures of the discourse community was essential in Sokal's endeavor to ridicule said community. It is for this reason that discourse

analysis is also interested in laying open the underlying structures which support a statement. One of the central goals of this thesis is laying out the ways in which newspaper articles about James Damore's memo were supported by a structure of social taboos which – as will be shown in chapter 3. – can be seen as manifestations of underlying ideas about morality.

Foucault also defines discourses as "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Archaeology 49). In this way, discourses rely on a continual iteration of specific views and language items. The predominant view within cultural theory is that discourses are social phenomena which are backed by institutional force; hence they do not present isolated entities. They are heavily involved in the social creation of knowledge: "The context that texts, whether spoken or written, are designed to key into are constructs of reality as conceived by particular groups of people, representations of what they know of the world and how they think about it" (Widdowson 26). For instance, Foucault argued that the stigma about mental illness was also partly a consequence of housing policies. Negative attitudes towards people with mental illness are linked to the historical fact that people with leprosy were housed in the same institutions as mental patients. Consequently, the stigma was carried on from one group to the other (Taylor 9-10).

Foucault maintains that the generation of new knowledge is also linked to institutional power since those who create meanings are the ones who have the power to do so within society (Mills 19). According to Foucault, all knowledge is the result of struggles for power. The winners of these struggles are the ones whose version of knowledge is sustained. In this way, discourses also always constitute a subjugation of someone's ideas of truth and knowledge under the ideas of someone else (Mills 19). However, discourses are not only sites of ideological struggles for versions of truth and knowledge. They are the very place where truth is created. Foucault does not see truth as a thing which is grounded in reality but rather as a consequence of different discourses which are engaged in a constant struggle with one another: "Thus, discourses do not exist in a vacuum but are in constant conflict with other discourses and other social practices which inform them over questions of truth and authority" (Mills 17).

Since all knowledge is the result of power struggles and knowledge is constructed within discourse, Foucault concluded that discourses are not only linked to the generation of truth and knowledge, but also to power. He sees discourses not only as the place where battles over power and domination are fought (Order 52-53), but he maintains that "discourse is the power which is to be seized" (Order 53). Discourse theory proposes that language is a site of struggles for

domination where battles for power are fought (Mills 38). Therefore, one could argue that all language use is political (e.g. Joseph 17-20). Mills illustrates this point:

> The fact that there have been strong efforts made by many conservatives to label struggles over sexist and racist language as mere political correctness – an implicitly negative term – and that feminists and anti- racists have attempted to resist that naming demonstrates the way that struggle over language is more than a simple imposition of a particular view on powerless people by people in power. (Mills 40)

Consequently, the struggle between competing discourses is a struggle over power and truth fought in language, "[f]or all communication, to a greater or lesser extent, is an exercise in control, an attempt to assert one's own position and to persuade the other to accept it" (Widdowson 67).

Discourses are the arenas in which conflicting, often diametrically opposed, ideas about a subject are investigated (Mills 9-10). They tend to incorporate the rhetoric and vocabulary of the opposing side which leads to a situation in which "[…] each group will have its discursive parameters defined for it in part by the other" (Mills 10). Thus, discourses can be understood as social phenomena which operate in a framework of social struggle and constant negotiation. This is why discourse study also investigates the ways in which the form of a text is linked to its intended function in a communicational setting (Renkema 1-2, Mills 12, and Gee 55). Because of these qualities of discourses, one can argue that the articles which followed Damore's firing constitute a similar struggle between discourses which previously manifested itself in the opposition to Lawrence Summers and Charles Murray which will be outlined in chapter 4.1. This thesis proposes to call these two opposing discourses the discourse of biological differences between men and women and the discourse of equality between the sexes. The discourse of biological differences between men and women seems to have re-emerged in the case of James Damore's memo and it was contested by the discourse of equality between the sexes.

In his writings on discourse, Gee uses an additional modifier in relation to discourses. He argues that one should differentiate between Discourse with a capital D and small d discourse (51-52). Capital D Discourse always entails other things – like acting in a particular way or some form of social support structure or network – while small d discourse only refers to "language- in- use or stretches of language (like conversations or stories)" (Gee 52). Mills, too, highlights this differentiation in Foucault's writing when he says that "[…] there is an important distinction in Foucault's work to be made between discourse as a whole, which is the set of rules and procedures for the production of particular discourses, and discourses or groups of

statements themselves" (55). The two capital D Discourses in this case would be the larger set of practices and institutionally backed ways in which people behave with regards to the biological differences between men and women and the Discourse of equality between the sexes, while the small d discourses can be viewed as the set of texts which forms the basis for this thesis. It is difficult to draw a clear boundary between the two however, since these small d discourse texts are backed by the institutional force of the media and have led to consequences in the social world. These texts have influenced ways of being and thinking which is an essential feature of capital D Discourses, since the meaning of a Discourse does not only lie in the text but in everything that has meaning in relation to it. "[D]iscourses are not simple groupings of utterances or statements, but consist of utterances which have meanings, force and effect within a social context" (Mills 11); in this way, "Discourses are sets of sanctioned statements which have some institutionalized force, which means that they have a profound influence on the way that individuals act and think" (Mills 55). Gee highlights the role that Discourses play in enacting different identities and conversely, the role, identity plays in Discourses. Once we use language, we always also position ourselves within a specific identity and enact it (Gee 22). "[W]hen two people interact, so too do two (or more) Discourses. It is as if socially significant forms of life (identities), formed in history via social work, talk to each other- continue a long-running conversation they have been having, by using different human bodies and minds at different times" (Gee 25).

In the Damore story, there are several instances which show this intricate link between capital D-Discourses and the practices they spawn: shortly after Damore's firing a park bench advertisement near one of Google's offices depicted the late Apple CEO Steve Jobs with the caption "think different" next to his name and Google CEO Sundar Pichai with the words "Not so much" next to his (Swartz and Weise). Another bus stop ad was less forgiving in its criticism of Google, likening it to a soviet work camp: "Fake bus-stop ads sprouted in Venice, Calif., slamming Google as 'Goolag' in the same type and color as Google's logo […]" (Swartz and Weise).
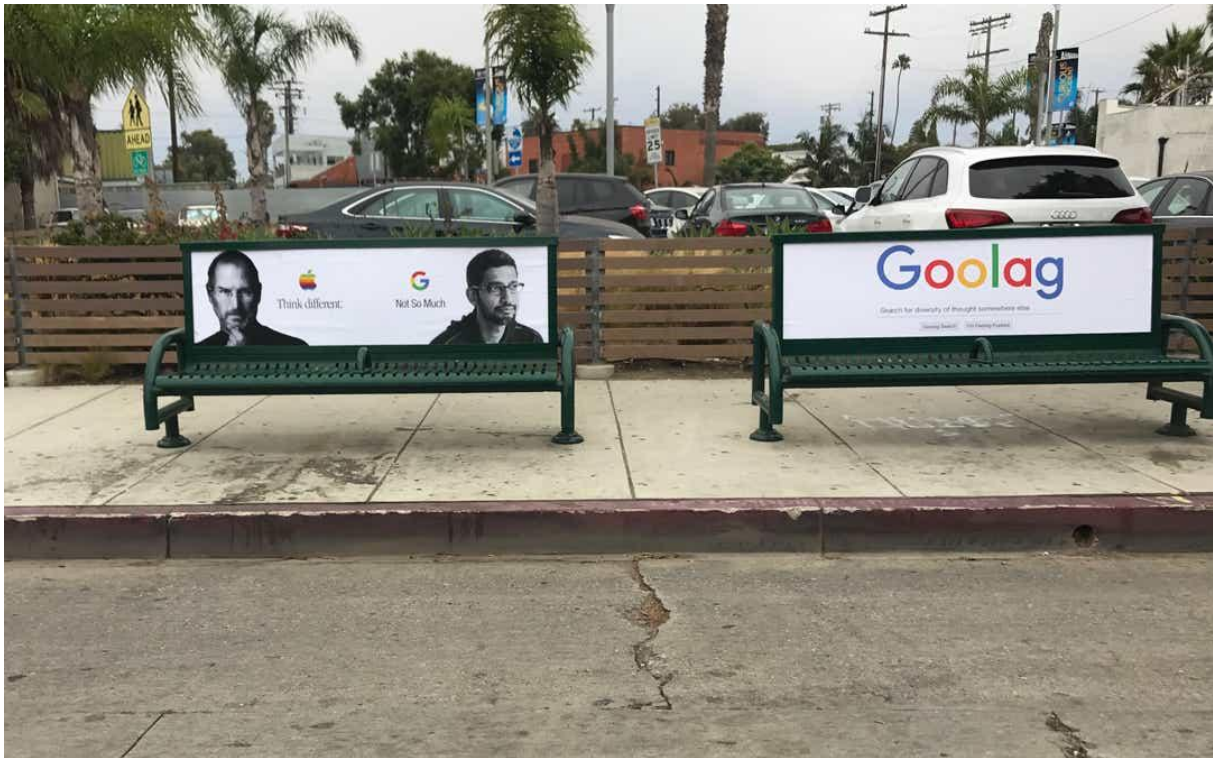
Fig. 1 Bus stop ads near Google headquarters in Venice California (Graham in Sandler).

2.2. The US-news media and the public sphere in the digital age

Journalism, its functions, its relationship towards public opinion and its effect on public discourse are important aspects of this thesis which is why the following section will lay out a few relevant theoretical concepts. Conboy notes that "[j]ournalism is defined in each era by its particular engagement with politics, technology, economics and culture" (224). This statement already implies several challenges journalism faced within the earliest parts of the 21st century, one of which has manifested itself in a rapidly changing technological environment. The internet has brought a multitude of changes to journalism and has led to a fundamental shift in how people consume information, with some citizens seeking information online, rather than in their newspapers (Conboy 225). We will return to the challenges that the internet presents to journalism at a later stage in this chapter.

Let us first define the media's functions for the public. There are several functions journalism fulfils within public discourse. According to Shanahan, the news media has two primary functions. The first lies in the duty to brief the public on events which are deemed necessary so that it can make informed decisions (Shanahan 21-22). In this briefing process, news outlets also have a surveillance function often bringing potentially political stories to the attention of their readers, thereby monitoring political elites. Politicians, in turn, adjust their talking points and adapt their stances on issues according to news coverage of certain topics

(Price 80-81). The second function of the media according to Shanahan is to counter bias by "providing a forum for public discourse" (22). This second function can be executed in a variety of ways. Traditionally it took the forms of letters, open editorial pieces and sometimes public discussions hosted by news organizations. Nowadays it is often implemented in the form of a space for online comments on the paper's website (Shanahan 21-22). Price, too, notes the function of the media in coordinating and broadcasting the public's views on certain topics as well as its role in the open discussion of opinions (81). In relaying necessary information to the public, the media has traditionally oriented itself along lines of what could be considered factual. This emphasis on the truth is already evident at the advent of the news media in pamphlets in the 16th century (Conboy 16-17). What was considered to be true was also backed by government interventions in some cases (Mills 59).

The focus on truth is also evident today. Van Dijk notes that the media rely on a shared set of assumptions for the creation of their texts and that the views of journalists play an important role in the selection of stories:

> News should be consonant with socially-shared norms, values , and attitudes. […] Instead of previous knowledge and beliefs, existing opinions and attitudes are involved. It is easier to understand and certainly easier to accept and, hence, to integrate news that is consonant with the attitudes of journalists and readers, that is, with the ideological consensus in a given society or culture. (Van Dijk 121-122)

While it is possible to cover news items that contradict shared assumptions and values, these items are prone to face more challenges and are therefore less likely to appear in papers (Van Dijk 122).

All of these stories unfold in the conceptual space which Habermas called public sphere (Shanahan 20). By this term he means "[…] a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed" (Habermas 49). Media institutions like newspapers take part in the formation of public opinion in this public sphere. Here, citizens have the option to criticize and control political elites through iterations of public opinion like votes or the news (Habermas 49-50). The public sphere "[…] serves as a forum in which to communicate collectively relevant issues, and allows citizens to inform themselves about societal developments and to observe and control political, economic and other elites" (Gerhards and Schäfer 2). Ideally it should incorporate a variety of diverse views and should be built around participatory principles. The strongest medium of the public sphere has traditionally been the news media (Gerhards and Schäfer 2). Journalism plays an important role in the formation of public opinion and news stories are most successful when they garner debate and dialogue

which in turn can lead to policy changes (Shanahan 19- 20). Newspapers underwent significant changes in the process of becoming the mediating institutions for public discourse. While at first, they only relayed daily news, they soon became the venues where public opinion was being distributed and formed (Habermas 52-53). This change was also related to the institution of editorial staffs for newspapers. An example of this can be found in the bourgeoning of French journals and clubs around the turn of the 18th century where nearly every politician had their own club or journal (Habermas 53). After the print media business became commercially viable, many papers saw a "[…] transformation from a journalism of conviction to one of commerce […]" (Habermas 53). Economic and political interests surrounding the news media have led to concerns with regards to its aptitude for being the primary forum of the public sphere. The advent of the internet led to hopes of a more participatory culture within the public sphere with lower entrance thresholds for small scale actors (Gerhards and Schäfer 3,12-13). Consequently, "[t]he mass media, and now digital media, support and sustain communication in the public sphere" (Shanahan 20).

Because of this close link between public opinion and newspapers, social scientists might even run the risk "[…] of mistaking opinions that appear in the press for public opinion" (Price 87). However, there is a very strong link between ideas which are presented in the media and the views of its audience. Some models establish links between media coverage of political issues and corresponding poll results. These "controversial methods and results have again raised questions about the autonomy of public opinion, and whether it is a more or less mechanical reproduction of elite opinion expressed by the media" (Price 87). Walsh, for example, goes even further and argues that the media have a strong influence on voter behavior (89-91).

Established media sources often function as the primary medium through which politicians and public officials communicate with their citizens (Feldman and Zmerli 3-4). Norman Fairclough suggested that the news media effectively "[…] act as mediators between official bodies and the people at large, in effect translating […] documents into a form which they feel more closely approximates the language usage of their intended readers" (Mills 139). One therefore has to consider the news' role in the maintenance of power. As we have discussed in the section on discourse: knowledge, power and truth are formed within practices of discourse. The construction of public discourse, truth, and opinion relies – as do indeed other kinds of discourse – on a "prodigious machinery designed to exclude" (Foucault Order 56). "[T]he media select and exclude issues to report on and thus define the news, frame particular aspects of the perceived reality, and 'set the tone' for how the news is to be interpreted"

(Feldman and Zmerli 3-4). They therefore play an active "[…] political role in cultural relations of power" (Hartley and Montgomery 260). Thus, it can be argued that the media are influential actors within the public sphere who help to establish and maintain power and shape public opinion through their role as mediators between powerful actors and the people. They do so through their role in the public sphere and discourse:

> From the standpoint of critical theory, the ability to represent real discourses, such as by constructing media narratives, is a fundamental factor of power, since discourses are social practices that create worldviews and ideologies. Words are not chosen accidentally, but reflect interpretations of the events that are subject to this discourse. In this vein, we can reveal the production of meaning by studying representations of the real world. When these meanings and representations are articulated, discourses are shaped, offering different versions of reality. […] Accordingly, analyses of media representations are studies about power, as they reveal dominant narratives that create the legitimacy of discourses. (Pérez Rastrilla 147)

Up until this point, this thesis always treated the media as a powerful, yet neutral actor within the public sphere but we also have to consider what kind of influences shape media coverage. Price speaks of an "activist role of the media" (82) which sparks continuous accusations of bias either from the right, or from the left. While some studies suggest that journalists "[…] especially those in the elite media, are disproportionately liberal […]" (Price 82), traditional codes of conduct within the journalistic practice tend to counteract political biases. However, these codes of conduct do not apply to editorial pieces which are more open to texts which convey their author's ideological influences. Contrary to accusations of liberal inclinations in editorial pieces, some older studies were able to detect a conservative bias when it came to presidential endorsements (Price 82). While these pieces might be prone to ideological influences, Walsh argues that there is one form of text within newspapers which is especially subjective: "Even more ideologically implicated, however, are those hard news stories in which the narrative function of predicting [italics in original] future events is to the fore" (Walsh 89). There were some articles in the Damore incident, where the authors made predictions for the future. One example saw the advent of an alternative right-wing internet because conservatives increasingly felt alienated by Silicon Valley's perceived liberal bias (Roose, Jan and Dwoskin).

In 2004, Conboy already noted that the media faced a multitude of issues relating to its public, or advertisement-based funding, the pressure for commercial success or the way in which politicians would adopt to the format and specificities of media discourse (218-221). It is probable that in times of Trump and Brexit this adaptation and exploitation of media discourse has only gained momentum. This is also due to a general emotionalizing trend within

public discourse which became evident in these two political movements: "Their apparent effectiveness has made public discourse more polarizing, and increasingly difficult to reach political compromise and preserve social cohesion" (Feldman and Zmerli 2). Indeed, Farnsworth maintains that Trump's use of Twitter and his attacks on the media – which mirrored his voter's concerns about dishonesty in traditional media sources – were factors that led to his presidency (124-126). Farnsworth also states that Trump continuously found support within the right-wing media especially from 2017 onwards and that friendly conduct between critical media sources and Trump was deemed an indication of lacking journalistic scrutiny towards the president. This led to a situation in which the Wall Street Journal, after procuring an interview with president Trump, was reluctant to release the entire transcript of the conversation because its staff feared accusations of too much friendliness between the reporter and the president (Farnsworth 129-131).

It seems that Trump's election and the years of his presidency up until now have revealed a lot about the nature of American news. Indeed, Jacobs speaks of a "crisis in the world of journalism" (409) in relation to Trump's election and a proclivity within journalist circles to see his victory as their fault (410). One could argue that journalism has become an increasingly partisan issue in America. This is exemplified in Trump's aforementioned unwavering support within the right-wing media. These conclusions suggest that there are specific interests for every newspaper which have to be taken into consideration when it comes to the media's role in constructing public opinion. Widdowson says that texts in the media fulfil a variety of functions and that "[…] what is presented as a factual account in a newspaper article will usually reflect, and promote, a particular point of view" (6). Smith and Gómez state that: "[w]hether we like it or not, whether it is clearly pinpointed or not, journalistic discourse always represents the assumption, by those responsible for its production, of some kind of position or viewpoint with regard to events and happenings in the world outside" (41). These viewpoints are not always clearly highlighted, and opinions are not always personal beliefs but sometimes they serve economic interests, which is why Feldman and Zmerli argue that one important factor in the ongoing tilt towards opinion-based news delivery was the privatization of media outlets (4). Pérez Rastrilla states that along with economic interests, journalists' ideological views are also presumed influential in studies investigating media bias (147). Price sums up this assumption when he states that: "[i]n addition to providing channels through which other actors get their messages across, media elites promulgate their own views through partisan political analysis and through editorial endorsements of policies and candidates" (83). Thus, political communicators, which includes the mass media, engage in a "constant contest over the social

and political meaning of the world" (Feldman and Zmerli 2). This struggle serves to "[…] determine the social representations of issues, individuals, or groups of actors by framing them according to the political communicators' ideological dispositions or self- interest" (Feldman and Zmerli 2).

This opinion-based coverage mirrors Foucault's aforementioned statements on the nature of a truth as constructed in discourse. Within communication studies, numerous different voices have argued "[…] that news is not an objective reflection of reality, but a process of selection and interpretation of it" (Pérez Rastrilla 146). This relates to a general trend within news organizations away from the representation of information and towards presenting a "networks' opinions or ideological frames" (Feldman and Zmerli 2) within their pieces. All of these developments have led to the now infamous charges brought against the media of presenting "fake news" rather than real information (Feldman and Zmerli 2). A recent *Columbia Journalism Review* report states that Americans' trust in the media has decreased and that this lack of trust is in part due to conceived political biases, as well as sensationalist tactics within the media. Correctional tendencies – like fact checking – are faced with difficulties in their implementation because supporters of any political ideology tend to distrust institutions which challenge their views (Ingram). It is important to note at this point that newspapers have mechanisms in place to counter subjectivity. If an editor comments on a topic and does so in a subjective way they can be punished by the paper. Likewise, there are watch groups which try to monitor the industry and point out its ideological blind spots (Cotter 100-101).

It is highly unlikely that the memo would have had the enormous impact it did, without the internet (e.g McArdle Internet mob). Let us therefore look at the different ways in which journalism was influenced by the internet. The launch of the internet fundamentally changed the ways in which people consume their news and the papers had to adapt. One of the questions that arose out of the advent of the internet was whether people even needed to rely on edited sources for their news anymore (e.g. Conboy 225). Thus, the internet took part in a process of "[…] destabilizing norms of journalism, expanding and challenging them" (Conboy 225). Another significant change to the way in which people consume news, lies in the ever-increasing possibilities that the internet presents for participating in discourse. Any observer who might have previously not had the opportunity to partake in the public discourse can now state their thoughts publicly. Readers can also comment on – and interact with – news stories. These trends have led to news becoming ever more interactive (Shanahan 19).

As mentioned above, some researchers hailed the internet as a new forum for participatory public discourse. Edgerly et al. for example, see YouTube as a stage which "[…] allows anyone with basic knowledge about video and audio technologies and Internet access to 'broadcast' themselves to a large audience" (2). Advocates of the internet thought that as a modern public sphere, it would provide a ground for "new forms and formats of participation" (Edgerly et al. 5). The two main advantages that the internet has over more traditional forums within the public sphere are its wide accessibility and the new methods of participation outlined above (Edgerly et al. 5-6). However, when it comes to the actual participatory possibilities of the online public sphere, "[m]ultiple studies on various political and scientific issues have come to the same conclusion, namely that public debate in [sic] the internet, as long as it is organized by search engines, advantages established actors, while making it more difficult for smaller actors and their arguments to appear in a relevant manner" (Gerhards and Schäfer 13). Gerhards and Schäfer even concluded that in some of the cases they investigated, online coverage "[…] seemed even more one-sided and less inclusive than print media communication in terms of its actor structure and issue evaluations" (13). In relation to online newspaper forums, Wolfgang notes that they do not offer a space for nuanced discussion, but rather provide the audience with an opportunity to advocate their own views without engaging in discussion or argument (18-19). Another example of the breakdown of communication in online forums is Godwin's law, which states that as online discussions grow in length, the chance that someone will compare the opposing side to the Nazis or to Hitler increases until it becomes inevitable, effectively rendering any productive discussion impossible (Moore 146).

2.3.   Gender and the media

While in its beginning, the internet had been hailed as a democratizing factor in the process of public discussion, recent years have shown it to be a place where communication breaks down and derails. Issues concerning the relationship between the sexes and feminism are more likely than other topics to cause online outrage (Ganz and Meßmer 59-60). These issues are also relevant in relation to Damore's memo since much of the media coverage focused on his portrayal of gender stereotypes. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the ways in which the media portray ideas about gender.

When it comes to feminism, Mendes argues that media organizations often portray feminists as engaged in in-group conflicts between representatives of the second- and third wave of feminism (561-62). Second wave feminists are represented as annoying, unlikeable and collectivist, while third wave feminism is presented as individualist and easy going. She

sees this tendency to individualize feminism as "[…] a common neoliberal trope used to discourage groups from forming collective recognition of their oppression, and the know-how to resist it" (562). According to Mendes, in 2008 feminism was no longer constructed within the media as a collective movement, but as a matter of individual choice best enacted by obeying the logic of the neoliberal market (564-65). Rather than seeing women engaged in a collective struggle for equality, parts of the media presented the struggle as a thing of the past:

> Instead, by 2008, the prevailing sensibility was that (western) women are now equal, and anyone who argues otherwise is personally responsible for their own failure – after all, with equality legislation firmly in place in both nations, any woman who has not made it to the top of her field or enjoyed professional and personal success is constructed as either having not worked hard enough, or as having made poor personal life 'choices' and should blame no one but herself […]. Alternatively, when women speak out about patriarchy, sexism or discrimination (as many Second Wave feminists have done), they are constructed as whiners or as jealous of other (mainly younger) women's success. (Mendes 565)

When the media covers female politicians, Greenwald and Lehman-Wilzig note that their coverage often reflects those gender stereotypes which relate to perceived typical "'character traits' [quotation in original]" (168). Theses stereotypes also play a role in the solidification of stereotypical attitudes towards women (Greenwald and Lehman-Wilzig 168). However, this tendency does not only appertain to media coverage of women. Smith and Gómez claim that journalists tend to highlight the names or origins of members of certain groups whenever they display stereotypical characteristics of said group. These bad behaviors are then seen as evidence which supports preconceived negative notions about any given group (Smith and Gómez 39). Consequently, news stories on groups with minority status seem to operate in a binary matrix and use stereotypes to pander to preconceived notions. The media often operates within a binary framework when it comes to the textual construction of women which denies any place for complexity. In reporting about issues of gender, Walsh suggests that the media institutions follow a "[…] tendency to construct gendered identities for them [women] which ignore these complexities and serve to locate them within a preconceived binary frame" (Walsh 38). Hartley and Montgomery, two scholars who "[…] acknowledge a substantial debt to the structuralists […]" (233), also note this tendency within the news media to rely on binary oppositions in their reporting. This solidification of roles and attitudes is achieved through a constant reiteration of ideas about gender. "The hidden power of media discourse to reinforce women's segregation and subordination in the public sphere does not depend on a single article, or even a series of articles, but on systematic tendencies in news reporting, the effect of which is cumulative" (Walsh 93). In covering issues which relate to the topic of gender, media institutions tend to use the word gender in collocation with ideology, which in itself is a word

with negative connotations (Smith and Gómez 2018 43). Articles on this subject frequently appear in the editor's section and often reflect a specific political line of reasoning which is dominant within the particular paper (Smith and Gómez 43). Walsh also argues that there are "[…] signs of a media backlash against the gains women have made, as well as signs of indifference towards policy issues relevant to women" (Walsh 132) within parts of the press. While she contends that the media sometimes tries to combat negative gendered stereotypes, she also maintains that they often perpetuate notions that women are not cut out for public roles (Walsh 206). She concludes "[…] that gender remains highly salient, not only in terms of the public identities women and men construct for themselves, but also in terms of how they are perceived and judged by others, including the mainstream media." (Walsh 208).

The possibility that a text like Damore's memo could be written in 2017 challenged some prevalent ideas about feminism and gender in the media while reiterating older stereotypes about women and their willingness to work in certain fields. Most notably, Damore's memo was presented as an example which countered the notion that "[…] women have already made it, and thus further activism is unnecessary" (Mendes 557), which Mendes locates within the media. His calling into question of women's interest in engineering jobs was equivocated to a challenge of their aptitude for these jobs, as will be shown in chapter 5. The outrage is understandable, seeing as newspapers have their own history of accusations of unfair coverage of women (e.g. Walsh 11). It is highly likely that this history also influenced the coverage of Damore's memo and that newspapers were aware of the ways in which similar cases had played out in the past. Accusations as to Damore's supposed sexism – which will be discussed in detail in chapter 5.3.2. – have to be viewed in relation to the media's own history of constructing an exclusionary female discourse. Because of this history, journalists were likely to be more critical of Damore's statements. As we have seen, the media's role in the construction and dissemination of shared knowledge relies on values, which are also at the core of the subject of the next chapter.

3. Taboo

3.1. The history of the concept

Whenever we use the word taboo in our everyday language, we tend to mean practices which are prohibited by custom, or by habit. We follow certain taboos even though they are not protected by the law: "[…] [T]he term taboo today generally is used to refer to prohibitions grounded in custom or religion, rather than in bureaucratic law or common sense and hence

bearing some moral weight" (Lambek Taboo 15429). Ethnologically speaking, however, taboos are signs of a culture's implicit norms and they fulfil a variety of functions. Durkheim understands them as "negative cults" (Durkheim 300-301, see also Benthien and Gutjahr 7) which protect certain areas from change. This is why taboos often appear in proximity to cultural fields with strong emotional connotations. This subsection will outline the term's history in order to better understand its various meanings.

The term taboo originated in Polynesia, where it unified a double meaning: the Polynesian Tapu was not only used to describe that which is forbidden, but also the realm of the sacred (Benthien and Gutjahr 7). In its original meaning, taboo was also closely linked to notions of mana, which can be understood as a form of divine energy with which people who were tapu were charged (Guzy 17). Krüger emphasizes the fact that confining the concept to the realm of the sacred would do it injustice; taboo permeated every aspect of Polynesian life (15). Powerful people were endowed with taboo since they were seen as direct descendants of the gods (Krüger 18-19). Touching a taboo person without their consent could lead to serious injury or death, while being willingly touched by the same person could bring bliss and cure illness (Freud 96-104). They were not only taboo themselves, but could place taboos which were to be followed by anyone belonging to a lower social class (Simoes Lucas Freitas 24-25). However, those in power could also lose their taboo status by political defeat, bad decisions, or the breaking of taboos (Krüger 18-19). Taboo was not only confined to the behavior of people; things, or animals could be taboo as well (Lambek Taboo 15429 and Lambek Taboo among M.S. 253).

James Cook brought the concept back with him from his third voyage to the south sea (Benthien and Gutjahr 7). The term first appears in his diaries where he describes its pivotal nature for the inhabitants of Tahiti (Przyrembel 139). Cook played a vital role in popularizing the concept throughout Europe (Krüger 13-14). To say that he was the only actor in establishing the term's later presence on the European continent would, however, be an overstatement. At the end of the 18th century, the leading intelligentsia on the European continent were enamored both with the romantic idea of the south sea in general and with the idea of the noble savage in particular (Przyrembel 38-41). The intellectual focus on Polynesia also led to an influx of missionaries in these parts of the world, who soon returned and wrote about taboos. For them, the concept was linked to dangerous satanic practices which needed to be eradicated (Przyrembel 32-34). Missionaries' letters and diaries throughout the 19th century are filled with accounts of taboo which provided Europeans with additional language and a specific way of reflecting on the power of prohibition (Przyrembel 27-29).

The notion of taboo soon became an established concept in Europe (Kraft 264 and Przyrembel 16). This ready adaptation within European societies hints at the concept's universal significance for human cultures. Taboo was not new to Europe; it had been present in everyday practices of avoidance and prohibition. Importing the term gave Europeans a concept and framework to articulate already existing behaviors (Kraft 264 and Przyrembel 16, 360). The idea that Europeans had their own taboos, however, was not readily adopted at the time. Hovering over the notion of taboo was the presumption of a primitive state (Benthien and Gutjahr 9-10). The term was used to describe an "other" (e.g. Frietsch 11), a primitive society against which Europeans could be defined (Benthien and Gutjahr 9-10). In the process of European adaptation, the term lost its dual meaning relating it to the sacred as well as the forbidden and only the later meaning remained (Simoes Lucas Freitas 25). There are two important Victorian intellectuals who expanded the notion of taboo, namely W. Robertson Smith, whose main contribution was the distinction between a form of spiritual taboo and taboo as superstition (Simoes Lucas Freitas 26-27) and Sir James Frazer who built on Robertson Smith's ideas and was the first scholar to adopt the term *taboo* for the purpose of investigating other European societies (Przyrembel 35, 126-127 and Douglas 12).

Freud built on the idea that taboos could deliver meaningful insights into European societies (Benthien and Gutjahr 10). In *Totem and Taboo*, "one of Freud's most scholarly and profound works" (Grotstein 3), Freud built on Frazer's ideas and wrote about the ways in which his patients' neuroses were similar to the taboos of tribal cultures. Freud's fascination with the topic is also a sign of a general fascination for the origins of religious practice which he shared with many of his contemporaries (Przyrembel15-16, 119-120, 360). Freud's important contribution to the topic has even led some scholars to argue that he was the last person to contribute anything substantial to the notion (Benthien and Gutjahr 10).

Taboos, according to Freud, are signs of a primitive moral conscience which expresses itself in prohibition, or as Grotstein puts it, "[…] [T]he phenomenon of taboo is the veritable origin of conscience and character in the individual and the code of justice in society" (6). In what he perceived as undeveloped societies, taboos, as well as the principle of totemism, constituted "[…] the organizing principle that governed and mediated primitive tribal cultures" (Grotstein 4). While this holds true for what he perceived as primitive cultures, Freud did not diagnose taboos within his contemporary European societies at large, he only saw remnants of taboos in the neurotic behaviors of his patients (Przyrembel 360). This led him to think of neuroses as "arrested racial memory" (Grotstein 6). Freud thought that with an increasing degree of civilization, any person within society would self-impose society's rules, leaving

taboos obsolete (Frietsch 11). Freud also thought that the difference between taboos and neuroses lies in the fact that transgressing a taboo would lead to sanctions against the transgressor themself, while those suffering from neuroses fear a transgression will lead to harmful effects for others. Another differentiating factor, according to Freud, is that the principle desire at the heart of the neurosis is sexual, while other taboos can originate in the social realm (Freud 120-121). It is important to note at this point that Freud, as well as Frazer operate in a context of colonialism and imperialism which, again, sees the holders of taboos as a primitive "other" (Przyrembel 16, e.g. Freud 116).

At the heart of all taboos, according to Freud, lies a desire for "incest and parricide" (Grotstein 6). He arrives at this conclusion since one of the central organizing principles in the societies he investigates, the totem, is seen as a symbolic representation of the father. This leads him to the following statement in which he draws parallels to the famous Oedipus complex, which he first established in *Totem und Tabu* (compare Przyrembel 360):

> Wenn das Totemtier der Vater ist, dann fallen die beiden Hauptgebote des Totemismus, die beiden Tabuvorschriften, die seinen Kern ausmachen, den Totem nicht zu töten und kein Weib, das dem Totem angehört, sexuell zu gebrauchen, inhaltlich zusammen mit den beiden Verbrechen des Ödipus, der seinen Vater tötete und seine Mutter zum Weibe nahm, und mit den beiden Urwünschen des Kindes, deren ungenügende Verdrängung oder deren Wiedererweckung den Kern vielleicht aller Psychoneurosen bildet. (Freud 171)

The mechanics of taboos operate in a complex space between desire, fear (Lesnik-Oberstein 4) and guilt which leads Frietsch to describe taboos in Freud's writing as that which cannot be desired openly (10). Freud himself defines the impulse behind the formation of taboos as a strong inclination within the unconscious to perform a forbidden act: "Grundlage des Tabu ist ein verbotenes Tun, zu dem eine starke Neigung im Unbewußten besteht" (Freud 88). This also leads him to the conclusion that a prohibition always points towards an inclination (Freud 87). A taboo cannot exist without the desire for its transgression; "[t]he transgression partakes of the mana of the prohibition, and vice versa. This tie disallows any simple championing of a transgression and rejection of the taboo it violates" (Whitmarsh 861).

This is why Freud understands taboo as a deeply ambivalent concept (Frietsch 10-11) even defining it as a symptom of compromise for the conflict of ambivalence: „*Kompromiß-symptom* [sic] *des Ambivalenzkonfliktes* [italics in original]" (Freud 116). He sees a reflection of this ambivalent character also in the initial meaning of the word which, as has been mentioned above, incorporates the holy as well as the impure (Freud 116-117). Another sign of the desire for transgression can be seen in the punishment which follows a taboo. If it is not

immediately punished by a divine power or the culprit himself, the other members of the tribe punish the taboo breaker, since they fear the delinquent's example:

> Die Angst vor dem ansteckenden Beispiel, vor der Versuchung zur Nachahmung, also vor der Infektionsfähigkeit des Tabu ist hier im Spiele. Wenn einer es zustande gebracht hat, das verdrängte Begehren zu befriedigen, so muß [sic] sich in allen Gesellschaftsgenossen das gleiche Begehren regen; um diese Versuchung niederzuhalten, muß [sic] der eigentlich Beneidete um die Frucht seines Wagnisses gebracht werden, und die Strafe gibt den Vollstreckern nicht selten Gelegenheit, unter der Rechtfertigung der Sühne dieselbe frevle Tat auch ihrerseits zu begehen. (Freud 120)

It is for this reason that transgressions of a taboo often lead to the tabooing of the transgressor, because he is now seen as a negative example for society (Freud 88,94).

Two additional factors are important in the understanding of Freud's notion of the taboo. For Freud, taboos are imposed upon the people by an outside authority and they operate through projecting inner desires unto something outside the person (Freud 90 and López Cirugeda 209). Freud sees taboos as a primitive form of prohibition which is instigated by an authority and which counters an ambivalent desire between the restriction placed on the individual and an inner desire to break the law, which is in turn "displaced upon something else" (López Cirugeda 209). In Freud's writing, taboo is the place where binary oppositions meet.

Claude Lévi-Strauss expanded on these ideas and saw taboo as the fault line between nature and culture. Similar to Freud, Claude Lévi- Strauss saw taboo as a central force of social coherence (Lambek Taboo among M.S. 261). He investigated one taboo in particular, which led him to a number of conclusions on the nature of taboo in general. Lévi-Strauss focused on the incest taboo, which he saw as the only universal human rule (Lévi-Strauss 8-9). According to Whitmarsh, Lévi-Strauss' writing on the issue, especially on the notion of the sacred, was ambiguous. While he was criticized for this ambiguity, Whitmarsh sees it as essential for the understanding of taboo (e.g. 875-876). A taboo is characterized by its ambiguous nature. Taboos are not simple bans, neither are they omissions caused by indifference; they are linked to desires (875-876).

His investigations into the nature of the incest taboo led Lévi-Strauss to the assumption that every society is a place of interaction in which the primary goal is the exchange of women in the form of marriage in order to prevent incestuous relations: "Thus, the problem is resolved by transforming the incestuous impulse into a socially sanctioned marriage exchange" (Schechner 571). Every subsequent exchange arises out of this initial interaction (Schechner 564-566, 571). Not only do the systems of exchange and marriage follow from this initial taboo,

but any societies' kinship systems and marriage rules also arise out of this central prohibition. "Lévi-Strauss's main idea is that [kinship systems] are always the expression of some sort of exchange between groups, which is, therefore, the origin of the different rules of marriage" (Korn 4). While one might argue that this view is misogynist by nature and based on the commodification of women, Lévi-Strauss emphasized that the dynamic of incest would not change, even if societies were to exchange the men, since the central mechanism of marriage is a change from a biological status (woman as mother, sister, daughter) to a cultural one (woman as wife) (Schechner 568).

This transition already indicates the most important aspect of Lévi-Strauss' writing on the subject of taboo for this thesis. In his book, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, Lévi-Strauss repeatedly addresses the fault line between nature and culture (Schechner 563). On the one hand, he postulates that rules, such as the marriage rules he outlines, are clear signs of culture: "Wherever there are rules, we know for certain that the cultural stage has been reached" (Lévi-Strauss 8). However, on the other hand, he also states that universalities across cultures – such as the incest taboo – are clear signs of an intrinsic human nature (Lévi-Strauss 8). Consequently, taboos – and the incest taboo in particular – are spaces where nature and nurture meet.

Therefore, taboos lie at the fault line between culture and nature. The origin of the incest prohibition, for example, evades simple explanations since it is influenced neither purely by cultural nor biological factors (Korn 8-9 and Kortmulder 438): "In the triply polarized interplay among the biological, psychological, and social processes clustered around the incest impulses and taboo (and all other sexual regulations), the transformation from nature to culture is achieved and yet always conflicted and jeopardized" (Schechner 572). In the incest taboo, culture triumphed over nature. Yet in this defeat, Nature actually benefitted; since following its own impulses would have led to Nature's inevitable death (Korn 8-10).

Damore's case shows the relevance of Freud's and of Lévi-Strauss' ideas. In the media representation, the emotional complexity which Freud outlined with regards to taboo subjects is as apparent as the line between nature and culture which Lévi-Strauss described.

3.2. The functions of taboos in modern societies

Since the times of Freud and Lévi-Strauss, taboos have been conceptualized in a variety of ways. This section will outline todays understanding of taboos. While there appears to be a tendency in contemporary western societies to see taboos as a thing of the past, scholars agree

that they are as present as ever (Frietsch 9 and Lambek Taboo 15430). Frietsch links this view to our conception of the enlightenment and to the idea that sex constitutes the primary taboo. Since our society does not overtly treat sex as a taboo, wide parts of the population consider these conversational and behavioral prohibitions obsolete (Frietsch 9). However, Belton and others argue that this is not the case (e.g. Belton 11-12, 90-91).

Taboos form around subjects which are considered unclean, but they also operate with alluring force and relate our behavior to ideas about morals (e.g. Lambek Taboo 15429). Taboos can be overt, covert or unconscious and they are closely linked to ideas and language of uncleanliness (Kraft 263 and Guzy 18). This is also the reason for the taboo status of some occupations wherein people either work with the dead or the diseased. Therefore, taboos today are generally associated with rules of avoidance (Guzy 18). These prohibitions disclose what cannot be said within a society; they disclose that which is secret and prohibited. Simultaneously, however, taboos are also spaces of alluring forces with great power, capable of influencing the individual (Guzy 21): "Indeed, nobody is indifferent to taboo: probably because taboo is still considered as something dangerous, untouchable, or unmentionable, it is somehow tempting and fascinating for us." (Crespo-Fernández 9).

The instigation of taboos often relies on certain subject matters, or semantic fields. Taboos emerge in areas which are seen as particularly indisputable, vulnerable and deserving of protection: "A taboo is a topic that a culture prevents its people from discussing freely. The population has been subtly taught from birth that the prevailing view on the subject is natural, unquestionable and correct" (Arthur 4). Areas where these prohibitions are often established include religious beliefs, bodily impulses and urges –especially those of a sexual nature –, violence, as well as cultural viewpoints which are deemed to be overcome by society, like, for example, overt sexism (Benthien and Gutjahr 8-11). Foucault asserts that sexuality and politics are the primary areas where taboos are established (Foucault Order 52). Therefore, one could argue that topics where feelings of vulnerability or powerful interests intermingle are more predominantly involved in the establishment of taboos. In establishing taboos, boundaries play an important role (Guzy 21). For example, taboos might emerge at the boundaries between the individual and society: Taboos often "[…] arise out of social constraints on the individual's behavior. They arise in cases where the individual's acts can cause discomfort, harm or injury to him- or herself and to others" (Allan and Burridge 27).

Who, then, establishes notions of what is unthinkable? Freud and Douglas suggest that taboos are initiated by controlling elites or authorities (López Cirugeda 209 and Douglas XIII).

According to Douglas, taboos are established and maintained in order to guard the interests of ruling elites against assessment: "Criticism will be suppressed, whole areas of life become unspeakable and, in consequence, unthinkable. But when the controllers of opinion want a different way of life, the taboos will lose credibility and their selected view of the universe will be revised" (Douglas XIII). However, although these constraints are often imposed from above, either by people of high social standing – like royalty – or by ancestors, the adherence to taboos is considered beneficial in most cultures and consequently even people of the highest social standing are likely to follow their own impositions (Lambek Taboo among M.S. 249). Hence, taboos, as a system of cultural norms, are closely linked to power. Guzy argues that they are inscribed into our bodies through our understanding of gender and sex and that they are intertwined with our individual conscience and morality. Consequently, ideas of that which is taboo are essential in internalizing ideas about that which is holy within society (Guzy 19-20).

This relationship between taboos and power is often called into question by the broader public. A new injunction is established through continuous processes of prohibition and lifting of prohibitions (Benthien and Gutjahr 8). Taboos are not established in a linear fashion and while there might be developments where one could witness the celebrated breaking of a taboo, the same act might be seen as an affront when committed at a different time (Benthien and Gutjahr 8). Another complicating factor lies in the fact that taboos are more frequently formulated implicitly rather than explicitly and are not only sanctioned by society but also by the individual who transgresses them. This individual might experience feelings of shame, embarrassment, or guilt and it is for this reason that taboos are often subject to inner censors (Benthien and Gutjahr 7-8). An act of transgression can therefore call attention to an implicit taboo within a society, or as Lambek puts it: "[T]aboos are often indicated through instances of their transgression, in effect, a double negation" (Taboo 15431). Cultural boundaries therefore seem to call for their own transgression and are only made more salient by instances of their violation (Benthien and Gutjahr 13). Jokes are often the space in which these boundaries are explored (Kraft 262). Wherever there is a taboo, there is also a breaking thereof: "Of course, the presence of taboos has always generated fantasies of transgression. These are often difficult to distinguish from actual transgressions and at the same time may produce transgressive acts of their own […]" (Lambek Taboo 15431). There are a variety of punishments for those who break social prohibitions. One has already been mentioned: people often feel guilty after transgressing a taboo. Often, these feelings of guilt are accompanied with illness or other bodily sensations (Allan and Burridge 27). However, they may also be subject to social ostracism, or become taboo themselves (Kraft 262 and Freud e.g. 88, 94).

Taboos fulfil a variety of functions (e.g. Simoes Lucas Freitas 3 and Benthien and Gutjahr 10). They are a force for social coherence, since they "[…] provide a means of affinity for those who agree to hold a taboo in common" (Lambek Taboo among M.S. 249). According to Przyrembel, the notion of taboo is central for understanding the history of modernity and it is an essential mechanism in the continual process of forming societies (10-12). In addition to these functions, Mary Douglas sees taboos as one of the central forces behind the formation of morality and social order. She claims that without taboos "[…] conceptual and moral discrimination would be compromised and the ensuing freedom of both thought and action would be hopelessly chaotic" (Lambek Taboo 15430). According to Douglas, social morality is based on the distinction between that which is clean and that which is unclean (Douglas XI). This connection seems intuitive and is also prevalent in everyday conversations when we describe taboo language and swear words as "dirty" words and when people tell someone to wash their mouth after uttering "filthy" language (e.g. Allan and Burridge 40-42). These distinctions, however, do not relate to hygiene as such, but rather to an embodied understanding of what is moral or immoral; that which might be considered dirty in our society is considered taboo in other contexts (Guzy 20-21 and Douglas XI). This understanding of the embodied nature of taboos will be discussed in detail in a later section of this chapter. Douglas highlights an additional function of the concept, saying that it organizes society and social consensus: "Taboo confronts the ambiguous and shunts it into the category of the sacred" (Douglas XI). Consequently, the origins of norms and morality lie within social taboos:

> Der Tabu-Komplex einer spezifischen Gesellschaft ist somit ein externes und gleichzeitig internalisiertes Norm- und Wertesystem, gleich einem juristischen System, das im Falle eines Tabubruchs nach Sühneritualen verlangt. Im jeweiligen Tabu-Komplex wird demnach das soziale Gewissen, d.h. eine soziale Moral deutlich. Diese äußert sich als ein kulturspezifisches Ideen- und Wertesystem, das mit Geboten, Verboten und kollektiv ritualisierten Handlungen operiert und sich als ein sozialer Körper am Körper des Einzelnen manifestiert. (Guzy 19)

This quote already hints at another important function of taboos, which is their role in the formation of identity, which will again be discussed in detail in a later subsection of this chapter. First, it is important to note what is known about the formation of taboos.

Taboos vary in their iterations and are contingent on a specific space and time. It is for this reason that the nature of taboos can shift drastically over time. Religion, for example, has become less of a taboo subject within the context of western societies, while matters of race and the treatment of minorities have become increasingly controversial topics (Allan and Burridge 9-10, 106-110). Taboos are also heavily influenced by specific contexts and matters of individual identity: "Even within the same historical period, taboo is dependent on personal

and cultural differences, as particular individuals consider taboo topics in different ways on account of age, social status, education, etc." (Crespo-Fernández 11). Lambek's account of taboos among the Malagasy speakers who live on the island of Mayotte, illustrates the point that there are different taboos which are relevant for different people at different times. There, "[…] taboos are distinctive at every level of social inclusion from humanity viewed as a whole down to the individual" (Lambek Taboo among M.S. 254). Further complicating factors in establishing whether something constitutes a taboo include the medium of conversation and the language in which taboos are discussed. The medium of conversation is relevant because different norms apply for written or spoken forms. With regards to the language in which taboos are discussed, morphology and syntax are an important factor in making something unsayable (Crespo-Fernández 11). One could summarize the context-bound nature of taboos as follows: people enact taboos in a constantly changing environment, pervasively negotiating what any society deems acceptable (Kraft 263-264). Since Taboos differ for groups and individuals, they are also very important in the constitution of our identities, which will be discussed in the following subsection.

3.3 Taboos and Identity

Taboos play a pivotal role in the formation of identity and in the formation of groups. For example, the concept of taboo was widely discussed within Victorian society, where certain utterances or behaviors would be deemed either acceptable or unacceptable, depending on the groups to which each individual belonged (Simoes Lucas Freitas 26). They can also be observed in religious laws concerning different foods, like the Jewish kosher laws (Grotstein 6). In this case, adherence to taboo also constitutes belonging to a religious group, or a subsection thereof. Consequently, these practices "provide a means of affinity for those who agree to hold a taboo in common" (Lambek Taboo among M.S. 249). However, keeping a taboo is not the only way in which an individual can signal their belonging to a group. Joseph notes that by breaking a taboo, people can also solidify their relationships with others who do the same (86-87).

Individuals do not only need taboos in order to establish their identity in relation to different groups. Since taboos are linked to our moral understanding of the world, they also play a pivotal role in the formation of our selves (e.g. Whitmarsh 860). The formation of the self with relation to taboos is chiefly accomplished via negation. Taboos function in solidifying one's identity through differentiation from others (Kraft 263):

> To observe a taboo is to establish an identifiable self by establishing a relationship […] with an external reality such that the 'self' only comes into existence in and through this

relationship. In phenomenological language, the self only comes about in 'intentional acts' and the observance of a taboo is such an 'intentional act'. (Gell 136)

Taboos are linked to strong ideas about moral obligations and in adhering to these obligations, individuals can form and maintain a fixed notion of their identity. Restrictions of this kind also play an important role in the formation of the ego (Lambek Taboo 15430 and Frietsch 11-12). Because of this link between taboos and identity, transgressing one might not only establish belonging to a group, but might also have detrimental effects on the transgressor: "Defiance of taboo may challenge subjection, identity, and value at quite a deep level" (Lambek Taboo 15430). Because of this intricate link between a person's identity and their taboos, taboos also offer insights into the processes of establishing morality within individuals (e.g. Lambek Taboo among M.S. 254).

Boundaries are important both for the construction of taboos, and the construction of the social and individual body. This is one of the reasons for the proximity between the concept of the socially constructed body and the notion of taboo (Guzy 21). Taboos exist in two main forms. On the one hand, they can be understood as a set of social rules in the world and on the other hand, taboos are embodied practices which are enacted either in adhering to, or transgressing their prohibitions (Lambek Taboo among M.S. 248). "If we ask what is the practical difference between sacrificing an animal and holding it taboo, it lies precisely in the fact that the taboo is 'pervasively performative', being inscribed into the continuous practice of everyday life" (Lambek Taboo among M.S. 253). While a religious ritual, a Sunday Mass for example, might constitute a performative act once a week, the taboo is something that has to be adhered to at all times. Lambek likens the performative nature of taboos to the performative aspect of language. He gives the example of an amulet, inscribed with protecting spells which is worn by someone who believes in the power of spells and taboos. While the one-time utterance of a protective spell might have a finite effect, wearing the amulet constitutes a continuous utterance of the protective words inscribed in the talisman. A taboo functions in a similar way, in that it acts as a continual imposition which has to be embodied (Lambek Taboo among M.S. 252- 253). This embodied aspect of taboos is also evident in the bodily sensation of unease people feel when taboo subjects are discussed (Arthur 4). Therefore, the felt reaction which people have to the breach of their own taboos is a sign of an individual embodied morality. Consequently, taboos are extremely influential in the formation of one's personhood and psychology.

The relationship between taboo and gender, which along with sexual orientation is a prevalent topic of this thesis and a constituent aspect in the formation of our social identity (e.g.

Cerezo et al. 11), is close. Taboos are not only contingent on cultural circumstances, but they also establish differences between men and women within certain cultures (e.g. Lambek Taboo among M.S. 254). Gender taboos form at the intersection of gender and culture, where they establish degrees of cultural inclusion or exclusion for the individual according to their gender (Benthien and Gutjahr 8). They also serve to ground gender attributes in an emotional, affective base. Because of this function, they can serve as indicators of social change and shifting boundaries in cultural attitudes towards specific gendered topics (Benthien and Gutjahr 8-11). Judith Butler, for example, argues that the incest taboo is fundamental in establishing both sexuality and gender. It does so by prohibiting the opposite sex parent as a love object, effectively prohibiting identification with said parent (Bell 115 and Butler 80). All homosexual desires and all desires for identification with the opposite gender are therefore, according to Butler, prohibited under the incest taboo (Bell 114-117 and Butler 78-82).

As has been pointed out above, modern western societies take pride in the perceived reality that some harmful ways of thinking about sexuality seem to have been overcome. However, debates about sexuality are still delving into a taboo subject and they still seem to operate in an ambivalent space between open discussion and silence (Frietsch 10). Within the cultural realm of sexuality there is a constant and ongoing debate about what is and is not allowed (Benthien and Gutjahr 13). However, some subjects which relate to gendered or sexual components of identity, as well as race, are clearly taboo and there are strong efforts to regulate some forms of speech with regards to these subjects: "Nowadays, for example, the desire to eradicate from language any offense towards minorities is more evident than ever; in this way, for example, sexism is socially and legally banned in public discourse, whereas sex is not or, at least, not officially banned" (Crespo-Fernández 11). So, while sex is a topic which is mostly discussed openly in our society, some aspects of gender are banned from this form of open discussion. One could argue that sexism is not a part of the gender- complex, but rather related to sex, since it is not related to the realm of the cultural (i.e. gender), but to the biological (i.e. sex), but sexism, by definition, relies on the gender specific hierarchical orders within society and should hence also be considered an aspect of gender (Lorenzi-Cioldi and Kulich 693).

As we have seen, the concept of taboo is closely linked to the concept of the body, which itself can be understood as existing in two simultaneous states: the body can be understood as the combination of a social and a biological body (Guzy 19-20). Culture is being reiterated and reproduced by every generation anew and this process is guided by collective norms and ideas. Taboo is central to guiding these norms about different cultural ideas and gender is one of those

ideas which we embody (Guzy 19-20). Hence, taboo plays an important role in the establishment of our group, our individual identity, and our gendered identity.

3.4.   Language and taboos

Taboo related language has been studied extensively. Taboo is one of the driving forces behind language change since most speakers continually adopt new language in order to avoid evoking offensive concepts (Allan and Burridge 2). Smith and Gómez see two contradictory models for using language in taboo-related circumstances. The first is euphemistic: Language can be used in order to conceal unwanted realities with speakers effectively "blurring a particularly unpleasant reference to the real world" (Smith and Gómez 32). Speakers can employ euphemisms by means such as lexical substitution, phonetic alteration, or verbal and non-verbal modulation (Smith and Gómez 30-31). The second way in which language is used in order to talk about taboo subjects is dysphemistic, whereby speakers' utterances are "[…] reinforced, intensified, or evocatively motivated […]" (Smith and Gómez 31). Dysphemisms and face-threatening acts are reliable indicators of taboo subjects (Allan and Burridge 31 and Crespo-Fernández 10-11). "Speakers resort to dysphemism to talk about people and things that frustrate and annoy them, that they disapprove of and wish to disparage, humiliate and degrade" (Allan and Burridge 31). Euphemisms, dysphemisms, and orthophemisms – which refer to "direct or neutral expressions" (Allan and Burridge 29) – can be subsumed under the umbrella-term X-phemism. It is important at this point to note that "[m]uch of the X-phemistic language used to verbalize taboo topics is metaphorical in nature," and that "[…] both euphemism and dysphemism can be considered special kinds of metaphors, since they have similar social and cognitive functions and create conceptual mappings." (Sánchez Ruiz 235).

There is another basic differentiation when it comes to taboo expressions in that they can be either referential or non-referential. Referential expressions relate to specific subjects and "[…] delicate concepts or semantic fields (such as sexuality)" (Pizarro Pedraza 183), while non-referential expressions encompass the area of swear words (Pizarro Pedraza 182-183). Allan and Burridge suggest that while for taboo words the truism of the arbitrary connection between the sounds of a word and the abstract concept it evokes still holds, these words are also indicative of the force of taboo concepts in a variety of ways (242). First, they argue that taboo language evokes stronger emotional reactions in speakers and hearers than other language. In order to prove this statement, Allan and Burridge cite a study which demonstrated that taboo words elicit stronger skin conductance responses in participants than other words (242). They explain this reaction in the following way: "The taboo terms have been contaminated by the

taboo concepts they represent" (Allan and Burridge 242). They also make this strong connection responsible for the fact that taboo language is subject to a high degree of etymological change, and for the great richness in the English language when it comes to expressions which relate to bodily functions, parts of the body, or sexuality (242-243). "[E]uphemisms become tainted over time, as the negative associations reassert themselves and undermine the euphemistic quality of the word" (Allan and Burridge 243), which leads to new words for taboo concepts, which in turn are discontinued because of their connotations, thus continuing this ongoing language change. It is important to note that the driving force behind these changes seems to be the desire to conceal a forbidden reality which is inherent in taboo language (Smith and Gómez 29).

There is a close conceptual link between polite behaviors and an understanding of what constitutes a taboo. As is the case with taboos, politeness in interaction relies strongly on context and is dependent on a number of factors such as "[…] the relationship between speakers, their audience, and anyone within earshot; the subject matter; the situation (setting); and whether a spoken or written medium is used" (Allan and Burridge 30). Once someone is being impolite and uses a dysphemistic communicative act this is a reliable indicator of a face threatening act (Crespo-Fernández 10-11). The notion of face was brought forward by Brown and Levinson who define it as "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself" (Brown and Levinson 61). Face comprises negative face, which relates to freedoms of action and the right not to be imposed upon, and positive face, which is connected to a positive self- image (Brown and Levinson 67-69). Speakers can actively try to threaten someone's face and "[m]ost speech acts can be regarded as being inherently face-threatening, either to the speaker, the hearer, or both" (Geyer 16). Speakers usually try to correct for this inherent danger with their use of politeness strategies (Geyer 16). In establishing the concept of face, Brown and Levinson rely on cross-cultural findings and consequently arrive at the conclusion that politeness is a cultural universal. While this universality is a contested issue, their theory nonetheless has proven very influential (Geyer, 16-23). In conclusion, language which talks about taboos is often euphemistic and metaphorical in its nature, it is either referential or non-referential, and often relates to politeness and the notion of face.

4.   Contemporary debates

4.1.   Nature vs. nurture and similar cases

The story of the memo tapped into a number of contemporary cultural debates. Damore's text and Google's reaction to it have to be viewed within the context of the culture at that time. In

the Summer of 2017, Google was struggling with allegations of differential payment for men and women. They were also criticized for a lack of diversity with regards to "women and underrepresented minorities, like black and Latino workers" (Lang Firing) in leadership positions, as well as amongst engineers (Wakabayashi Contentious). Ortutay at the time wrote: "[…] Silicon Valley faces a watershed moment over gender and ethnic diversity. Blamed for years for not hiring enough women and minorities – and not welcoming them once they are hired – tech companies such as Google, Facebook and Uber have promised big changes" (Ortutay).

The reaction to Damore's memo is indicative, not only of broader problems and discussions about sexism within the tech industry, but within society as a whole. Tannen, for example, starts her article on James Damore's memo with the weary assertion that this memo is just the latest text in an ongoing debate: "Here we go again: sucked into the nature vs. nurture quagmire" (Tannen). Brooks, too, notes that

> Damore was tapping into the long and contentious debate about genes and behavior. On one side are those who believe that humans come out as blank slates and are formed by social structures. On the other are the evolutionary psychologists who argue that genes interact with environment and play a large role in shaping who we are. In general, the evolutionary psychologists have been winning this debate. (Brooks)

In fact, there are some cases with striking similarities, where media pressure over political views or over statements about biological differences between women and men have led people to fall into disrepute.

One notably similar case concerned Lawrence Summers, the former President of Harvard, who on January 14th, 2005 addressed a small private conference on "Diversifying the Science and Engineering Workforce" (Murray 32). Addressing the issue that women are underrepresented in tenured positions in science and engineering at top American universities, he concluded: "So my best guess, to provoke you . . . [is] that in the special case of science and engineering there are issues of intrinsic aptitude . . ." (quoted in Murray April, 2005, p. 32). Once publicized, these remarks indeed provoked an uproar and pressure mounted on Summers to resign, which he did on June 30th, 2006 (Hughes 53). In her article on Damore, Ou also mentions the case of Summers and says that his "[…] remarks were widely condemned as an allegation that women have an innate disadvantage in science and math" (Ou). The two cases of Summers and Damore present instances where the questioning of biological differences between the sexes proved taboo enough to end a person's career at an institution.

The second example which offers striking similarities to Damore' Google memo is Douglas Murray's case (e.g. Page). Together with his co-author, Richard J. Herrnstein, he published a book called *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life*. Herrnstein

Conley and Domingue summarize the book's thesis as follows:

> […] earlier in the twentieth century, ascribed characteristics primarily determined who got ahead, and cognitive ability meant comparatively little. However, as institutional barriers fell over the course of generations and society became more meritocratic, achieved characteristics became more salient. (Conley and Domingue 520)

While these assertions were backed by most scientists within their field, other statements proved more controversial (Conley and Domingue 520-521). Herrnstein and Murray asserted that with the continual dismantling of structural inequalities in societies, innate differences in aptitude and intelligence within the population would surface:

> [T]hey argued that a genetically based caste system was coming into focus in the United States by the 1990s and was not only being reinforced by sorting in the education system and the labor market but was being solidified within the process of reproduction by an increase in assortative mating on skills and intelligence, which caused the distribution of talent to widen further with each generation. (Conley and Domingue 521)

The response to the book was extreme on all accounts, with political pundits from all ideological strides commenting on it. Some people levelled accusations against its science, calling it "pseudo-scientific" (Ma and Schapira 58-59). Some of the strongest criticism "[…] came from evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould […], who said that the book's assumptions were fundamentally racist, insofar as they justify and legitimize existing racial disparities; by arguing that existing differences between racial groups are biologically determined" (Ma and Schapira 59). Murray faced most of the public response alone, since Herrnstein died before the publication of the book (Ma and Schapira 60-61). The debate over the validity of the claims made in *The Bell Curve*, rages on to this day and while many claims have been rebutted, some have withstood scrutiny and have been supported by new evidence (Ma and Schapira 60-66).

Damore's case is not only similar to Murray's because they both claimed that biological differences might play a role in differences between strata of the population. They are also similar because in both cases, arguments on both sides of the debate seem to be motivated by political reasoning and funding[2]. Both cases also highlight the controversial nature of the topic. Herrnstein and Murray, as Pinker notes, did not blame differences in population level

---

[2] For the Murray case (Ma and Schapira 63-66)
For Damore's case see Chapter 5.

distribution of certain traits entirely on biology (Pinker 219). They repeatedly made disclaimers arguing that nurture might also play an important role in the differences they discovered (e.g. Herrnstein and Murray 315). However, this "'some-of-each" position did not protect them from accusations of racism and comparisons to Nazis" (Pinker 219). Murray, who continues to defend his claims, has been a prominent target of deplatforming efforts on college campuses. The power with which this debate rages on is exemplified in the following anecdote from 2017: At that time, Murray was invited to Middlebury College in order to talk about his 2012 book *Coming Apart*, but when disinvitation efforts by a group of students failed, violent protests ensued. Murray was hindered from delivering his talk on site; instead he gave it from a locked room via livestream.

> When the livestream ended, as Murray and Professor Stanger [a local political science professor] left the building, they were swarmed by protesters. One shoved Stanger another grabbed her hair and pulled with such force that she suffered concussion and a whiplash injury. As Murray and Stanger attempted to flee campus by car, protesters, some of them masked, pounded on the car, rocked it back and forth, and jumped onto the hood. Someone threw a large traffic sign in front of their car to prevent them from leaving, but public safety officials cleared a path, and the car eventually drove off to a diner with selected students and faculty. The protesters, however, somehow discovered where the group had gathered for dinner, so the Middlebury administrators quickly moved the group to yet another location, this time miles from campus. (Lukianoff and Haidt 87-88)

The vitriol with which the public debate about the book rages on has deterred some researchers from "[…] publicly discuss[ing] the policy implications of the idea that intelligence is heritable" (Ma and Schapira 68). Hughes argues that a lot of the discussion over Herrnstein and Murray's claims relied heavily on name-calling and ad-hominem attacks against Murray and his defenders (77-78). Murray himself also spoke out in defense of Lawrence Summers, saying that there was an "Orwellian disinformation about innate group differences" (13), which was not only perpetuated by the media, but also by scientists and academics who are unwilling to speak up in support of these views, because of the public stigma that comes with these positions (Murray 13). Many of these claims mirror the points that Damore's supporters made in the wake of his memo, as will be seen in chapter 5. One striking example is Murray's assertion that this "[…] taboo has crippled our ability to explore almost any topic that involves the different ways in which groups of people respond to the world around them – which means almost every political, social, or economic topic of any complexity" (Murray 22).

The overarching debate in these cases is concerned with the complex interplay of nature and nurture. In Damore's case, many factors complicate the issue. First, he had some claims to authority with regards to biological differences between the sexes since he also had a

background in biology (Dallas Morning News Editorial). Consequently, Damore found support for his assertions even amongst experts: "Of the four scientists who commented at *Quillette*, a libertarian-leaning online magazine critical of 'political correctness,' three, including neuroscientist and science writer Deborah Soh, thought the memo was almost entirely correct" (Young). However, some media voices were quick to dismiss his arguments saying that none of them "[bear] close scrutiny, in part because the claims are ephemeral and political […]" (Hiltzik).

If Damore is right in at least some of his claims, as the equivocal media coverage suggests, the question remains, whether it is nature or nurture which is responsible for the differences between the sexes. Some articles put forth the notion that this question is wrongheaded and cannot be answered definitively (e.g. Tannen). Tabery, too, proposes that the distinction between nature and nurture is impractical and that throughout history, the same arguments were used in different iterations, time and time again, leading to the same outcomes (1-8). Fausto-Sterling also argues that it is difficult to say whether differences between humans have biological origins since conclusive experiments would not be ethical. What remains are "quasi-experiments" (Fausto-Sterling 39) because there is no non-invasive method of looking at the "[…] details of brain anatomy and physiology on living humans" (Fausto-Sterling 40). Therefore, one might say that it would be best to cease all investigations into biological differences between different section of humanity since these investigations and subsequent acts that relied on their findings for justification wreaked havoc throughout humanities history. Social Darwinism and the logic of biological differences were not only used by the Nazis in order to justify their acts but also by a lot of other groups. As Hiltzik puts it in relation to Damore's memo:

> Over the years, biology and its supposed intellectual or psychological manifestations have been used by antebellum plantation owners to justify their enslavement of an ostensibly inferior race. By white South Africans to justify keeping political power out of the hands of a black majority that 'just wasn't ready' for rule. By American political leaders to deny the vote to women. By Nazis to rationalize the extermination of Jews, homosexuals, and Romani, or Gypsies. (Hiltzik)

These comparisons show the way in which Damore's memo tapped into the long history of the nature vs. nurture debate which was dominated by different arguments at different times. Throughout wide parts of the twentieth century, it was a mainstream intellectual tendency to deny influence to human nature and maintain that human beings are "blank slates" (Pinker 215). This argument was especially alluring due to its implications: if people were all the same and every difference was due to nurture, it followed that people were infinitely malleable.

Undesirable traits like racism, sexism, greed, or prejudice could be avoided by nurture and the idea raised the prospect "of unlimited social progress" (Pinker 215). However, newer scientific methods have led to the realization that "the doctrine of the blank slate is untenable" (Pinker 215). While Pinker acknowledges that nurture plays an important part in the development of any trait, he also suggests that "[e]volutionary biology gives reasons to believe that there are systematic species-wide universals, circumscribed ways in which the sexes differ […]" (216).

The attitudes outlined above, which acknowledge a link between nature and nurture, while also arguing that to study the exact origin of a specific trait is undesirable, is what Stephen Pinker describes as "holistic interactionism" (217). This attitude is characterized by the admittance that both nature and nurture play a role in the formation of behavior while trying not to engage seriously with questions of where specific behaviors come from (Pinker 216-217). Pinker claims that this attitude muddies the intellectual waters, in that there are cases where only nature or only nurture applies. He gives a striking example, saying that the people who are born in England are not genetically predisposed to learn the English language. While they are predisposed to learning languages in general, the fact that they learn English is entirely circumstantial (Pinker 218-219). Pinker's main point is that this holistic interactionalism is counterproductive in most fields that look at behavioral differences between people since most cases warrant exact scrutiny (219-226).

It lies beyond the scope of this thesis to establish whether any of the claims made in the memo are credible from a biological point of view. However, what can be determined is that the debate on these issues is not over, as some articles have suggested. The the sheer number of responses to Damore's points, some of which were supportive of his claims (e.g. Brooks), indicate its ongoing nature. What is striking is the similarity between the cases of Summers, Murray and Damore. They are all examples in which people were fired, deplatformed, or fell into disrepute because of their views, or because they peddled in what their critics perceived to be "pseudo-science". They also show that Damore was by no means the first person to venture into this subject. They are all remarkably similar in the ways in which the outrage they induced was followed by a broad public debate, which in the case of Murray rages on to this day in the form of disinvitation- and deplatforming efforts. All of these instances are highly indicative of the cultural practices of taboos outlined above. The next section will provide additional context in the form of other contemporary debates within feminism and the study of anti-genderist movements.

4.2. Gender, anti-genderism, "feminist biophobia", and Trump

The controversy which followed the Google memo is not only indicative of an ongoing debate about influences of nature and nurture on people's behavior. It also taps into ideas about the exclusion of women from the workplace. Since the topic of gender will be discussed in this chapter it is necessary to clarify what is meant by it. This thesis follows "[…] the traditional feminist formulation whereby sex is seen as a biological category and gender as a socially constructed one" (Walsh 14).

Damore's claim that women are, on average, just not as interested in tech as are men, is indicative of a wider problem, decried by several scholars. This problem lies in telling people what they should and should not be interested in. Sterk and Knoppers for example, suggest that gendering can occur in a variety of ways and circumstances, and that telling someone what they should be interested in is one of these ways (108): "The rhetoric of entrepreneurialism deftly blames women themselves for their relative absence from high managerial positions. No matter what the actual case may be, women are perceived as uninterested in the aggressive parts of managerial life" (Sterk and Knoppers 94). This last statement mirrors a number of Damore's points, as well as the criticism he received for making them. Sterk and Knoppers go on to argue that choice is not really an option in the debate between nature and nurture. "However, even choices that women feel they have come to freely […] are tinged with cultural givens" (Sterk and Knoppers 9). But choice is an important aspect in this debate, since by the same logic, Damore should be exempt from any criticism because his choice to write the memo would only come from cultural and environmental circumstances.

In her book on gender and discourse, Walsh maintains that some communicative practices within the workplace systematically exclude women. She "[…] suggest[s] that two of the main ways in which gender inequality is perpetuated are through the operation of impersonal masculinist discursive practices that have become normative, as well as through concrete fraternal networks that transcend the boundaries of institutional discourses" (Walsh 17). Communities of practice can be likened to apprenticeships where people adopt a certain normative behavior, based on which they form their identities within these communities. Some members are, by merit of certain characteristics, "[…] more 'core' than others" (Walsh 3). Damore's memo could serve as an indication for the validity of Walsh's statements, since a number of articles claimed that his memo was an indication for broader sexism within Silicon Valley (e.g. Jaeger).

It is understandable that women who have worked in a field for their entire life would be frustrated by the continuing resurgence of the discourse outlined above; mainly because of the conflation of interest-related differences in biology in large segments of the population and these same differences in individual people. One example of the impact that this discourse is having on people can be seen in Wojcicki's article, which is discussed in detail in chapter 4. Walsh suggests that in order to combat the male dominated discourse in any field, women should adopt a "critical difference" (204) approach. She takes the view that assimilation to "pre-existing norms and practices" (Walsh 204) is counterproductive, since this behavior can lead to large numbers of female voices being swallowed up by the dominant male discourse: "[…] [T]he voices of large numbers of women can be assimilated, if they choose to adopt a policy of accommodation to pre-existing norms and practices" (Walsh 204). These arguments have to be understood in light of the assumption that "[d]iscourse and discursive practices make up gender" (Sterk and Knoppers 5). Sterk and Knoppers argue that every text about men and women, as well as every word we use to describe them "does gender" (5) in the way in which it iterates and re-iterates tropes and ideas about feminine - and masculine traits (5). In this way, Damore's memo did gender by reiterating and solidifying traditional gender roles. It is a logical conclusion therefore that his memo stirred outrage. While some of his assumptions might even be correct, and based in scientific research, Damore was doing gender in describing differential average distributions of interest between the sexes.

However, this is not the only relevant reading of the memo from a feminist perspective, since the media coverage tapped into a variety of debates within feminism. In order to illustrate this question, it is necessary to first define feminism. While it is not a unitary movement there are certain universal tendencies within it: "Feminism, one might say, is the multiplicity of political and philosophical programs designed to explain and end sexist oppression" (Vandermassen 4). The first wave of feminism "emerged in the eighteenth century as a product of the Enlightenment" (Vandermassen 4) and was based on the assumption that "the differences between the sexes are small and are mostly the product of socialization" (Vandermassen 4). Second wave feminism, for which the founding text was Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex,* emerged within the 1970s. One of its main goals was women's equal access to the workforce (Mendes 559-564).

The entry of an increasing number of women into traditionally male-dominated fields has "[…] at the very least, […] called into question the unproblematized status of the implicitly masculinist belief systems, values and discursive practices that predominate in these domains" (Walsh 204). However, it also led to a backlash and to the reinforcement of "traditional fraternal

networks" (Walsh 204). Some strands of second wave feminism include radical feminism, which claimed that everything, including personal life, was political, and socialist feminism whose proponents focused on uncovering ways in which the structure of society was rigged against women (Vandermassen 5). With regards to this tendency of radical feminism, Walsh argues that the coupling of the political and the private might lead to the disappearance of the political (162).

As opposed to first-, or second wave feminism, post- or third wave feminism has no one clear discernible purpose but strives for the alleviation of all forms of oppression (Mendes 556-557). It is not specifically linked to the social advancement of women anymore and scholars disagree on what it represents in its entirety with some arguing that this third wave of feminism also includes the fragmentation of the movement into a neo- liberal form of individual feminism. For some scholars, this is also linked to the disillusionment of feminism "because its goals (appear to) have been achieved" (Mendes 557). The debate within feminism which most relates to Damore's memo is the debate around the dichotomy between sameness and difference. While both camps in this debate strive for more equality between the sexes, the advocates of the sameness- hypothesis argue that this equality will naturally come, once all structural inequalities between the sexes are overturned, while the voices in the other camp maintain that women are in fact different from men and that there should be efforts to make the workplace more accepting especially in the light of women's dual role as mothers and professionals (e.g. Capps 65).

In investigating Damore's memo, one also has to note a broader, international backlash against political correctness and what has been called *gender ideology*. While Walsh already saw a general " […] climate of backlash against so-called political correctness, a climate that […] has helped to re-legitimize overt sexism, racism and heterosexism" (Walsh 12), in 2001, more contemporary sources speak of a broader, international movement of anti-genderism (e.g. Kováts 529). The international rise of right-wing and conservative governments of recent years has brought with it a trend to regard all advocates of LGBTQ and gender issues as a homogenous mass of ideologues (Kováts 529). Within the anti-gender movement, terms which relate to equal rights are used interchangeably and the term "'gender ideology'" which has its roots in the Vatican, is used in order to construct a common enemy (Kováts 529 and Choluj 220):

> It is crucial to bear in mind that 'gender ideology' does not designate gender studies, but is a term initially created to oppose women's and LGBT rights activism as well as the scholarship deconstructing essentialist and naturalistic assumptions about gender and

sexuality. Erasing fierce controversies within gender and sexuality studies and the complex interplay between activism and the academy, it regards gender as the ideological matrix of a set of abhorred ethical and social reforms, namely sexual and reproductive rights, same-sex marriage and adoption, new reproductive technologies, sex education, gender mainstreaming, protection against gender violence and others. (Kuhar and Paternotte 5)

The movement against the perceived threat of "gender ideology" is transnational and it is difficult to point to a single factor which might have initiated it (Kováts 529-531). While there are voices which argue that it is a phenomenon that would have been unthinkable without the internet, Ganz and Meßmer see anti-genderism as a part of a broader social trend (73). Kováts, too, believes that

> *[g]ender* [italics in original] provides the theatre for the struggle for hegemony in the Gramscian sense, and these mobilizations are rather the throes of a contest for redefining liberal democracy where 'gender ideology' embodies numerous deficits of the so-called progressive actors, and the adversaries of the concept react to these by re-politicizing certain issues in a polarized language. (Kováts 535)

Kováts and others see anti-genderism as symptoms of a fatigue with the political status quo within the populace. Broad parts of the electorate believe that the political elites disregard their concerns and that they "[…] are powerless in the face of transnational companies and supranational bodies […]" (Kováts 532). It is also not accurate to speak of a uniform movement against "gender ideology" since specific iterations of these political movements sometimes do not openly oppose gender politics and in other cases work together with local political and sometimes religious actors in order to combat these issues (Kováts 529-531). Akin to the old right-wing myth of the Jewish plot to take over the world, anti-genderists seem to believe in a "lesbische Weltverschwörung" (Hark and Villa "Eine Frage" 26). Herrmann believes that the antagonism between anti-genderists and gender studies has its roots in differing opinions on questions of sexual and reproductive freedoms. While the anti- genderism movement tries to limit freedoms of sexuality, gender, and desire, gender studies and its advocates try to expand them (Herrmann 79). He goes on to suggest that any form of dialogue between anti-genderism and the advocates of gender studies is doomed to fail, since anti-genderisms relies on violent language which includes humiliation, defamation, and silencing. Anti-genderism relies on these tactics in order to establish their group identity in opposition to the perceived threat of "gender ideology" (Herrmann 79-90).

Those who oppose feminism and gender studies often see the goals of these disciplines in the propagation of views which oppose a felt natural order. Therefore, they do not accept gender studies as science (Ganz and Meßmer 60). While Hark and Villa maintain that this

critique is not entirely correct, they also concede that one of the central goals within gender studies is the de-naturalization of the naïve idea of a natural gender. Gender has to be understood as the complex ways in which people negotiate their individual gender, treading on the line between nature and culture (Hark and Villa Warum 7-8). Some critics of gender studies therefore claim that these fields oppose reason in not acknowledging differences between women and men (Choluj 221).

However, it would not be accurate to say that all advocates of gender studies disregard biological determinants for these differences. While some feminists claim that "[…] sex, like gender, is a constructed category" (Walsh 14), effectively disregarding all biological factors, others, like Walsh, do not agree with this view and see gender as "[…] both a flexible and a fixed category" (15). Walsh argues that there are two theoretical extremes when it comes to the position of doing gender. While some feminist scholars chiefly limit the scope of *doing gender* to the sphere of the private, thereby understating the power of discourse, others, like Judith Butler "[…] betray […] the opposite tendency of overemphasizing the constitutive nature of discourse, while ignoring material constraints" (Walsh 16). Walsh goes on to say that Butler's oeuvre shows "[…] a confusion between the metaphorical and the real" (Walsh 16).

Anti-genderist accusations that gender studies and feminism disregard biology, also have to be viewed in the context of these debates within the field. If one were to single out soundbites in the debate outlined above, it would be easy to construct a straw-man version of feminist thought and make a claim like "all feminists believe that there is no such thing as biology". In fact, the suggestion that gender studies are not scientific is often brought forth by populist movements (Hark and Villa "Eine Frage" 19-20). Those who oppose gender theory often discredit it as pseudo-scientific ideology, dogmatism, and religion. However, in most cases where its critics call it pseudo-scientific, they do not deliver a clear definition of what would constitute science in their opinion (Hark and Villa "Eine Frage" 19-20).

The criticism outlined above – that "gender-ideology" seemingly fights against a natural order – is complicated by the fact that there is a trend within feminist studies to adopt "an extremely environmentalist notion of the 'construction' of sex differences" (Vandermassen 85) and disregard biological evidence as a consequence of this tendency. Vandermassen calls this behavior "feminist biophobia" (e.g. 86) and puts forth the notion that there is a general proclivity within feminism in particular and the social sciences in general to disregard biological explanations for behavioral differences between the sexes. She claims that social scientists continually paint the studies of sex differences in a suspicious light (Vandermassen

87-88). These suspicions sometimes also fall on other feminists: "Even dedicated feminists, such as Christina Hoff Sommers and Cathy Young, are accused of 'feminism bashing' whenever they dare to question some of the ruling tenets within academic feminism today" (Vandermassen 85). Therefore, Vandermassen suggests that feminism should embrace biological findings, rather than ignore them, and that any disregard of findings in the biological sciences "can harm the intellectual credibility of the [feminist] movement" (Vandermassen 196).

It is understandable that some feminists harbor suspicions towards the study of biological differences between the sexes, since these studies have a history of sexism. The fact that men's brains are bigger on average than those of women, was used as a way of justifying forms of oppression until studies failed to show a corresponding difference in intelligence between the sexes (Lorenzi-Cioldi and Kulich 693). Seminal studies into sex differences showed some stable inequalities between men and women, however, these same studies ascertained that the reasons for said differences lay in stereotypes and in socialization rather than biology (Lorenzi-Cioldi and Kulich 693).

Regardless of whether there are biological differences between the sexes or not, it is interesting to note that the debate between the advocates of gender studies and anti-genderism tends to exclude overt criticism of feminism. Hark and Villa claim that criticism of feminism has become scarce (Hark and Villa "Eine Frage" 26). While previous attacks against feminist movements were directed against the notion that men and women should be equal in their rights, newer attackers suggest, that while there should be equal rights for all, men and women are fundamentally different, also in relation to their biology. Critique of feminism therefore tends to focus on gender and not on feminism as a movement (Hark and Villa "Eine Frage" 26). Hark and Villa see this proclivity to evoke the biological science behind differences between women and men as a slight of hand. While first, opponents of feminism were able to rely on traditional discrimination against women to make their points, nowadays they use this scientific argument in order to create pseudo-scientific noise, or as Hark and Villa call it: "szientistischer Lärm" ("Eine Frage" 27).

The tendency towards fragmentation in feminist thought on the issues of biological differences between the sexes outlined above is also one of the major points of critique levelled at identity politics (Kováts 532-534). Identity politics itself has fallen out of favor in the academy, according to Martín Alcoff, who says that the concept has been ill defined and only according to the needs of its opponents (313). She goes on to say that at the core of identity

politics lies "a belief in the relevance of identity to politics" (Matín Alcoff 313) which can be connected to a belief "[…] that those who share one's identity will be one's most consistent allies" (Matín Alcoff 313). However, according to Michaels, the logic behind identity politics is flawed because it shifts the focus away from structural inequalities that disenfranchise the poor towards a view of structural inequalities that disenfranchise women and minorities (Michaels 8-11). Because of this shift, identity politics can sell the gains of a single member of a minority as a win for the entire group (Michaels 11). Right- and left-wing critics of identity politics appear to condemn the same thing, namely the fragmentation of gender, or the individual, into the realm of the subjective (Kováts 532-534). This contributes to a broader view of society which does not see the feminist battleground in politics and its goal in advocating for the toppling of systemic biases, but rather in the freedom of the individual to define their gender as they please (Kováts 532-534). All of this is seen under the umbrella of the neoliberal consensus which "[…] bans every alternative and concurring vision to the current economic order as illegitimate […]" (Kováts 2018: 532).

In this political climate, the rhetoric of Donald Trump and the ways in which he has redefined the public understanding of what can be considered truth, have to be considered. Trump's way of using emotions rather than facts in order to convince his electorate has reached a point where epistemological statements no longer hold (e.g. Mann 573). In this context, the word "post-truth" is often used to indicate a general shift "in people's relationship to truth" (Finlayson 65). The concept is then also linked to a radical form of relativism, which questions the entire notion of truth, or the phenomenon of "echo chambers" which relate to online spaces where people receive their news and opinions from sources with whom they already agree (e.g. Finlayson 72-74). Finlayson argues that these phenomena are not new, but that they are still the sign of a deep disappointment with the current political system which is acted out through language: "What some people are doing with their words, in the context of phenomena such as Brexit and Trump, is issuing a slap in the face to an Establishment which they believe, with good reason, has failed to serve them" (78).

All of these movements and their debates form the cultural ground out of which this discourse emerged. Damore's memo tapped into issues of nature and nurture, into feminist ideas about sameness and difference, as well as populist discourses. The different ways in which the memo was reported on, also exemplify the uncertainties of this "post-truth" era of Trump and Brexit. The following section will show ways in which claims of censorship in the form of political correctness were linked to Damore's memo.

4.3. Political correctness

There is one relevant phenomenon which has to be defined in detail, since it mirrors aspects of gender, language and taboo. This phenomenon is political correctness, which in itself is not a monolithic phenomenon. Hughes notes that it is "[…] more easily recognized than defined […]" (9) which links it to taboos and the idea that they are most easily recognized in instances of their transgression. The illusive nature of political correctness is probably best illustrated by the fact that Tolmach Lakoff gives an entire page worth of contradictory definitions of political correctness in her book *The Language War*. The page of definitions also points to the fact that political correctness is often defined in ways which suit the goals of those who define it (Tolmach Lakoff 93-94). Hughes, too, gives three contrasting definitions of political correctness in his book on the subject which describe the phenomenon along a spectrum, ranging from the "authoritative and neutral", to the "combative or tactical" (13). Some definitions present political correctness as a deliberate invention of right-wingers who intended to construe an "other" – the politically correct elite – in order to openly engage in racism as an act of protest while others construe it as a force which censors language and thought, through acts of bigotry (Hughes 13). Tolmach Lakoff also argues that political correctness was mainly used as an instrument by the American political right-wing whose members hurled it at their opponents, claiming that it was "[…] the goose step of the totalitarianism to come" (96). She also maintains that the political right-wing coined new absurd terms like *follically challenged*, meaning *bald*, in order "[…] to make renaming and reclaiming ridiculous, without having to offer reasoned arguments against them" (Tolmach Lakoff 100). Tolmach Lakoff concludes that "[…] every aspect of the discourse—its tone, its terms, its targets— was defined by the right, leaving the left the capacity only to react, if even that. That makes the entire p.c. complaint self-contradictory" (92).

But why is political correctness such a contested issue with so many seemingly contradictory definitions? A broader historical perspective might help to answer this question. The term *political correctness* emerged in the writings of Mao Tse-Tung where it denominated thinking along the communist party political lines. Later it was adopted within the civil rights movement and campus culture in the 1980s and nowadays it envelops different aspects of public life, like attitudes towards diversity, and multiculturalism, but also animal rights (Kraft 268-269 and Hughes 3-5, 16-17, 60-61). "Linguistically, it started as a basically idealistic, decent-minded, but slightly Puritanical intervention to sanitize the language by suppressing some of its uglier prejudicial features, thereby undoing some past injustices or 'leveling the playing fields'

with the hope of improving social relations" (Hughes 3). Hughes lists two contemporary directions within political correctness. One direction lying in "the expanding currency of various key words" while the other appears to have "[…] manifested itself in speech codes which suppress prejudicial language, disguising or avoiding certain old and new taboo topics" (Hughes 3). Its basic goal seems to be the minimization of potential offence based on someone's gender, race, or membership to a specific social stratum (Kraft 269). Politically correct language tries to achieve this through the same methods we have discussed before in the section on taboo-related language change, namely through the substitution of vocabulary, as well as through metaphors and euphemisms effectively "disguising the topic of discussion" (Hellín-García 55).

There are two main reactions to these language changes and to the efforts of political correctness as a whole, which are viewed either as the only way in which a multicultural society can live together in peace, or as an ideology employed by dogmatists who are calling for speech codes and the deplatforming of professors on college campuses (Kraft 269-270). Some scholars see the language changes which are advocated by politically correct people as signs of the advent of an Orwellian system. Hughes, for example, sees politically correct speech as being most evident in "a whole new series of artificial substitutions" (14) whereby he means typically non-judgmental and neutral sounding, but also abstract high-register, words which have either been invented in order to veil aspects of reality which are deemed unacceptable, or the appropriation of vocabulary in order to further a specific agenda. These substitutions include the suffix -*person* instead of -*man* as in chair*person*, neologisms like *herstory,* and calling someone *visually impaired* instead of *blind* (Hughes 14- 18). Hughes describes most of these politically correct forms as "[..] abstract, imprecise, and euphemistic" (15). Political correctness, therefore, operates in the same ways we have perceived in the last chapter in relation to taboos. However, according to Hughes, these changes do not occur naturally, as is the case with other taboo language, but they are mediated (26-27). The difference between these two language changes seems to lie in the fact that political correctness actively dictates the words which should be used instead of the taboo words, while in ordinary processes of language change, these changes occur spontaneously. Consequently, it can be argued that the same mechanisms of taboo language are being used in politically correct circumstances and that both changes are instigated by ideas about morality, but that politically correct language does not only ban subjects, but also supplies the forms which it prefers in order to veil a reality which is perceived as cruel. It does so through euphemistic substitutions, metaphors and the creation of new vocabulary. Hughes sees these changes as inherently contradictory, since they imply that

there is one **correct** [my emphasis] way to view politics which is contradictory to the idea of a pluralistic democratic society (5, 17).

Others, however, argue the benefits of political correctness and view these language changes as "[…] forms of language devised by and for, and to represent the worldview and experience of, groups formerly without the power to create language, make interpretations, or control meaning" (Tolmach Lakoff 91). López Cirugeda, for example, suggests that politically correct language has played an important role in decriminalizing homosexuality and in challenging the norms of heterosexuality and she equivocates political correctness with socially appropriate behavior (210-229).

As has been shown in this section, both the opponents of political correctness and its advocates seem to link to concept to an understanding of social norms and codes of behavior. In this way, political correctness functions similar to taboos. Most taboos which are established as part of the politically correct movement are discussed openly and publicly and consequently differ from more personal, silent taboos against, for example, mentioning alcoholism within a family (Kraft 263). As is the case with other discourses, there are particular ways of being and acting within the discourse of political correctness. It contains not only language guidelines, but also guidelines for action – like the active advocacy of quotas and multiculturalism (Kraft 269) – and ways of being – like labelling a part of one's identity as *politically correct* (Hughes 10). In this way, it also resembles the continual embodied nature of taboos.

Hughes describes a tendency within politically correct culture to extend taboo areas and argues that there are double standards in the way in which some groups are able to make racial generalizations – like "I don't think Blacks can be racist" (Spike Lee in Hughes 286) – while cultural norms do not allow other groups to make the same generalizations (285-286). This, however, is a clear indication that these rules work along the same lines as taboos do, since taboos heavily rely on context and group identity, as we have seen. Taboos have been identified by Freud, Lévi-Strauss and Douglas as the sources of morality within societies and nowadays political correctness in many ways performs moral functions (Hughes 294-295). For this reason, politically correct culture is often likened to religion, especially in relation to a perceived orthodoxy within the movement (e.g. Trenton 431-434). However, "[u]nlike previous forms of orthodoxy, both religious and political, it is not imposed by some recognized authority like the Papacy, the Politburo, or the Crown, but is a form of semantic engineering and censorship not derivable from one recognized or definable source, but a variety" (Hughes 7).

Some of the aforementioned norms relate to politically correct ideas about gender and race. This might also be the case because of the link between political feminism and the resurfacing of political correctness in America. As is the case now with politically correct efforts to change language, feminists tried to coin new phrases in order to advance equality during the second half of the last century (Hughes 178-185). Tolmach Lakoff notes that the free speech issue, which had historically been a left-wing issue, where liberals defended the right to free expression, became a right-wing issue against the perceived threat of political correctness (100). The associated debate around issues of free speech on college campuses will be outlined below.

Competing ideas about language norms are being discussed in an ongoing vociferous debate which has been especially active on American campuses and in university settings (e.g. Lukianoff 6-10). While most western countries have some form of speech legislation, Americans are in the unique position of having the right to free speech enshrined in their constitution (Blackford 11 and Hughes 7). Free speech and discussion is seen as of fundamental importance in the complex process whereby people within democracies jointly produce meaning and truth (e.g. Greenawalt 3-4 and Howard 98-100). John Stuart Mill, in his seminal essay *On Liberty*, defended a broad notion of freedom of speech, essentially envisioning the public sphere as a locus of rational enquiry which could be compared to an academic seminar (Blackford 11). After the Second World War, the American Civil Liberties Union provided a strong voice in the advocacy of free speech, which is a trend that runs contrary to that in other nations at that time. It was only when political correctness surfaced on campuses that this attitude towards freedom of speech was challenged (Blackford 14). The issue of political correctness is closely linked to these debates about free speech, since some proponents of political correctness do not perceive universities as sites of free speech and enquiry but as places of power struggles between different groups. In this view, universities are places of struggle between people of majority - and minority status (Kraft 269-270). This goes contrary to conceptions that see the central purpose of universities in the generation and spreading of knowledge and truth, whereby they inevitably become the terrain for conflict and difficult conversations (Whittington 161-162). Lukianoff sees higher education as the place where viewpoint diversity should be taught, but at the same time he argues that American universities are inept to deal with this task, since they have spearheaded the idea that some people have "the right not to be offended" (10) by speech (6-10).

While some authors see a worrying trend within higher education towards an increase in utterances of hate speech (Tolmach Lakoff 103), others have claimed that professors on

American campuses are afraid of speaking out against political correctness and politically correct behavior., Barker conducted a study on college campuses and, contrary to this second proposal, arrived at the conclusion that there was little to no pressure to conform to politically correct views (271-280). Tolmach Lakoff also dismisses these accusations of orthodoxy on account of her personal experience as a professor (98-99). However, both of these papers are now more than ten years old and numerous contemporary sources speak of pressure to conform to a new orthodoxy on campuses (e.g. Lukianoff, Whittington, Hughes).

These pressures manifest in the disinvitations and protests of conservative speakers who plan to appear on campus, as well as in speech codes and trigger warnings (Lukianoff 5). One example of this tendency to stifle academic discourse can be seen in the continual debate that follows controversial academic articles. One such article, which had been written by Rebecca Tuvel and which seemingly dismissed transgender issues, led to a host of problems for its journal of publication. After the article had been published, some people called for the ousting of the peer reviewers who had accepted the article on behalf of the journal. This was one instance in which the rhetoric of hate speech and speech as violence was used in order to attack Tuvel's points (Whittington 170-171). It was subsequently revealed that some of Tuvel's critics had not read the article and while "[…] others privately expressed their sympathy with Tuvel, they all felt obliged to publicly denounce her for her sins lest their own careers also be put in jeopardy" (Whittington 171). In another example, an article, which had argued for the benefits of imperialism for indigenous people, led to credible threats of violence against a journal editor and a subsequent retraction of the article. Safety concerns were also at the forefront in two other cases in which Professors were asked to leave campus because of their controversial views (Whittington 171-172). Other cases include a petition against a gay rights activist "[…] for uttering the word *tranny* [italics in original] – an abbreviation for *transsexual* [italics in original] that is often used as an epithet – during a panel discussion […]" (10), in order to advocate for the reclamation of this word by the gay community, as well as disinvitation-efforts which are increasingly also directed at speakers who are located at the liberal side of the political spectrum (Lukianoff 10-12).

The tactics of taboo are evident in these examples. Deplatforming attempts not only prevent students from hearing conservative viewpoints, but also actively "ostracize" (Whittington 167) speakers, turning them away before they can even state their case. American students in these instances effectively try to cleanse campus of unwelcome thought. Whittington talks about an "[…] effort to purge the campus of the unclean […]" (168) in relation to banning a conservative law professor who served in the George W. Bush

administration (168-170). Murrays disinvitation also indicates the mechanisms of taboo since: "[…] the chairman of the department that cosponsored Murray's talk was forced to issue a public apology for his role in **breaking campus taboos** [my emphasis] and bringing a forbidden person to campus" (Whittington 168). The student protests in Middlebury College "made the goal of ideological ostracism plain" (Whittington 167). Lukianoff and Haidt link student behavior in these instances to witch hunts, where people tried to defend what they held sacred through violent means (99-103). They argue that videos show the protesters on Middlebury's campus "[…] chanting, singing, and at times swaying in unison to prevent Charles Murray from speaking" (Lukianoff and Haidt 103), consequently evoking images of religious ceremonies. They also argue that a lot of the attempts to disinvite speakers from campus in the year 2017 were "justified by moral arguments about violence and safety" (87).

Why, then, do people try to stifle these forms of speech? Lukianoff sees the origins of this trend on the American political left to stifle free speech in a "care ethic" (9) – a term coined by Jonathan Haidt –which sees its primary goal in protecting victimized groups within society. Lukianoff concludes that speech interventions that come from the political left are consequently motivated by a desire to "[…] prevent offensive or challenging speech and to provide those they view as vulnerable with as much freedom *from* [italics in original] speech as possible" (9). These instances, where taboos are being enforced by students on American college campuses, show the ways in which the debate on biological differences between groups has become a contested issue. The following analysis will establish the case that James Damore transgressed a taboo based on the theory outlined above.

5. Analysis

5.1 Introduction to the analysis

The overall topics covered in the subsequent close reading are as follows: First the thesis analyses the memo in order to establish a common understanding of Damore's arguments. Then, it provides an overview of textual evidence for the breach of a taboo with a special focus on euphemism, dysphemism, politeness and language which relates to values and morals. The next section covers language related issues in the article with a special focus on issues of political correctness, free speech and hate speech. The third and final section of this chapter takes a closer look at Damore's characterization, charges of sexism and political group affiliations. Throughout these sections this thesis tries to establish that we are in fact talking about a form of taboo which relates to the biological differences between women and men.

5.2   Damore's memo

This section of the paper will establish a common ground of interpretation for Damore's memo. This is done in order to establish whether or not the media representation of Damore's memo is indicative of taboos later in the thesis.

In his memo, Damore argues that within Google there is a "political bias [that] has equated the freedom from offense with psychological safety" (Damore Echo Chamber 2). This bias is supported and enforced by strategies of silencing ideas through shaming ideological dissidents which has "[…] created an ideological echo chamber where some ideas are too sacred to be honestly discussed" (Damore Echo Chamber 2). Damore goes on to claim that since these ideas cannot be discussed openly, Google's diversity efforts have become "extreme" and "authoritarian" (Damore Echo Chamber 2). They have become "[e]xtreme [in the view that] all disparities in representation are due to oppression" and they have become "[a]uthoritarian [in the tendency to] discriminate to correct this oppression" (Damore Echo Chamber 2). Damore prefaces his arguments by saying that his goal is to spark a conversation and that his text "[…] is by no means the complete story, but it's a perspective that desperately needs to be told at Google" (Damore Echo Chamber 2). Damore maintains that both the political left and right have different strengths and weaknesses and that continual dialogue between the sides can help in establishing a functional society, or in this case company. However, he believes that on issues of "diversity and inclusion, Google's left bias has created a politically correct monoculture that maintains its hold by shaming dissidents into silence" (Damore Echo Chamber 2). While Damore acknowledges that there are differences in the ways that women and men are being treated and that each person might experience discrimination, or "bias" (Damore Echo Chamber 3), he believes that these biases are only one reason for the underrepresentation of women in tech.

The following part of the memo garnered the most criticism for Damore. He states that: "[o]n average, men and women biologically differ in many ways" (Damore Echo Chamber 3). However, this statement is followed by a lengthy disclaimer which puts the sentence into perspective:

> Note, I'm not saying that all men differ from all women in the following ways or that these differences are 'just'. I'm simply stating that the distribution of preferences and **abilities of men and women differ in part due to biological causes** and that **these differences may explain why we don't see equal representation of women in tech and leadership.** Many of these differences are small and there's significant overlap between men and women, so you can't say anything about an individual given these population level distributions [my emphasis]. (Damore Echo Chamber 3)

He goes on to list a number of differences between the sexes which he argues are influenced by biological factors in some way. These include higher average levels of agreeableness for women, as well as a proclivity to be more interested in people rather than things or ideas and a tendency for more "neuroticism" (Damore Echo Chamber 4).

At this point, it is important to note that both terms "agreeableness", and "neuroticism" are terms used in the study of differences in personality traits (e.g. Wiggins and Trapnell 737). They are both categories "in the influential Big Five model of personality disposition" (Kwon and Weed 619). The term *agreeableness* is used as an umbrella term in order to describe a person's proclivity to show positive behavior and emotions towards others (Habashi and Graziano 25). The term "[n]euroticism refers to a broad personality trait dimension representing the degree to which a person experiences the world as distressing, threatening, and unsafe" (Kwon and Weed 618). The term has a long history but was popularized in the 1950s and is used in the description of personality differences today (Kwon and Weed 618-620). Damore could have used less emotionally loaded terms, but by employing this terminology he used the language of the study of differences in personality, which was one of the subjects of his memo. If in this case he is guilty of pathologizing "neuroticism", then so is the entire study of personality differences.

Damore also states that women on average are more interested in people and men tend to display more interest in things. He argues that one could "[…] make software engineering more people-oriented with pair programming and more collaboration […]", while also maintaining that "[…] there may be limits to how people-oriented certain roles at Google can be […]" (Damore Echo Chamber 5). He claims that the average "higher levels of agreeableness" for women are partly responsible for their lower average salaries, as well as for the relative lack of women in leadership positions and in tech-companies as a whole. Higher levels of agreeableness in women and men have been reported to have negative effects on their income (e.g. Judge et al. 391-392; 404). Studies find that higher levels of agreeableness are partly responsible for lower degrees of career success (e.g. Seibert and Kraimer 6).

After having postulated these claims, Damore then offers ways to incorporate these traits into Google's diversity efforts in order to create a more diverse working environment. One of his suggestions is that the tech world should strive to make coding more cooperative and reward cooperative practices (Damore Echo Chamber 3-5). With regards to his arguments about average higher levels of neuroticism and agreeableness in women, it is important to note that there are, in fact, numerous studies which support his assertions but that there are no definitive

findings (e.g. Vianello et al. 994-995). A hypothetical proponent of the nurture side in the nature vs. nurture debate might argue that these differences are only caused by cultural expectations and stereotypes and that once society is free of these discriminatory assumptions, all differences will vanish. However, this idea is also up for debate, with some studies even suggesting that personality differences between the sexes increase rather than decrease with the freedom of choice in societies: "In less fortunate social and economic conditions, innate personality differences between men and women may be attenuated" (Schmitt et. Al 168). With regards to higher anxiety levels and higher levels of "neuroticism" in population averages of women, Damore proposed that one could counteract these traits by making "tech and leadership less stressful" (Damore Echo Chamber 6) and by establishing ways in which people can more effectively balance their work- and private lives, for example, by establishing part time work options. These suggestions seem somewhat naïve in a competitive work environment and it is not clear how one could implement such changes. However, what can be gleamed from this quote is a notion that Damore is trying to advance diversity.

Throughout the memo, Damore seems to be painfully aware of the fact that he is treading on dangerous territory. The memo is filled with disclaimers like: "I strongly believe in gender and racial diversity, and I think we should strive for more" (Damore Echo Chamber 6), or "I hope it's clear that I'm not saying that diversity is bad, that Google or society is 100% fair, that we shouldn't try to correct for existing biases, or that minorities have the same experience of those in the majority" (Damore Echo Chamber 8). For the sake of the argument of this thesis, we will take Damore's statements at face value. Damore made generalizing claims about biological difference in average traits between the sexes on a population-level, but he did not talk about individual women, or individual men – which would have made the memo slanderous – and he tried to clarify this point repeatedly within the memo (e.g. Damore Echo Chamber 3, 8). His method of pointing towards broad biological differences between the sexes is somewhat prone to overgeneralizations and criticism in this regard is surely merited, but Damore is also trying to make a broader claim about Google's diversity efforts. He argues that some of Google's diversity initiatives do not take into account facts about human nature because of the politically left- leaning tendencies of Google, and because of the American left's tendency "to deny science concerning biological differences between people" (Damore Echo Chamber 7). Thereby he is mirroring the concerns about biophobia outlined in chapter 4.2. He is trying to make an argument about biological differences between the sexes based on his reading of studies and articles in order to show that some of Google's diversity efforts might be ill-advised and that the desired goal of diversity could be better established in other ways. In an op-ed he

wrote for the *Wall Street Journal* after his dismissal, he himself summarized his memo as follows:

> I wrote and circulated [a memo] raising questions about cultural taboos and how they cloud our thinking about gender diversity at [Google] and in the wider tech sector. I suggested that at least some of the male-female disparity in tech could be attributed to biological differences (and yes, I said that bias against women was a factor too). (Damore Fired by Google)

Consequently, Damore highlights these differences, but does not say that they are positive or negative. In his framing of the issue he does not attribute any importance to these differences in determining someone's aptitude for coding, since population level differences in interest are only one of many factors when it comes to the capabilities of an individual and Damore repeatedly argued that the individual should be the focus of analysis (Damore Echo Chamber 3).

In response to the argument that Damore had claimed women were less capable of working in tech fields, this thesis takes the same stance as Singer who wrote: "But Damore explicitly, and more than once, made it clear that he was not reducing individuals to a group, and so was not saying that the individual women employed by Google as software engineers are less biologically suited to their work than men" (Singer). These statements show that one of the main problems in the case of Damore is the difference between a level of analysis which sees people as members of a group and as individuals. In instances where Damore mentioned population-level distributions of interest between the sexes, his readers and critics often inferred that all individual members of this group would have to adhere to the same distributions. This is not the case. This nuance in the discussion is the difference between calling all women inept when it comes to coding or arguing that in samples of the population, less women would be interested in coding than men.

Let us briefly examine Damore's wording and style. While Emba called his rhetoric "insulting" (Emba), some have said that his "[…] employment of dry technical language [served] to put forward a wholly unscientific idea" (Jackson). The overall style of the memo can be described as personal. He repeatedly uses first person pronouns and highlights the fact that he is stating his own opinions (e.g. Damore Echo Chamber 2,5). In some parts, he is talking from a vantage point of common sense and uses generalizations to prove his point. This is especially apparent in statements where he groups himself with the reader like: "People generally have good intentions, but we all have biases which are invisible to us" (Damore Echo Chamber 2). He uses the pronoun "we" whenever he talks of biases and ideological "blind

spots" (Damore Echo Chamber 2), in order to indicate that he himself is not immune to these tendencies. He also concedes that his document is by no means the only voice in this argument and that he does not provide "the complete story" (Damore Echo Chamber 2).

Whenever he tries to come across as an objective party, he gives weight to his arguments by citing studies and articles. Harré argues that one of the most persuasive methods of speaking publicly is by speaking as an expert, or by quoting the voice of an expert: "The most forceful voice of contemporary authority is that of 'scientist'" (Harré 126). By citing studies in order to support his assertions, Damore tries to outsource his expertise. He himself does not claim expert status where he cites someone else's writing on biological differences between the sexes. Whenever he makes such a statement, he uses a hyperlink in order to let the reader track his sources. Here lies the core problem in Damore's presentation of his case, because most of the sources he cites are instances of popular writing rather than scientific journals. Some of his links connect to Wikipedia pages and others to *New Yorker* articles, or other newspapers; only a few link to scientific journals. However, as outlined above, his points mirror those of personality scholars. His assertions cannot be said to be based in scientific facts, because he does not cite the relevant literature in all instances. However, his sources still mirror the scientific debate in the field and consequently are not pulled out of thin air.

Damore does make broad generalizations and accusatory statements to make his points. One of these statements is: "Google has several biases and honest discussion about these biases is being silenced by the dominant ideology" (Damore Echo Chamber 2). Here, Damore mirrors the claims of the critics of political correctness outlined in section 4.3. He thereby evokes images of politically correct elites which instate a taboo, and which punish any diverging views. In this statement, he makes it clear that he has a problem with the culture within the company and not only within parts of the company, but within the entire company. He also relies on generalizations to make his assertions about the biological differences between the sexes, often invoking "cultural universals" (e.g. Damore Echo Chamber 5). Damore does not cite studies which relate gender differences to cultural influences and while he acknowledges differences in perspective and experiences of sexism (e.g. Damore Echo Chamber 3) he seems to remain firmly on the side of biological differences between the sexes. Therefore, he ignores the voices in this debate which argue that cultural influences are of primary relevance when it comes to differences between the sexes. However, throughout the memo it is apparent that Damore's intention was not to make definitive statements, but to contribute to a broader conversation and discussion. He repeatedly acknowledges his own fallibility and partiality in the matter and

makes it clear that he is advocating for people to be judged as individuals and not as members of their group.

In conclusion, while Damore relied on broad generalizations and unscientific methods in his presentation – especially because he did not use scholarly sources – he still mirrored contemporary scientific debates within the field. His claims can be found in similar forms in the study of personality differences. Therefore, his text is at least based on one side of the scientific research. While he does not represent the entire ongoing debate around issues of nature and nurture, his arguments can still be found within the academic discourse. None of his claims are made up. Accusations of sexism are therefore somewhat unjust, or they would also have to be leveled at the study of personality differences in general. While he makes broad generalizations, it is possible to interpret his memo as an attempt to open the debate with regards to diversity and even advocate for more diversity. The mistake he made in presenting his case, was to present his case at all. He broke a taboo, as will be shown in the following parts of the analysis.

5.3   Indications of taboo in the coverage of Damore

5.3.1   Outright mentions of taboo

"For someone who claims to have been silenced, James Damore has started quite the conversation" (Emba). This statement is somehow emblematic of a lot of the conversation that followed Damore's memo. One could argue that Damore's case cannot possibly be indicative of a taboo, since the debate was quite open and involved many voices. However, as outlined in chapter 3, there is a difference between the silent private taboos that might manifest in a family, for example around the topic of substance abuse, and the taboos which are established and negotiated in the public sphere.

Numerous articles directly stated their authors' beliefs that Damore had transgressed a taboo: "Damore told the truth. This is not to endorse every word of his memo, but he was completely right that the subject of innate differences between men and women has become taboo" (Charen). Damore himself seems to have been aware that he was breaking a taboo. Lang quotes him, when he laments that some topics are just predestined to cause offense: "'I think it's impossible sometimes to say what you really believe without offending someone" (Damore in Lee and Lang). The Times Editorial Board wrote in reaction to Damore's dismissal that "Clearly, there are some ideas from outside the mainstream that Google will not even debate internally" (Times Editorial Board). However, these ideas are not only contentious within

Google. Some articles maintain that aspects of laws against discrimination have been shown to be misguided in the Damore incident: "It's unfortunate that the laws that have been put in place to protect women from discrimination have made open conversations in which we explore ideas (and get some things wrong) so dangerous, pushing us all toward manipulative insincerity" (Scott). This is highly indicative of underlying taboos since the conversations on these topics are limited to a dominant ideology and are even protected by the law. One of the authors of a study Damore had quoted, David Schmitt from the University of Michigan, said that while Damore had "overstated some fairly modest sex differences" (Young), the necessity for further debate remained and that the points Damore raised should "not be off-limits to discussion" (Young). Again, this dismissal of a certain topic based on a perceived inherent danger, or other quality that makes it "off-limits", is a clear sign that Damore touched on a taboo.

In covering Damore's memo, Emba asks whether "strident offense-taking" is the correct response to his points. She also says that while the goal of strengthening diversity efforts might be laudable, "[…] the reflexively furious response to [the conclusions of the memo] suggests that any disagreement, even politely held, is verboten" (Emba). She thereby evokes a number of relevant aspects of taboos. First, her comments correspond to the fact that taboos come with an immediate bodily response. This "reflexively furious response" (Emba) of disgust towards Damore's viewpoints is indicative of views which are "verboten" (Emba). The use of the German *verboten* evokes images of authoritarianism and the OED links the word's usage in the English language to an emphatic prohibition[3].

Another instance in which taboos become obvious can be found in a Wall Street Journal interview with Bill Proudman, the "CEO of White Men As Full Diversity Partners" (Nicas and Koh), who agreed with Google's decision to terminate Damore, but had his objections: "'The downside is that, however well intended the decision, people who are not in the mainstream flow of politics at the company may now feel they're going to lose their livelihood if they speak up" (Proudman in Nicas and Koh). This is a clear indication of a taboo, since voicing one's opinions about this subject is felt to have strong immediate ramifications.

McArdle expands the locus of the taboo and links Damore's case to broader social developments and the advancing of taboos when she argues that the

> […] power [of internet mobs] keeps growing, as does the number of subjects they want to declare off-limits to discussion. And unless it is checked, where does it lead? To something depressingly like the old Communist states; a place where your true opinions

---

[3] See reference to OED "verboten": <https://www-oed-com.uaccess.univie.ac.at/view/Entry/222402?redirectedFrom=verboten&>

about anything more important than tea cozies are only ever aired to a tiny circle of highly trusted friends. (McArdle Internet mob)

She thereby implies that the developments at Google were only necessary because of a broader social trend to declare the issues discussed in the memo as taboo. Friedersdorf, too, alludes to taboos and at the same time dismisses this practice as unsatisfactory in challenging Damore's beliefs when he says that "coverage rooted in stigma will be no more effective in stopping the embrace of beliefs expressed by the author than it was at stopping Donald Trump from being elected president" (Friedersdorf). All of these voices mirror the suggestion that Damore transgressed a taboo in talking about biological differences between the sexes. The next section will offer additional evidence to support this statement.

5.3.2 Euphemism, dysphemism, correctio, and politeness

In order to talk about taboo subjects, speakers use a variety of tactics. One such tactic is the employment of euphemisms and dysphemisms (Crespo-Fernández 10). Let us first look at dysphemisms in the media coverage of Damore. "Speakers resort to dysphemism to talk about people and things that frustrate and annoy them, that they disapprove of and wish to disparage, humiliate and degrade" (Allan and Burridge 31). This tendency is clear in all the articles which label Damore as a sexist (e.g. Moore and Milord, or Wojcicki). Whether there is any merit to these claims or not is irrelevant in this case, since the dysphemism, whether justified or not, still functions as a dysphemism.

In western societies today, overt sexism is a taboo (e.g. Crespo-Fernández 11). Therefore, calling someone a sexist is equivalent to saying that this person has broken social taboos. Claims of sexism are apparent in the articles which say that his memo functioned as a sexist text (e.g. Swartz and Weise; Weise Confirms Firing; Young). For social scientists who investigate sexism with regards to ideology and language, "[…] sexism consists of those statements and underlying beliefs which make unnecessary and discriminatory distinctions between people on the grounds of gender […]" (Mills 38). Since Damore's argument was about biological differences between the sexes, it would be difficult for him to make that point without differentiating between people based on their sex.

The memo is seen as part of a broader culture of sexism within Silicon Valley (e.g. Wojcicki, Batchelor Warnke). One striking example of this can be found in an edited collection of comments about the memo on the New York Times' page. Damore's memo is mentioned for context at the top of the article and his main thesis is summarized as follows: "women [are] less likely to succeed in technical positions because of biological differences rather than gender

discrimination" (Moore and Milord). This summary of his views is followed by selected comments made by women who have either faced sexual discrimination in the workplace or have not been able to work in technological fields because of experienced bias. One frustrated comment which relates to biological differences between the sexes reads: "Tell me again how reinforcing ideas about women's inherent differences is a valid opinion that deserves my respect and time. Tell me again that my frustration is neuroses and probably PMS. Tell me again" (Hanna in Richmond in Moore and Milord). The repeated cries of "Tell me again" in this statement evoke images of similar confrontations with claims about biological differences between the sexes. The mention of PMS is used as a stand in for a reductionist approach to someone's feelings and behaviors. It mirrors a sentiment which might be expressed thus: "oh, ignore her, she is on her period", which is a highly insensitive argument mirroring the taboo about menstruation (e.g. Chrisler 129). In some of the articles and comments, an idea of women's status as subordinate to men is presented as a common-place fact and oppression and sexism is viewed as a permanent part of the workplace, especially in Silicon Valley (e.g. Moore and Milord, and Wojcicki). Some of the comments that are displayed in the Moore and Milord article clearly characterize Damore as an overt sexist who made the mistake of uttering his despicable views on company time: "Everyone has the right to their own backward, sexist, racist views, but when you utilize company property and resources to spread those views in violation of company policy you are likely to be disciplined and/ or terminated" (Moore and Milord). These articles establish Damore as a sexist, thereby effectively saying that his memo broke a taboo.

This attack against his character has to be viewed as an example of people's proclivity to attribute dysphemisms to those who they perceive to be outside their group. Euphemisms are often attributed to one's own group members, while dysphemisms are appointed to the views of another group (Allan and Burridge 49-53). In this way, people opposing Damore's viewpoints called him a sexist, while those same people have to face dysphemisms from those supporting Damore. While Scott argues that Damore should be more empathetic with women and says that "[n]ot being obnoxious doesn't mean you have to become ruinously empathetic" (Scott), Goldberg called some of Damore's critics and voices in this debate "hysterics" (Goldberg), which in itself is a term with a long history (e.g. Tasca et al. 110). Another example of a dysphemism levelled at Damore's critics can be found in a New York Post article, which called women who did not come to work because they felt hurt after Damore's memo "poor snowflakes" – a term frequently employed by conservatives to suggest emotional fragility (e.g. Duncan 517) – who "can't bear to hear anything outside the very 'ideological echo chamber'

Damore complained about" (New York Post Dissent). These employees had demanded that Damore be fired for his memo and protested his continual employment with their absence.

The blatant use of dysphemisms is also an indication of a face threatening act which goes against notions of linguistic politeness. There is a close link between discussions about taboo subjects and breaches in politeness (Crespo-Fernández 10-11). "There is a general assumption that the speaker will be polite except when intending to affront the hearer" (Allan and Burridge 33). Some people at Google thought that Damore had foregone all consideration for his fellow employees' face once he ventured into the realm of biological differences between the sexes. Wakabayashi quotes a former Google employee who says that while the company has a rich history of disagreements among their staff on various issues, this case was different since it represented a case of "disrespectful disagreement" (Zunger in Wakabayashi Contentious). "[T]here's really no respectful way to say, 'I think you and people like you aren't as qualified to do your job as people like me.'" (Zunger in Wakabayashi Contentious). Emba also states that Damore's rhetoric was "insulting" (Emba).

Another textual indication of the breach of a taboo can be found in the use of a rhetorical devise called *correctio*, which is an "[…] acknowledgement that an expression might offend, but is necessary […]" (Pizarro Pedraza 185). There are numerous correctios in the articles about Damore. They mainly appear in instances where people defend Damore's text as a whole, or in some parts. One example can be found in Charen's text on Damore, quoted above, where she writes that "Damore told the truth. **This is not to endorse every word of his memo** [my emphasis], but he was completely right that the subject of innate differences between men and women has become taboo" (Charen). By highlighting her own position in relation to Damore's statements, Charen makes it clear, that she herself understands that Damore breached a taboo. Other examples include Young's statement that "[t]he memo has its flaws" (Young) which follows a lengthy defense of Damore's points and Goldberg's continual concession of points where he starts his paragraphs with statements like "[n]o doubt there are real injustices out there" (Goldberg). All of these utterances comment on the fact that something might be inappropriate and can be viewed as metapragmatic comments. These comments, however, function differently than other taboo related language items in that they do not avert readers' attention from a specific subject, but rather just mitigate the problematic content (Pizarro Pedraza 185-187). These statements "rely on three main functions in order to mitigate the offensiveness of taboo concepts or words: approximation, quotation, and apology." (Pizarro Pedraza 204). Taking this course of action signals a deliberate attempt at expressing the

speaker's "[…] awareness on the inappropriateness or offensiveness of the focalized expression" (Pizarro Pedraza 204).

The heavy use of dysphemisms in the coverage of Damore's memo is highly indicative of the fact that Damore transgressed a taboo. Once people called him a sexist, it was akin to saying that he had broken a conversational rule.

5.3.3 Language of disgust and shame

Taboos are oftentimes accompanied by intense feelings of nausea, disgust or shame once they are breached. Because of the embodied nature of taboos, people tend to feel uneasy when taboo subjects are discussed. Reactions range from employing the language of ridicule to that of disgust (Arthur 4, and Lambek 15430, and Lambek 248). While the language of ridicule is scarcely found in relation to Damore's memo –with the exception of an article that challenges Damore saying "[n]ow who's not smart?" (Hensley) – the language of shame and disgust is prevalent throughout the coverage.

There are many articles which called Damore's views offensive. DeBoer, for example, decried Damore's memo as "a bizarre and offensive attack on [Google's] diversity practices" (DeBoer). Damore's memo evoked very visceral reactions on the internet where "[s]ome [people] fantasized about violently attacking him" (Young). Outrage is an emotional response to Damore's memo which is quoted with some regularity (e.g. Petrecca). In one article, Damore's memo and the willingness of people to discuss his points causes such revulsion in one interviewee that he likens the memo's contents to a manifesto which sympathizes with ISIS or Al-Qaeda. (Lang Firing). A senior engineer who had recently left Google wrote that Damore's firing was inevitable and that he had lost all ability to work with other people, since, because of his memo, they might want to "'simply punch [Damore] in the face'" (Zunger in Ortutay). After summarizing Damore's approach to the biological differences between men and women, Page indicates that some people might feel disgust in relation to the topic. She likens Damore's attempt at an argument to a trip into a pit filled with disgusting, sticky liquid: "Yup, he's wading into some pretty thick goo with that argument" (Page). While this language could be indicative of irony or humor, the sentence which immediately follows it shows that Page is aware of the historical precedents and uses the word "goo" in order to evoke areas which should not be discussed: "His paper reminds me of the dust-up around 'The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life,' the 1996 book by Charles Murray and Richard J. Herrnstein […]" (Page).

Greenell advocates the employment of one particular emotion in her aptly titled article: "Be grateful for the power of shame" (Greenell). She argues that "shame speech is countering hate speech" and that "so many shameless people in America these days […] insist[…] on their right to say foolish things" (Greenell). This feeling of shame was acknowledged by Damore himself: "Psychological safety is built on mutual respect and acceptance, but unfortunately our **culture of shaming** and misrepresentation is disrespectful and unaccepting of anyone outside its echo chamber [my emphasis]" (Damore Echo Chamber 1). Damore repeats this claim, saying that many of his co-workers privately offered their support, but would not come out publicly to defend him "[…] because of our **shaming culture** and the possibility of being fired [my emphasis]" (Damore Echo Chamber 1). In his op-ed for the *Wall Street Journal*, Damore again focused on the feeling of shame, saying that "[p]ublic shaming serves not only to display the virtue of those doing the shaming but also warns others that the same punishment awaits them if they don't conform" (Damore Fired by Google).

In most cases, taboos are formulated implicitly rather than explicitly. They are not only punished by society but also by the individual who transgresses them. This individual might experience feelings of shame, embarrassment, or guilt and for this exact reason taboos are often subject to inner censors (Benthien and Gutjahr 7 -8). Damore outlines these very feelings and the language in the articles, which reports of very strong, bodily reactions to his memo, supports the hypothesis that he in fact broke a taboo. Erickson argues that Damore's wording would not have played a role in the public perception of the memo, since the subject he decided to tackle evokes such immediate reactions in people. Regardless of the way he would have framed it "[…] it seems he would have offended someone and been fired. The only way to avoid it would be to keep his mouth shut and embrace the groupthink" (Erickson). This statement is indicative of the ways in which taboos are perceived in this discussion. Erickson says that discussion on these issues is not welcome and that there is an orthodoxy which he links to "groupthink" – the Orwellian connotation of this term will be discussed in section 5.4.1.

The feelings of disgust and shame which are prevalent in these pieces of writing are indicative of the authors' views that this subject is taboo. Since we assume that the word choice of these articles is deliberate, the highlighting of emotional reactions to the memo suggests that people were trying to foreground their feelings of disgust and shame. They wanted to highlight the fact that they had an embodied reaction to Damore's memo. This, too, supports a reading of the memo which maintains that its author broke a taboo.

5.3.4 The language of morality, values, and religion

One reason Pichai gave for Damore's firing was that he had acted "contrary to [Google's] basic values" (Pichai). This implies that Damore transgressed an in-group taboo in writing his memo. He broke the moral rules of the company he worked for and was consequently punished. This breaking of moral values is also mirrored in the articles which use the language of religion to describe Damore's text.

Lee, for example, quotes Damore's memo saying that "'[s]ome ideas are too sacred to be honestly discussed'" and he agrees, saying "Damore had that right: Some ideas are just not up for debate. But we usually call them 'values', the core essence of a company's identity or mission" (Lee). This statement exemplifies Lee's understanding of the Google memo and its impact. He uses the language of morality when he says that Damore has disregarded a "value" (Lee). He also links these beliefs to identity. This link between identity and morality is central to the workings of taboos and Lee clearly defends Pichai's decision to fire – and thereby exclude – Damore from the Google community. It is also evident that he shares the same values and ideas about what is right and wrong when it comes to diversity. This is illustrated in the first sentence of the article: "Courageous CEOs dealing with freedom of speech issues fall back on defending our values" (Lee). It is not only the company's values which are at stake here and which Damore attacks, but moral values throughout society; the values of Lee and the reader alike, who is implicated when Lee uses "our" to talk about shared beliefs and ideals. Lee's article is also indicative of an understanding of taboos as instantiated and upheld by elites. He argues that CEO Pichai had to fire Damore in order to defend company values (Lee). The morality of the group is therefore upheld by its leader; he who breaks those taboos becomes taboo himself.

In his *Wall Street Journal* op-ed, Damore highlights the ways in which Google becomes a part of their employees' identity: "With free food, internal meme boards and weekly companywide meetings, Google becomes a huge part of its employees' lives. Some even live on campus. For some, including myself, working at Google is a major part of their identity […]" (Damore Fired by Google). As we have seen in chapter 3.3., identity and taboos are intrinsically linked. It is therefore only logical that Damore's breach of taboo led to his termination, especially at a company like Google, where the association between work and identity is so close. This link is also evident in Danielle Brown's memo to employees about Damore. She states that "[…] diversity and inclusion are a fundamental part of our values and the culture we continue to cultivate" (Brown in Rhodan). She goes on to quote another Googler

who expresses the link between diversity, values, and Google's group identity even more directly: "'[…] Building an open, inclusive environment is core to who we are […]'" (Balogh in Brown in Rhodan).

However, it is not only the language values and morals which is apparent in the articles, but also that of religion. Roose calls the unfolding of the events outlined above "the end of a bizarre, short-lived morality tale" (Roose). Damore is characterized as an "[…] unlikely new **martyr** [my emphasis] in the culture wars […]" (Swartz and Weise). One picture had Damore's head photo-shopped over Martin Luther's, who is depicted in the process of nailing his proclamations of the Catholic Church's wrongdoings to a door (Ohlheiser). All of these examples show the ways in which religious language and imagery is used in this debate to advance the notion that Damore was talking about morals and values and thereby about a topic which has high emotional salience, as well as a taboo status.

Brooks speaks of a mob mentality and a "moral craze" (Brooks). In relation to these mobs he sees standing against Damore, he says:

> We all have our theories about why these moral crazes are suddenly so common. I'd say that radical uncertainty about morality, meaning and life in general is producing intense anxiety. Some people embrace moral absolutism in a desperate effort to find solid ground. They feel a rare and comforting sense of moral certainty when they are purging an evil person who has violated one of their sacred taboos. (Brooks)

As we have seen in chapter 3.2., taboos often manifest around those values within a society which are perceived as particularly vulnerable. This perspective, which sees diversity as a hard-won treasure which has to be protected, is evident when Emba writes the following:

> Gender equality and diversity movements have advanced, but their hold remains tenuous in powerful spaces such as Google. Will advocates be able to defend their hard-won successes against those, like the memo-writer, who think that enough has been achieved – or worse, that those goals weren't useful at all? (Emba)

Damore himself certainly seemed to believe that he was fired because he had attacked the company's values. In the *Wall Street Journal*, he wrote that "We all have moral preferences and beliefs about how the world is and should be. Having these views challenged can be painful, so we tend to avoid people with differing values and to associate with those who share our values" (Damore Fired by Google). He went on to say that "[w]hether it's in our homes, online or in our workplaces, a consensus is maintained by shaming people into conformity or excommunicating them if they persist in violating taboos" (Damore Fired by Google). In this statement, he links his firing to a broader overreaching consensus which does not only target people at work, but reaches into their private lives. This conflation of the workspace and the

private space is also evident in similar examples where people were fired over controversial remarks which were picked up by the media (e.g. Lukianoff 4). Damore himself uses the language of religion, speaking of "excommunication" and therefore argues that he was not fired because he transgressed a simple code of conduct, but something larger. He likens Google to a "cult with its own leaders and saints, all believed to righteously uphold the sacred motto of 'Don't be evil'" (Damore Fired by Google). He says that "[he] committed heresy against the Google creed by stating that not all disparities between men and women that we see in the world are the result of discriminatory treatment" (Damore Fired by Google).

The language of religion, morality and values permeates the coverage of the memo. Young highlights the fact that diversity is intrinsically linked to ideas of morality and values in her synopsis of Damore's views. She states that "[…] some of the memo's suggestions – for instance, to uncouple diversity initiatives from empathy and moralism – are excellent and validated by the reactions to the memo itself" (Young). Erickson links Brendan Eich and Peter Thiel to Damore, saying that they are prominent examples of conservatives in Silicon Valley who, like Damore, faced ostracism because their values diverged from the Silicon Valley mainstream. Mozilla CEO Brendan Eich, had been forced to step down from his post after reports surfaced that "[…] he had donated $1,000 to the campaign for California's Proposition 8, a ballot initiative opposing same-sex marriage, back in 2008" (Lukianoff 4) which led to protests even from gay-rights activists who saw this as an example of punishing people for their conservative views rather than engaging in discussion with them (Lukianoff 4). Erickson's attempt to link Damore to other Silicon Valley conservatives seems to be an oversimplification, especially if one considers that Damore self identifies as a "classical liberal" (Damore Echo Chamber 1). However, the central position of the word *values* in these statements remains. Charen uses the language of religious prosecution when describing the public's reaction to Damore's memo: "James Damore is fortunate that we don't burn heretics at the stake, because he has blasphemed" (Charen). She claims that within politically left-leaning circles the topic of differences between the genders is off limits and that questioning it is "heresy" (Charen). Page also invokes religious language: "Firing Damore makes a martyr of him" (Page). Greenell, who strongly disagrees with Damore's points, also uses the language of religion in order to explain the following he garnered after his termination. "Damore has since reinvented himself as a **martyr** for the cause, **preaching** against a 'monolithic culture […] [my emphases]" (Greenell).

Taboos are at the core of our moral fabric, as we have seen in chapter 3. There are strong links between what we believe and what we hold taboo. The repeated statements that Damore's

memo was akin to an act which challenged prevalent norms and values is highly indicative that the subjects in his memo are taboo.

5.4 Political correctness, free speech, and the media

5.4.1 Mentions of political correctness in the articles

On the spectrum of opinions, Damore's memo was seen either as an indication of an overreach of political correctness, or as a sexist screed. Tannen states that there is a tendency within this debate about nature and nurture for fighting ideological trench wars. She explains that in her time studying this debate, most of the people who were prone to believe in the primacy of biological foundations for differences between the sexes were men and that they called her "an idiot, or a P.C.-addled ideologue, if [she] denied what they thought was obvious" (Tannen). On the other hand, some of the women who believed strongly that culture was the sole cause of differences between the sexes "were ready to think [her] a villain bent on keeping women down if [she] denied what they thought was obvious" (Tannen).

This tendency to vilify the other side of the debate is evident throughout the media coverage of Damore's memo. Some voices evoked political correctness, like Hiltzik, who argued that the essential feature of the memo might be its "argument that a male-centric engineering culture is being victimized in the name of political correctness, and its implication that this feeling is widespread at Google and throughout Silicon Valley" (Hiltzik). Hiltzik thereby mirrors sentiments that political correctness is only ever used by right-wingers to determine a political other in the form of liberal elites, as outlined in chapter 4.3.

Political correctness is not a term which is used lightly in the tech industry. Lang also calls political correctness a "punching bag for conservatives" and says that within the tech industry, few firms want to be associated with the concept since "[t]he term itself has become poisonous" (Lang PC). Lang mentions a consulting firm which has specialized in helping firms develop a politically correct culture, meaning that they try and counter implicit and explicit biases, and try to respect diverse perspectives and backgrounds. She also points to a study which showed the benefits of a politically correct work environment; political correctness in this instance means more than being polite. It is an attitude and a form of being. However, Lang also mentions that within firms, employees are hesitant to use the term political correctness (Lang PC). This is an indication of the instrumental ways in which the term is used. Any mention of the concept is framed in a specific way. It is either used to indicate the evil of

censorship, or it is accompanied by an extensive explanation of what it means in the specific context.

The words political correctness repeatedly appear in relation to Damore's memo. The engineer "described himself as a victim of 'PC silencing'" (Damore in Pierson and Lien) in his interview with Jordan Peterson. Friedersdorf suggests that the memo was misinterpreted mainly because it related to issues of social justice and that through this public mischaracterization of Damore's views and media coverage on similar topics, a large segment of the American population "[…] now believe the mainstream media is more concerned with stigmatizing wrong-think and being politically correct than being accurate" (Friedersdorf). In the immediate aftermath of the memo's publication, "[o]ne conservative group, Americans for Limited Government, criticized what it called Google's politically correct culture and left-wing bias" (Ortutay). The cries of political ostracism went so far that some of Google's critics even evoked Orwellian comparisons. Charen proclaimed "Orwell lives" (Charen) in relation to the memo, bringing forth a dominant trope within the discourse of the anti-political correctness movement (e.g. Hughes 4). Erickson, who also wrote in support of Damore, repeatedly evoked Orwell. He said that many of Damore's critics thought that he had "[…] dared to engage in **wrongthink** [my emphasis]" (Erickson). In response to Danielle Brown's answer to Damore, Erickson again takes an Orwellian turn saying that "views outside left-wing **groupthink** [my emphasis] are not shareable inside Google" (Erickson). One article in the *New York Post* which offered support to Damore said that his firing "proved his point" (New York Post Dissent) about Google's "'politically correct monoculture'" (Damore in New York Post Dissent), that it was an alarming sign of the disintegration of free-speech rights and that people "should speak out before it's too late" (New York Post Dissent). The debate over political correctness, the evocation of authoritarian threats as well as the Orwellian terminology show that Damore's memo was instrumentalized in an ongoing debate where each side of the argument tries to win by vilifying their opponents.

Some of Damore's supporters name political correctness as an evil and talk about an "orthodoxy" (Moore and Milord) which has to be followed. One online commenter speaks of the danger of being "[…] derided as a bigot, a boor or worse" (Moore and Milord). The same person lists a number of perceived politically correct topics where this orthodoxy applies. These topics relate to "race, sex, climate change, etc." (Moore and Milord). This statement indicates a frustration with perceived blind spots in open discussion. The person who wrote the comment seems to view political correctness as the evil in this situation and thinks that there are numerous subjects on which orthodoxies of opinion exists and which must not be discussed. He himself,

however, does not appear to follow this orthodoxy, thereby highlighting the way in which different groups follow different taboos.

Smith's article seems to be a direct response to the points made above. She writes that Damore's memo and the Charlottesville riots are signs that Americans "have slipped into accepting **bigotry** at a level not seen since the civil rights movement began in the 1950s [my emphasis]" (Smith), supporting the views of Damore therefore would make the person who wrote the comments above a bigot. She goes on to argue that political correctness and identity politics should not be at the center of this discussion, but that Americans should "[…] keep [their] focus firmly on how those terms are being used to inflame the kind of dangerous divisiveness we saw in Charlottesville […]" (Smith). Again, Smith's points seem to be directed straight at the anonymous commentator who was published in the *New York Times* (Moore and Milord). It is not clear whether Damore's case is indicative of actual political correctness in action, or of conservatives arguing that this is the case. While his outrage-induced dismissal points towards actual censorship which follows from a culture of mob-mentality, it is still important to note that right-wing and conservative voices were all too quick to assume a lynching in the name of political correctness. Whatever might be the case, political correctness – which is a form of tabooing of words and behaviors – was a big part in the debate about Damore's memo

5.4.2   Free speech

One common thread throughout the media coverage of the memo is the issue of free speech which, one could argue, is diametrically opposed to tabooing tendencies. While some commentators maintained that Damore's firing was an indication of an overreach by a Silicon Valley company, others say that Google had a right to fire Damore, since he had contributed to a hostile work environment (e.g. Dwoskin). Damore's opponents claim that his speech was not protected by the first amendment since he was terminated by a private company with its own code of conduct. Some also suggested that those conservative outlets which leaked the names of Damore's critics, but were critical of his dismissal, were also in violation of free speech, since they created a situation which was hostile to the free expression of ideas (e.g. Dwoskin).

The situation for free speech inside Google at the time of the Damore incident seems ambivalent. While the company had long tried to establish an environment in which every opinion would be heard and where employees would feel safe to speak about their opinions, Damore's termination led to a situation in which some employees only spoke to the press on conditions of anonymity and did not "feel safe to engage in free speech" (Dwoskin). One reason

why the free speech aspect of the Damore case is so central, is that Google "[…] has built its business on the tenets of free speech, with a search engine that enables a wide spectrum of voices to reach their audiences" (Nicas and Koh). Singer states that in firing Damore, Pichai "[…] has created a workplace culture in which those with opinions like Damore's will be intimidated into remaining silent" (Singer). Lang also cites Google C.E.O. Pichai who "[…] said the majority of staffers agreed with the company's decision to fire Damore, though some 'are worried that you cannot speak out at work freely'" (Lee and Lang).

Goldman, pointing to the paradoxical nature of this situation, argued that it is "ironic that an ardent defender of free speech –Google – fires an employee for speaking out and circulating a position on Google's corporate employment practices different from the corporate model" (Goldman in To the editor). He goes on to say that while he disagrees with Damore, he still believes in his right to voice his concerns, and that women in Silicon Valley would ultimately profit from the debate that followed the memo. Other opinion contributors said that Google's firing of Damore constituted censorship and that it gave additional gravity to his accusations, a sentiment which is mirrored in the *New York Post* editorial (New York Post Dissent) outlined in the section on political correctness (Tonty in To the editor).

This is interesting since open discussion of difficult topics seems to be a prioritized issue at Google. While some articles highlight the openness Google seems to display towards challenging leadership decisions in other areas (e.g. Lang), the company was criticized because some people thought that this same openness did not seem to apply to questions that relate to issues of viewpoint diversity (Lee and Lang). Some of Google's critics pointed out that diversity in relation to political viewpoints might be viewed as a form of diversity as well (e.g. Goldberg).

Many of Google's critics lamented that in firing Damore, Google had missed an opportunity "to learn more about his views and try to point out the flaws in his argument" (Nicas and Koh). One comment which was published in the *New York Times* presents a clear indication of a view of free speech as speech which challenges viewpoints and sees Damore's termination as a "missed opportunity to engage this guy […] and discuss openly why his claims were simplistic" (Moore and Milord). Page argues that while views like Damore's might be wrong, censoring them is not a good idea. She suggests that similar ideas "need to be argued openly, not censored and driven underground to fester without intellectual challenge" (Page). McArdle insists that any engineer who might have had thoughts similar to Damore's would only have been strengthened in his bias by Damore's dismissal. She asserts that "[t]he mob reaction did

prove that women indeed have some power in tech. But the power to fire people is not why most people get into engineering" (McArdle wasn't wrong).

Scott, too, seems to adopt a view that challenging someone's speech is better than not engaging in conversation. Her letter to Damore is a clear indication of the willingness to engage in dialogue with a viewpoint that is different from her own. She goes on to link Damore's case to a broader American problem with free speech. While conservatives throughout Silicon Valley might feel persecuted by a broad liberal consensus, liberals throughout other parts of the country, where conservative views are at the forefront, feel a pressure for two options: "invisibility or banishment" (Scott). Her tone, however, can be viewed as condescending to some degree. Her first word is Damore's first name – "James" –which is followed by a statement which determines her expert status. While the text is conversational, it is written in a vernacular style and gives the impression of an adult reprimanding a child. She starts out by stating her agreement on Damore's point that everyone has their own biases, but then she reaches the topics where she does not agree with Damore. Scott lectures him on issues of politeness saying that: "radical candor gets measured at the other person's ear, not at your mouth" (Scott). At this point in her text, conversation seems to break down. Scott summarizes her perception of Damore's views on gender and her willingness to talk to him as follows: "I'm not eager to talk with someone who's predisposed to think I'm stupider and more neurotic than he is because I'm a woman" (Scott). She prefaces his statement on population level differences between the sexes with the words: "[y]ou didn't quite come out and say you thought the gender problem in tech is that women are stupider and more neurotic than men. But you came close […]" (Scott). She also presumes that his memo, while downplaying the role of emotion in debate, is primarily motivated by emotions which culminates at the end of one paragraph, when she says: "I imagine what you wrote may be the product of some silent fuming" (Scott). In the last paragraphs, she extends an invitation to further dialogue and highlights that she invites open debate, even if she disagrees with Damore. Her main argument against Damore's memo seems to be that the workplace is not the right place for the questions Damore raises. She calls for the initiation of a "safe place to talk openly" (Scott). So, her solution to the problem seems to be the instantiation of safe spaces for discussion. These places are not in the workplace, however, according to her reasoning.

When it comes to viewpoint diversity and free speech, there are views, which society deems unacceptable and which cannot be discussed. We call these views taboos. Again, this section has shown that Damore's case is highly indicative of taboos. While some people called for open debate in order to change Damore's heinous perspective, others simply maintained

that what he had said was so repulsive and goes so strongly against workplace etiquette that it should not be said in the first place, and if it had to be said, it should be said in a safe space. The instantiation of a safe space also alludes to a ritualistic, even religious idea of a space where all ideas can be heard without hurting someone. It hints at the taboo that can only be discussed at a specific place for fear of its detrimental effects on the wellbeing of the individual.

One common argument in the justification of Damore's dismissal is that his firing did not, in fact, present a case where freedom of speech was disregarded, since there is no free speech in the workplace to begin with. McGregor argues that much of the free speech debate which followed Damore's dismissal is indicative of a common misconception concerning America's First Amendment to the constitution: "The First Amendment protects people from adverse actions by the government, but it does not generally apply to actions by private employers" (McGregor firing of). Lee makes a differentiation between public free speech, which is intrinsically valuable in democratic societies and free speech in the private sector which has to align with company values. Since Google had been open about its diversity efforts, Damore's ideas questioned company values and did not fall under free speech protection (Lee). While DeBoer strongly disagrees with Damore's statements, he also sees his termination as indicative of a worrying broader development within American professional life. Companies increasingly fire people over statements those people have made during their time off. By terminating employees for controversial statements made in their spare time, employers can curtail any possible publicity damage, but they also infringe on citizen's right to free speech and political expression. This development is made possible by the fact that "[…] the line between work life and private life […] has been blurred by digital technology" (DeBoer). McArdle criticizes the ways in which private citizens have come to face repercussions for the views they espouse in public. She sees the forms of mob mentality which led to Damore's firing as a sign of private coercion, where one person is being forced out of public life. She mentions conversations she had with people who say that they live with the fear of "inadvertently offend[ing] the self-appointed powers-that-be. […] They're worried that some opinion they hold now will unexpectedly be declared anathema, forcing them to issue a humiliating public recantation, or risk losing their friends and their livelihood" (McArdle Internet mob). These arguments show that speech codes and values are strongly linked and that the speech we engage in privately is increasingly becoming public. Cases like Damore's show that private speech is increasingly a public matter. One could argue that Damore's memo is different insofar as it was not a privately uttered belief which influenced his working life, but rather a belief uttered at work, which heavily influenced his private life.

Damore's case also raised some general concerns about Silicon Valley's role as gate keepers of information in the public sphere. Swartz and Weise note that while there seems to be a general trend for tech giants to support liberal and libertarian values, "[…] to their users, social networks including YouTube, Facebook and Twitter have stressed that they're value-neutral platforms, designed to allow the free exchange of ideas" (Swartz and Weise). They highlight the role which technology companies play in the public sphere and in the creation of political speech. While some people have criticized tech giants for providing a platform for hate speech, others have criticized them for limiting free speech, especially where it relates to conservatives. They also mention Trump's and Steve Bannon's – "a right-wing nationalist and a populist" who was the campaign CEO of Trump's 2016 presidential election (Hawley 129) – use of the internet in their political campaigns (Swartz and Weise). All of this, according to their article, is an example of the "culture wars", which rage around "'attitudes toward equality and diversity, attitudes toward immigration, and so on'" (McGrath in Swartz and Weise). Again, this seems to indicate that attitudes, values and morals are being negotiated in this sphere, which highlights the shifting taboos of American society.

Jan and Dwoskin also mention the role of tech firms as gatekeepers of information in the free speech debate, calling them the emerging "arbiters of free speech in America" (Jan and Dwoskin). Some conservative voices in Silicon Valley saw a bias in tech giants against their political goals and argued that, just like infrastructure, online communication should be open to everyone and regulated by the state: "'Imagine if a private corporation owned all the highways and they decided to close them down whenever they feel like it – that is what it's like'" (Sanduja in Dwoskin and Shaban). In the aftermath of the Charlottesville protests and Damore's memo, right-wingers raised the issue of government interference in order "to force powerful Internet companies to allow anyone to express themselves on their platforms" (Dwoskin and Shaban). Samples suggests that while most Americans would agree with the censoring and deplatforming of far-right hate groups, some might fear that tech companies have too much power in regulating access to the online public sphere (Samples). After the Google town hall had been cancelled, due to online threats and harassment, some people "[…] said that it was ironic that right-wing outlets that purport to support free speech and public debate created an environment where people don't feel safe to engage in it" (Dwoskin). Dwoskin quotes the founder of "a conservative group for technologists in Silicon Valley" who argues that Damore voiced a widely-held belief within conservative circles in Silicon Valley, namely that there is a strong progressive bias within the tech industry and that conservatives do not feel comfortable voicing their views (Dwoskin). After Damore's memo and the events in Charlottesville,

political actors across the aisle seemed eager to investigate and regulate tech companies' influence on public discourse (Dwoskin and Shaban). Ou, for example, questioned Google's ability to have a gatekeeping function for information because of their handling of Damore's memo. "If the company silences dissent within its own ranks, why should we trust it to manage our access to information?" (Ou).

Since taboos are instantiated by powerful actors, as Freud put forth, the values of powerful companies like Google are extremely likely to influence their dissemination into the wider public. Because of the power these companies hold over public discourse, it is even more important to monitor closely the ways in which company values and taboos play out in the public sphere,

5.4.3 Media mischaracterization and media critique

"The world the public sees through the mass media's eyes is not a mirror image of reality, nor a true picture of events, people, places and issues. The media's news window on the world is, instead, a reflection of the media's own construction of reality" (Turk 211). Damore's case is a clear indication of the truth behind the statement above. Friedersdorf, for example said that "[…] the Google memo is an outlier – I cannot remember the last time so many outlets and observers mischaracterized so many aspects of a text everyone possessed" (Friedersdorf). Brooks proclaimed that "[t]he coverage of the memo has been atrocious" and Erickson summarized his grievances with the media coverage as follows: "The problem, chiefly, is that many critics claimed Damore said things he did not and painted the things he did say in the worst possible light" (Erickson). A lot of media outlets mischaracterized Damore's views and were rebuked for this behavior by voices like those of the critics mentioned above.

Friedersdorf's text on Damore is a strong indictment of the media's coverage of the memo. He lamented that, while on other issues the media tends to present nuanced reporting, they failed in Damore's case. He maintains that through his memo, Damore put forth a plan to, among other things, reach more diversity at Google, but that media coverage mischaracterized this attempt, instead saying that he was anti-diversity. Friedersdorf argues that because Damore had advocated for a different way to reach more diversity and because he had questioned Google's efforts, journalists equivocated this with a complete dismissal of all diversity efforts and commented: "To object to a means of achieving x is not to be anti-x" (Friedersdorf).

> When journalistic institutions widely publicize material of this sort, only to abdicate the vital work of rigorously addressing its substance, they make its least plausible claims more likely to be normalized. They leave the project of assessing its merits and flaws to

Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, and other venues where the loudest voices tend to prevail, instead of offering their own careful reporting and expert analysis. (Friedersdorf)

Friedersdorf went on to say that "even if the substance of every viewpoint that he expressed is wrongheaded […] that won't make characterizing the memo as an anti-diversity screed any more accurate" (Friedersdorf).

Hicks, too, asserts that the media made mistakes in covering the memo. However, she argues that the problem was, that most of the newspapers "took this memo and just ran with it" (Hicks in Jackson). "[W]hen you have this sort of fake 'fair and balanced' news reporting, where you take ideas that on their face have basically no merit, and you present them as though they're something reasonable to intellectually engage with, then that really is a problem" (Hicks in Jackson). Hicks therefore seems to argue the exact opposite of Friedersdorf. While Friedersdorf claims that the memo had been mischaracterized, Hick says that it was reported fairly, but that Damore's points were so damaging to women in coding that they should not be spoken about in the first place. This view is indicative two things: first, of a taboo, since people should not report about the memo in the first place, and second, of severely diverging views of reality.

The articles also criticize the ideological and partisan nature of parts of the American press in reporting on Damore. Page addresses the reader directly: "You may have heard through some of the news coverage that he wrote a 10page, 3,000-word 'screed' of an argument that women are not as qualified as men. He didn't" (Page). Charen accuses some outlets who reported on Damore's memo of ideological bias, saying that "Left-wing outlets, such as Vox, have labelled Damore's memo a 'sexist screed'" (Charen). Erickson mentions a number of outlets which, according to him, did Damore a disservice: "According to the tech site Gizmodo, Damore wrote an 'antidiversity screed.' Re/Code referred to it as 'sexist'. The tech site Mashable assailed anyone who defended Damore as being part of the 'alt-right'" (Erickson). These utterances imply that some of the journalists who wrote about the memo might have mischaracterized it on purpose, or not read it at all. Whatever might be the case, the memo's broad range of characterizations already indicates a high probability of either ideological bias, or mischaracterization, be it positive or negative.

The media outrage could be read as support for the claim that the taboo in the case of Damore does not only hold for Google, but also for broad parts of the US- newspaper industry, since the same text was described in a variety of different ways with some voices loudly decrying it as sexist. Damore's views were mischaracterized by wide parts of the media. His

proposals, which, according to Friedersdorf, could be read as clear indications of his willingness to increase diversity in the workplace (Friedersdorf), were portrayed as efforts to achieve the exact opposite. This strong negative framing is indicative of underlying values which were challenged by the memo. Since Damore attacked prevalent ideas about gender, journalists in turn attacked him. It can be argued that he broke a taboo for journalists within parts of the media.

5.4.4 Politics and group: Damore's alleged right-wing affiliation

Identities –most importantly, group identity and political group affiliation – play an important role in the public discussion of the memo. In the following section, this thesis draws on CDA and its "[…] Foucauldian view of discourse as inextricably bound up with the social and, more radically, as *constitutive* [italics in original] of social identities and relations […]" (Walsh 27). Gee highlights this link between discourse and identity:

> The key to Discourses is 'recognition'. If you put language, action, interaction, values, beliefs, symbols, objects, tools, and places together in such a way that others recognize you as a particular type of who (identity) engaged in a particular type of what (activity), here and now, then you have pulled off a Discourse (and thereby continued it through history, if only for a while longer). (Gee 52)

All of this has to be understood in connection with the idea that the breaking or holding of a taboo can solidify one's part in a group. This section will show how Damore's breaking of the taboo on discussing biological differences between the sexes has led to him becoming a hero for the alt-right.

Within the articles, there are numerous allusions to Damore's supposed political affiliations with the American right wing, the alt-right, as well as mentions of a footnote within the memo in which Damore describes himself as a "classical liberal" who "strongly value[s] individualism and reason" (Damore, e.g. Wakabayashi Contentious, Schmidt); political group affiliations are highlighted at every turn. While "Damore himself has been explicit that he does not support the alt-right" (Weise Women coders) he was linked to the movement in a number of articles, again, either implicitly, or explicitly (e.g. Lee and Thadani, Ohlheiser and Huet Ex-Google engineer). It seems very important to the authors of the articles that talked about Damore to define his ideological position and point to his supposed political affiliations with conservative and right-wing movements. The articles do not differentiate much between the textual *other* of the alt-right and other neo-conservative movements. Ohlheiser for example mentions a wide array of questionable Damore supporters. These include internet trolls, right-wing news organizations like Breitbart news – a conservative online news site which was highly

influential in the election of Donald Trump (Hawley 129) –, and right-wing personalities with questionable backgrounds (Ohlheiser). Swartz and Weise also mention far-right "conspiracy theorists" among Damore's supporters, as well as the alt-right photographer Peter Duke, who "[…] was dubbed the Annie Leibowitz of the movement by the *New York Times*" (Swartz and Weise).

The articles offer a variety of definitions for the alt-right. One of the articles by Jan and Dwoskin defines the movements as "a fractious coalition of neo-Nazis, white supremacists, and those opposed to feminism" (Jan and Dwoskin). Hawley also highlights the fact that the alt-right is not a uniform movement and that its members are not interested in the same thing: "Using the loosest definition, we could say the Alt-Right includes anyone with right-wing sensibilities that rejects the mainstream conservative movement" (Hawley 11). Within the movement there is an emphasis on race and indeed it can be seen as an offshoot of American white nationalism (Hawley 11-15). Page said that for this group, Damore "became an instant hero, another sacrificial white male victim of liberal, pro-diversity 'Social Justice Warriors,' the altright [sic] label for those of us who think our society benefits from its diversity" (Page). Another article characterizes the alt-right as "a relatively new offshoot of conservatism that includes pundits and media personalities who espouse white supremacism, conspiracy theories like Pizzagate, and are savvy about using social networks to reach followers" (Sandler). While these characterizations differ in the concrete ways in which the movement is described, they all focus on a link to online culture or radical right-wing views and on their supposed connection to Damore.

Damore refused interviews with reporters, only speaking to Jordan Peterson and Stefan Molyneux, two YouTube personalities which are frequently linked to the alt-right. This seeming preference led reporters to associate Damore with his interviewers, labeling him an alt-right personality (Ohlheiser and Sandler). Ohlheiser mentions the interview with Jordan Peterson, who is characterized as a self-proclaimed crusader against his personal notions of political correctness (Ohlheiser) and an "alt-right YouTube personalit[y]" (Sandler). This logic of guilt by association is flawed in a variety of ways. First, it implies that speaking with someone is equal to sharing their views, which is not necessarily the case. Second, by the same logic, there should be something like vindication by association, which is equally nonsensical. It is important in this regard to point out that other guests of Molyneux included Noam Chomsky. Peterson on the other hand is a professor at the University of Toronto and has hosted liberal

speakers and public intellectuals like Stephen Pinker. Peterson has also repeatedly maintained that he is not a member of the alt-right and that he does not endorse their views.[4]

Damore's case highlights the ways in which identities are defined, enacted, or refuted through the breach of a taboo. The articles about him are very concerned with his identity and a number of articles linked his case to a small group of Silicon Valley conservatives. According to Dwoskin and Shaban, for example, there were always few right- wingers and conservatives in Silicon Valley, but since the election of Trump, some of them tried to "purposely hide their political beliefs from colleagues and peers" (Dwoskin and Shaban). Other conservatives within Silicon Valley who did not self-identify as alt-right or white nationalist, or did not endorse any other extremist points of view, argued that they feared being associated with these views and that moderate voices were being "drowned out" by tech companies (Dwoskin and Shaban).

However, it is not clear whether one should take this fear of the anonymous Silicon Valley conservative at face value, since it is taken up and ridiculed in a number of articles: "His new supporters believed that the only thing keeping Silicon Valley from a conservative revolution was that an army of secret conservatives were afraid to 'speak out'" (Ohlheiser). Ohlheiser's wording is indicative of a ridiculing approach to this idea, which likens the understanding of the situation in Silicon Valley to a conspiracy theory for supporters of Damore. He speaks of a "belief" which Damore's supporters hold in a "conservative revolution". He thereby implies a grand movement of "an army of secret conservatives" which is stifled by their own cowardice. The wording indicates that they should not be afraid to speak up by the sheer fact of their numbers, if they even existed, and that the claim of Damore's supporters is therefore driven ad absurdum.

While these reports, that there were people with similar views in Silicon Valley, were disregarded by Ohlheiser, some authors also argued that Damore's views were indicative of the existence of exactly these anonymous colleagues who supported him in the establishment of his beliefs: "[The memo] reads like the reflection of lengthy conversations with like-minded colleagues sharing similar gripes about those accursed diversity seminars, as though from adjacent urinals" (Hiltzik). Locating the conversation at "adjacent urinals" immediately paints the picture of two men who are not engaged in an open conversation, but who hide and talk

---

[4] The respective links that support these claims are as follows:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MautscPF5wE
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pBylbB7s5Nw
https://www.psych.utoronto.ca/people/directories/all-faculty/jordan-peterson
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0oJBJc9Ou2A&t=197s

about something which cannot be discussed openly. The "adjacent urinal" is reminiscent of the proverbial "locker room talk"[5] which is often used as a phrase to indicate behavior or topics which are dated and mostly taboo. The phrase also evokes images of Silicon Valley as a sexist mostly male environment, as discussed in chapter 5.

In the interview with Peterson, Damore spoke of support and of being proven right since he found himself opposing a "'culture [which] tries to silence any dissenting view'" (Ohlheiser). Greenell sees this sentiment mirrored in the US right wing, saying that "Americans on the right have seconded that complaint, buying into the false notion that disapproval is censorship. Far from it. Damore has been expressing himself nonstop, including on the opinion pages of *The Wall Street Journal*" (Greenell). Indeed, on the one hand, any accusations of censorship seem to be unfounded. Damore and his supporters were given ample opportunity to voice their beliefs. The contents of his memo were debated in large American newspapers and he himself was able to comment and partake in a national debate which he sparked.

However, despite these opportunities, Damore's "[…] supporters were ready to read [Google's] action as a desperate attempt to silence him and anyone like him" (Ohlheiser). Newspapers certainly contributed to this sentiment since one of the simplest ways of silencing someone is calling them a liar, which undermines the foundation of participatory speech (Herrmann 90). The same could be said for calling someone a sexist. Damore's continual characterization as sexist in parts of the media and the argument that his statements in the memo were completely unfounded, based in opinion, or outright unscientific, would probably lead readers to either disregard him as a liar, or at least as an opinionated person who does not rely on facts in order to support his claims. The allegations that people like Damore were "silenced" are also supported by articles in which people are mentioned who are afraid of speaking out in support of Damore for fear of losing their livelihood (e.g. Proudman in Nicas and Koh). Erickson links Damore's alleged silencing to tendencies of the political left: "The most troubling part is that many on the political left would be OK with a silencing. They see censorship of ideas they hate as a positive thing for the world" (Erickson). This statement is again indicative of the ways in which ideas of belonging to political groups or tribes are bound up in the James Damore story. Erickson, who believes that "the left", who he perceives as his enemies, try to stifle free speech. He finds support for his views in Damore's firing. He thereby mirrors the concerns of the enemies of political correctness on the conservative end of the

---

[5] See <www.oed.com/view/Entry/426363.>

political spectrum, which see it as a silencing influence, again disregarding the fact that Damore had ample opportunity to voice his beliefs.

The temporal proximity of Damore's story to the Charlottesville marches probably amplified the connections to the alt-right which sometimes dominated entire articles (e.g. Lee and Thadani). However, there were also other developments around the time of Damore's firing which suggested his links to the American right-wing for authors of newspapers. Some articles implied that the right-wing's response to Damore's firing was a coordinated effort to sow chaos. Roose says that "[m]inutes after Mr. Damore's firing was announced, a flurry of right-wing websites, message boards and social media cliques sprang into action, eager to paint the episode as another example of liberal political correctness run amok" (Roose). The short reaction time outlined in the quote above would lead the reader to conclude that employees at right-wing media sites must have had information about the firing beforehand, suggesting that Damore might have had contacts to these sites before his firing. Regardless of whether or not Damore had contacted the right-wing media outlets before his dismissal, the way the events unfolded shows that he was supported by some of their most powerful voices and through some of their most gruesome tactics. After right-wingers published pictures and names of Google employees who they believed to be responsible for Damore's firing, these employees had to face an onslaught of online harassment (Ohlheiser). In the time shortly after Damore's firing, right-wing free speech activists were able to garner large amounts of money in online pledges (Ohlheiser). Ohlheiser traces Damore's ascent to what he perceives as right-wing stardom along several steps. She presents the right-wing as calculating actors behind Damore's ascent to notoriety. After an initial reaction to Damore's firing, where he garnered support from right-wing media personalities and after the memo had been widely discussed throughout mainstream culture, Damore accepted their support and willingly started to incorporate his role, according to Ohlheiser (Ohlheiser). A protest march which would have taken place in support of Damore, and which was cancelled due to threats of violence, was likened by its critics to the white-supremacist marches in Charlottesville (Lee and Thadani). One of Damore's supporters compared his views on diversity and the primary importance of the individual to Rev. Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech, saying that "[t]he left has long ago abandoned colorblindness, melting pot and individualism in favor of multiculturalism and its enforcement mechanism, 'diversity.' Without intellectual diversity, all that remains is conformity" (De Carvalho in Brown). This broad spectrum of attributes from Martin Luther King to Stefan Molyneux, shows the ways in which the people in this debate tried to use famous examples in order to either establish Damore as trustworthy and part of their group, or as the exact opposite.

All of these developments are repeatedly linked to the actions of Trump and his supporters at the time of Damore's firing. Roose, for example, links the Damore episode to broader tendencies within fringe conservative movements which had been strengthened by Trump's political victories and which accused Google and other tech giants of a liberal bias (Roose). The aforementioned alt-right has repeatedly been linked to Trump's election since they "[…] gained visibility during the 2016 presidential campaign" (Sandler). There are strong links between Trump and this movement which has repeatedly attacked his political enemies in online onslaughts (Hawley 105-106).

The ongoing debate between tech companies and right- wingers, outlined above, is continually framed as an issue where the left calls for censorship while the right is beginning to form an alternative internet with sites specifically tailored to its needs (Roose and Jan and Dwoskin). For one group, Damore "[…] went from employee to outcast upon the memo's circulation […]" (Huel After firing) and for the other he "became a hero" (Ohlheiser). This dichotomy shows how transgressing a taboo can cement one's standing with a group, or cause ostracism. This highlights the fact that the debate on biological differences between the sexes actually is a taboo case, since the two sides in this debate accepted Damore's transgression as such. Both parties accepted the idea that he had written a memo which outlined biological differences between the sexes and for one side he therefore became a hero, while for the other side he was outed as a sexist.

Apart from these attempts to highlight and instrumentalize Damore's perceived political identity, the texts also highlight the ways in which other identities are formed and used in this debate using taboos. In the previous sections, we have seen numerous accounts of women in tech, who gave credence to their claims through mentioning their identity. Devlin, for example, prefaces her own views about Damore's termination with a statement about her identity: "I am far from someone who would be considered a feminist, but I find James Damore's firing justified" (Devlin). By prefacing her opinion on Damore's firing with identity disclaimer that she is "far from being a feminist" she is also implying that the group of people who would self-identify as feminists, is very likely to find Damore's termination justified. Pierson and Lien quote a law professor who argues that Damore as an engineer "[…] belongs to a particularly intransigent group when it comes to addressing attitudes and feelings." (Pierson and Lien). Williams sees Damore's attitude as a typical attitude among engineers: "'What that engineer expressed is an attitude that's common in engineering, which is that engineering is technical and pure, and that anything else that has to do with social issues is unrigorous and doesn't belong in engineering'" (Williams in Pierson and Lien). While Williams maintains that this is

a "'minority attitude'", it seems to be much more prevalent in engineering than in law, for example (Williams in Pierson and Lien). This assertion again highlights the way in which identities are formed in this discourse. Damore's behavior is presented as typical of an engineer. Identity is therefore used as a sign of belonging to a group in order to establish, among other things, trustworthiness and to create a textual other, against which the author can define their own group. Consequently, the Damore incident and the subsequent media coverage highlight the ways in which texts produce and define our social identities, via the groups we are ascribed to.

6. Conclusion

This thesis has tried to establish that the Discourse surrounding Damore's memo is indicative of a taboo around biological differences between the sexes. The way in which the Damore incident was treated in the media highlights all of the relevant aspects of taboos outlined in chapter 3. Taboos are repeatedly mentioned by authors, they appear in dysphemistic language use, in journalists' vocabulary choice, in the characterization of Damore and in the repeated attempts to categorize Damore as a member of the alt-right. Taboos are also evident in the articles which develop the argument around speech codes and in the continual mentions of political correctness.

Since Taboos are usually not legislated but are formed in implications and mostly visible in instances of their transgression and not in overt rules, it is impossible to make a definitive statement in this case. However, the analysis part of this thesis outlines the evidence that the coverage of Damore's memo was highly indicative of a taboo around the biological differences between women and men. It is possible that some journalists read Damore's memo as an attack on women, as an overgeneralization and a sexist screed wherein he attacked all diversity efforts and argued that all women were innately inept with regards to engineering jobs. However, the text of his memo does not support such a reading. The memo only supports a reading which sees some differences between the sexes as rooted in biology. Arguing that Damore is sexist, therefore, equates statements which try to root differences between the sexes in biology, with taboos. Apart from the open claims that the memo constituted a breach of taboo, one of the key indicators for taboos is Damore's repeated mention of shaming as a strategy in keeping people from discussing this topic and it is public shame, which is one of the clearest indications of a breach of taboos. The use of dysphemisms, as well as face threatening acts are reliable indicators of taboos and both were apparent in the discussion. One prevalent dysphemism can be found in the articles calling Damore a sexist. The idea that overt sexism is a taboo in our

society was also outlined above. Saying that someone espouses sexist views is therefore akin to saying that that person broke a taboo. While the people who disagreed with Damore tended to call him a sexist, those who agreed with him saw political correctness at fault. Both are examples of taboos. It is important to remember that while holding a taboo might be important in constituting belonging to one part of a community or country, it might not apply for others and therefore the breaking of one taboo can lead one group to call someone a hero, while the other despises that same person. The fact that Damore himself became taboo and that some people were not willing to talk to him or share a workspace with him after his transgression also implies that he broke a sacred rule.

Another claim which has repeatedly been made in this thesis is that the coverage of the memo was not only indicative of an in-group taboo within the company, but within broader society. I put forth the notion that if it were in fact an in-group taboo, there would have been no public discussion of this magnitude. The memo touched on values and moral understandings which are held, not only by Google employees, but by large parts of the American population. If one were to violate a hypothetical company policy by, for example, taking someone else's yogurt in the break room, or taking too long in the bathroom, one would be scolded or fired, but the story would probably not make the news. Only once the news piece is interesting or controversial enough that it becomes relevant to readers outside the company, does it become national news. This is especially relevant in light of the power of Google as an international information broker and gatekeeper in the public discourse. Google's internal taboos have the potential to influence the information and media available to the public. Indeed, the developments on campuses in America outlined above and the cases of Lawrence Summers and Charles Murray suggest that the taboo around biological differences between groups is not only a taboo inside Google, but in wider parts of society.

Newspapers play an important role in the public discourse, and they are also the primary platform where collective values are negotiated through the construction of a shared narrative. According to Freud, taboos are instantiated by powerful elites and according to Lévi-Strauss, they form at the intersection of nature and culture. The news as a whole can be considered to be such a powerful elite and the discussion of biological differences between the sexes is a primary example of the space between nature and culture. The ways in which these institutions continually called Damore a sexist are very likely to stifle the discussion on these issues. Anyone holding similar views, be they founded in biological evidence or not, would be cautious of speaking out in public after the developments outlined above.

The taboo on biological differences between the sexes is understandable and seems to arise out of the idea that diversity initiatives and efforts for more equal participation in the workplace are the results of contentious battles fought over these issues in the last century. Through the course of the last hundred years, several issues (like homosexuality) have gone from being penalized, to being accepted throughout most of the western world. In western societies, issues of gender and LGBTQ+ rights have gone from being the concerns of the fringe of society, towards the mainstream. However, a taboo on the biological differences between the sexes can only stifle any progress society has made in the establishment of equality between all human beings, since we need to be able to publicly discuss findings of peer reviewed research. Certainly, these discussions have to operate with an acknowledgment of the dangers of biases and over-simplification, but in order to grow as a society we have to scrutinize all ideas, even the bad ones.

Taboos are here to stay. They are a human universal and like other human universals we will have to accept them and work in accordance to them. Chantal Mouffe argues that a democracy needs disagreement in order to function (Kováts 532). A democracy lacking in intellectual debates and disagreements, suffering from too much consensus of ideas and opinions, may find itself turning to less constructive disagreement and division. Developments like this could lead to a contest of "essentialist forms of identification or non-negotiable moral values" (Mouffe 30). This focus on values and the break-down of discourse is apparent in the vastly differing media characterizations of Damore and his memo and the dysphemisms which were directed against all parties in this debate.

Even if all of Damore's points were completely wrong – and the fact that he found supporters within the scientific community suggests otherwise – we should listen. The way in which he was repeatedly called a sexist on the national stage and the ways in which the coverage diverged, indicates that a statement on the biological differences between the sexes should be made very cautiously, if it should be made at all in the current political climate; at least in the United States. Indeed, Damore's case showed that in transgressing taboos, people run the risk of being called bigots. But there are bigots who relish in their transgressions, and for those individuals, the label of sexist is rightfully applied. If someone is racist and correctly perceives his racism as taboo, we as a society should also have the right not to hear their racist views. The same holds true for sexism. However, it seems that the only way forward in a democratic society, in which we rely on a shared construction of values and morals, is continual debate. There are taboos about race, sexism and other topics and some taboos are useful. However, we should be careful as to when we bar someone from speaking. This thesis has repeatedly pointed

out the useful nature of taboos. Consequently, the taboo which James Damore broke, namely arguing that there is a biological basis for different interests between men and women on a population level, when conscientiously and rigorously discussed, serves a useful function in society. However, journalists within the news media should be conscious of their function in establishing taboos, and regarding their influence on public discourse when it comes to this topic.

7. Bibliography

7.1. General Bibliography

Allan, Keith and Kate Burridge. *Forbidden Words. Taboo and the Censoring of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006.

Arthur, Robert. *You Will Die. The burden of modern Taboos.* Port Townsend: Feral, 2012.

Barker, Kathleen. "To Be PC or Not To Be? A Social Psychological Inquiry into Political Correctness." *Journal of social behaviour and personality* 9. 2 (1994): 271-281.

Bell, Vikki. *Interrogating Incest: Feminism, Foucault, and the Law*. London: Routledge, 1993.

Belton, Pádraig. *An Analysis of Mary Douglas's Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. London: Macat, 2017.

Blackford, Russel. "Free speech and hate speech." *Quadrant* 45. 1-2 (2001): 10-17.

Benthien, Claudia, and Ortrud Gutjahr. „Interkulturalität und Gender- Spezifik von Tabus. Zur Einleitung." *Tabu: Interkulturalität und Gender.* Ed. Claudia Benthien and Ortrud Gutjahr. München: Wilhelm Fink, 2008. 7-16.

Brown, Penelope, and Stephen C. Levinson. *Politeness. Some Universals in Language Usage.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1999.

Capps, John. "Pragmatism, Feminism, and the Sameness-Difference Debate." *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 32. 1 (1996): 65-103.

Cerezo, Alison, Mariah Cummings, Meredith Holmes, and Chelsey Williams. "Identity as Resistance: Identity Formation at the Intersection of Race, Gender Identity, and Sexual Orientation." *Psychology of Women Quarterly* (2019): 1-17.

Chimombo, Moira, and Robert L. Roseberry. *The Power of Discourse. An Introduction to Discourse Analysis.* Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1998.

Choluj, Bozena. "'Gender-Ideologie': ein Schlüsselbegriff des polnischen Anti-Genderismus." *Anti-Genderismus. Sexualität und Geschlecht als Schauplätze aktueller politischer Auseinandersetzungen.* Ed. Sabine Hark, and Paula-Irene Villa. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2015. 219 - 237.

Chrisler, Joan, C.. "Teaching Taboo Topics: Menstruation, Menopause, and the Psychology of Women." *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 37.1 (2013): 128-132.

Conboy, Martin. *Journalism: A Critical History*. London: Sage, 2004.

Conley, Dalton, and Benjamin Domingue. "The Bel Curve Revisited: Testing Controversial Hypotheses with Molecular Genetic Data." *Sociological Science* 3 (2016): 520-539.

Cotter, Colleen. *News Talk. Investigating the Language of Journalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010.

Crespo-Fernández, Eliecer (Ed.). "Taboo in Discourse: An Overview." *Taboo in Discourse. Studies on Attenuation and Offence in Communication.* Ed. Eliecer Crespo-Fernández. Linguistic Insights 240. Bern: Peter Lang, 2018. 9-23.

Damore, James. "Google's Ideological Echo Chamber. How bias clouds our thinking about diversity and inclusion." July 2017. 14 Nov. 2019 <https://felleisen.org/matthias/Articles/the-google-memo.pdf>

Douglas, Mary. *Purity and Danger. An analysis of concepts of pollution and taboo*. London: Routledge, 2003.

Duncan, Pansy. "'I drink liberal tears': Genre, Desire and the Leaky Liberal Body." *Feminist Media Studies* 17.3 (2017): 516-520.

Durkheim, Emile. *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. 5th ed. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1964.

Edgerly, Stephanie, Emily Vraga, Timothy Fung, Tae Joon Moon, Woo Hynun Yoo, and Aaron Veenstra. "YouTube as a public sphere: The Proposition 8 debate." *Conference paper from the Association of Internet Researchers conference* Milwaukee October 8-10, 2009.

Fausto-Sterling, Anne. *Sex/Gender: Biology in a social World*. The Routledge Series Integrating Science and Culture. New York: Routledge, 2012.

Farnsworth, Stephen J.. *Presidential Communication and Character. White House News Management from Clinton and Cable to Twitter and Trump.* New York: Routledge, 2018.

Feldman, Ofer, and Sonja Zmerli. "Introduction: Liberal Democracies and the Study of Political Communicators." *The Psychology of Political communicators. How Politicians, Culture, and the Media Construct and Shape Public Discourse.* Ed. Ofer Feldman, and Sonja Zmerli. New York: Routledge, 2019. 1-10.

Finlayson, Lorna. "What To Do With Post-Truth." *Nordic Wittgenstein Review* (2019): 63-79.

Foucault, Michel. "The Order of Discourse. Inaugural Lecture at the Collége de France, given 2 December 1970." *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader.* Ed. Robert Young. Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981. 48- 78.

Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*. New York: Pantheon, 1972.

Freud, Sigmund. "Totem und Tabu." *Sigmund Freuds Werke.* Ed. Herman Westerink. Wiener Interdisziplinäre Kommentare 1. Göttingen: Vienna UP, 2013. 55- 196.

Frietsch, Ute. "Der Wille zum Tabu als Wille zum Wissen." *Geschlecht als Tabu. Orte, Dynamiken und Funktionen der De/Thematisierung von Geschlecht.* Ed. Ute Frietsch, Konstanze Hanitzsch, Jennifer John, and Beatrice Michaelis. Gender Codes 5. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2008. 9-16.

Ganz, Kathrin, and Anna-Katharina Meßmer. "Anti-Genderismus im Internet: Digitale Öffentlichkeit als Labor eines neuen Kulturkampfes." *Anti-Genderismus. Sexualität und Geschlecht als Schauplätze aktueller politischer Auseinandersetzungen.* Ed. Sabine Hark, and Paula-Irene Villa. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2015. 59-77.

Gee, James Paul. *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method.* London: Routledge, 2014.

Gell, Alfred. "Reflections on a Cut Finger: Taboo in the Umeda Conception of the Self." *Fantasy and symbol: Studies in Anthropological interpretation.* Ed. R.H. Hook, and George Devereux. London: Acad. Press, 1979. 133-148.

Gerhards, Jürgen, and Mike S. Schäfer. "Is the internet a better public sphere? Comparing old and new media in the US and Germany." *New Media & Society* XX.X (2010): 1-18.

Geyer, Naomi. *Discourse and Politeness. Ambivalent Face in Japanese.* London: Continuum, 2008.

Greenawalt, Kent. *Fighting Words. Individuals, Communities, and Liberties of Speech.* Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995.

Greenwald, Gilad and Sam Lehman-Wilzig. "Non-Systematic Factors Underlying Rapid Change in Gender-Biased Media Framing of Female Politicians. 2009 and 2013 Israeli Newspaper Election Coverage." *The Psychology of Political communicators. How Politicians, Culture, and the Media Construct and Shape Public Discourse.* Ed. Ofer Feldman, and Sonja Zmerli. New York: Routledge, 2019. 165-184.

Grotstein, James S. "Chapter One Taboo. Its Origins and its Current Echoes." *Taboo or not Taboo? Forbidden Thoughts, Forbidden Acts in psychoanalysis and psychotherapy.* Ed. Brent Willock, Rebecca C. Curtis, and Lori, C. Bohm. London: Karnac, 2009. 3-16.

Guzy, Lidia. "Tabu- die kulturelle Grenze im Körper." *Geschlecht als Tabu. Orte, Dynamiken und Funktionen der De/Thematisierung von Geschlecht.* Ed. Ute Frietsch, Konstanze Hanitzsch, Jennifer John, and Beatrice Michaelis. Gender Codes 5. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2008. 17-22.

Habashi, Meara M., and William G. Graziano. "Agreeableness." *Encyclopedia of Social Psychology.* Ed. Roy F. Baumeister, and Kathleen D. Vohs. Los Angeles: Sage, 2007. 25-27.

Habermas, Jürgen. "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article." *New German Critique* 3 (Autumn 1974): 49-55.

Hark, Sabine, and Paula-Irene Villa. "'Anti-Genderismus' – Warum dieses Buch?" *Anti-Genderismus. Sexualität und Geschlecht als Schauplätze aktueller politischer Auseinandersetzungen.* Ed. Sabine Hark, and Paula-Irene Villa. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2015. 7-13.

Hark, Sabine, and Paula-Irene Villa. "'Eine Frage an und für unsere Zeit': Verstörende Gender Studies und symptomatische Missverständnisse." *Anti-Genderismus. Sexualität und Geschlecht als Schauplätze aktueller politischer*

Auseinandersetzungen. Ed. Sabine Hark, and Paula-Irene Villa. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2015. 15- 39.

Harré, Rom. "Persuasion and Manipulation." *Discourse and Communication. New Approaches to the Analysis of Mass Media Discourse and Communication.* Ed. Teun A. van Dijk. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1985. 126-142.

Hartley, John, and Martin Montgomery. "Representations and Relations: Ideology and Power in Press and TV News." *Discourse and Communication. New Approaches to the Analysis of Mass Media Discourse and Communication.* Ed. Teun A. van Dijk. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1985. 230-269.

Hawley, George. *Making Sense of the Alt-Right*. New York: Columbia Press, 2017.

Hellín-García, María José. "Politically Tabooed Measures: Sanitizing the Economic Crisis through Metaphor and Euphemism." *Taboo in Discourse. Studies on Attenuation and Offence in Communication.* Ed. Eliecer Crespo-Fernández. Linguistic Insights 240. Bern: Peter Lang, 2018. 53-76.

Herrmann, Steffen K.. "Politischer Antagonismus und sprachliche Gewalt." In: Hark, Sabine; Villa, Paula-Irene (ed.): *Anti-Genderismus. Sexualität und Geschlecht als Schauplätze aktueller politischer Auseinandersetzungen.* Ed. Sabine Hark, and Paula-Irene Villa. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2015. 79- 92.

Herrnstein, Richard J., and Charles Murray. *The Bell Curve. Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life. With a New Afterword by Charles Murray*. New York: Free Press Paperbacks, 1996.

Hickerson, Andrea. "Appletopia: media technology and the religious imagination of Steve Jobs." *Consumption Markets & Culture* 17.4 (2014): 413-415.

Howard, Jeffrey W.. "Free Speech and Hate Speech." *Annual Review of Political Science*. 22 (2019): 93-109.

Hughes, Geoffrey. *Political Correctness. A History of Semantics and Culture.* Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

Hynes, Maria; Sharpe, Scott and Greig Alastair. "Appearing true in the social sciences. Reflections on an academic hoax." *Journal of Sociology* 48. 3 (2011): 287-303.

Ingram, Mathew. "Most Americans say they have lost trust in the media." *Columbia Journalism Review*. 12 Sept. 2018. 28 Jan. 2020. <https://www.cjr.org/the_media_today/trust-in-media-down.php>

Jacobs, Ronald N.. "Journalism after Trump." *American Journal of Cultural Sociology* 5.3 (2017): 409-425.

Joseph, John Earl. *Language and Politics*. Edinburgh Textbooks in Applied Linguistics. Edinburgh: UP, 2006.

Judge, Timothy A., Beth A. Livingston, and Charlice Hurst. "Do Nice Guys – and Gals – Really Finish Last? The Joint Effects of Sex and Agreeableness on Income." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 102.2 (2012): 390-407.

Korn, Francis. *Elementary Structures Reconsidered. Levi-Strauss on Kinship*. London: Routledge, 1973.

Kortmulder, K.. "An Ethological Theory of the Incest Taboo and Exogamy: With Special Reference to the Views of Claude Lévi-Strauss." *Current Anthropology* 9.5 (Dec. 1968): 437-449.

Kováts, Eszter. "Questioning Consensuses: Right- Wing Populism, Anti-Populism, and the Threat of 'Gender Ideology'." *Sociological Research Online* 23.2 (2018): 528-538.

Kraft, Hartmut. „Nigger und Judensau: Tabus Heute." *Tabu: Interkulturalität und Gender.* Ed. Claudia Benthien and Ortrud Gutjahr. München: Wilhelm Fink, 2008. 261-273.

Krüger, Gundolf. "Tabu: Die Macht der Götter in Polynesien." *Tabu?! Verborgene Kräfte- Geheimes Wissen.* Ed. Gundolf Krüger, Ulrich Menter, and Jutta Steffen-Schrade. Petersberg: Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum, sowie Michael Imhof Verlag, 2012. 12- 25.

Kuhar, Roman, and David Paternotte. ""Gender ideology" in movement: Introduction". *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe. Mobilizing against Equality.* Ed. Roman Kuhar, and David Paternotte. London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017. 1-22.

Kwon, Sangil and Nathan C. Weed. "Neuroticism." *Encyclopedia of Social Psychology.* Los Angeles: Sage, 2007. 618-620.

Lambek, Michael. "Taboo." *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences.* 2nd ed. Vol. 23. Orlando: Elsevier, 2001. 15429-15431.

Lambek, Michael. "Taboo as cultural practice among Malagasy Speakers." *Man, New Series* 27.2 (Jun.1992): 245-266.

Lemke, Thomas. *Foucault, Governmentality, and Critique.* Cultural Politics & the Promise of Democracy. Oxon: Routledge, 2016.

Lesnik-Oberstein Karín. "The last taboo: women, body hair and feminism." *The last taboo: women and body hair.* Ed. Karín Lesnik-Oberstein Manchester: Manchester UP, 2006. 1-17.

Lévi-Strauss: Claude. *The Elementary Structures of Kinship.* London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1969.

"locker room." *OED Online.* Oxford University Press, December 2019, 12 Jan. 2020. <www.oed.com/view/Entry/426363.>

López Cirugeda, Isabel. "Please, Like me: Coming out of the Closet in the Millennial Generation." *Taboo in Discourse. Studies on Attenuation and Offence in Communication.* Ed. Eliecer Crespo-Fernández. Linguistic Insights 240. Bern: Peter Lang, 2018. 209-231.

Lorenzi-Cioldi, Fabio, and Clara Kulich. "Sexism." *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioural Sciences.* 2nd ed. Orlando: University of Central Florida, 2015.

Lukianoff, Greg and Haidt Jonathan. *The Coddling of the American Mind. How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting Up a Generation for Failure.* London: Penguin Random House, 2018.

Lukianoff, Greg. *Freedom From Speech.* Encounter Broadsides 39. New York: Encounter Books, 2014.

Ma, Christine, and Michael Schapira. *An Analysis of Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray's The Bell Curve intelligence and Class Structure in American Life*. London: Routledge, 2017.

Mann, Douglas L. "Fake News, Alternative Facts, and Things That Just Are Not True." *JACC Basic to translational Science* 3.4 (2018): 573-574.

Martín Alcoff, Linda. "Who's Afraid of Identity Politics?" *Reclaiming Identity. Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism*. Ed. Paula M. L. Moya, and Michael R. Hames- Garcia. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000. 312- 344.

Mendes, Kaitlynn. "'Feminism Rules! Now, where's my swimsuit?' Re-evaluating feminist discourse in print media 1968-2008." *Media, Culture & Society* 34.5 (2012): 554-570.

Miaschi, John. "The 10 Most Popular Daily Newspapers In The United States." WorldAtlas, Aug. 1 2017. Jan. 22 2020 <worldatlas.com/articles/the-10-most-popular-daily-newspapers-in-the-united-states.html>

Michaels, Walter B.. "Identity Politics. A Zero-Sum Game." *New Labor Forum* 19.2 (2010): 8-11.

Mills, Sara. *Discourse*. The new critical Idiom. London: Routledge, 2004.

Molyneux, Stefan. "Noam Chomsky: The Race War of Drug Prohibition." Online video clip. *Youtube*. Youtube, 24 Dec. 2013. 09 Jan. 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MautscPF5wE>

Mona Charen. Mona Charen, 2018. 09 Jan. 2020. <http://www.monacharen.com/>

Moore, Rebecca. "Perspective. Godwin's Law and Jones' Corollary. The Problem of Using Extremes to Make Predictions*." Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*. 22.2 (2018): 145-154.

Mouffe, Chantal. *On the political*. London: Routledge, 2005.

Murray, Charles. "The Inequality Taboo." *Commentary* (Sept. 2005): 13-22.

Peterson, Jordan B. "Steven Pinker: Progress, Despite Everything." Online video clip. *Youtube*. Youtube, 10. Aug. 2019. 09. Jan. 2020. < https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pBylbB7s5Nw>

Pérez Rastrilla, Laura. "Representations of Televised Debates in the Press and their Influence on Political Candidates. The Cases of Spain, the UK, and the US." *The Psychology of Political communicators. How Politicians, Culture, and the Media Construct and Shape Public Discourse.* Ed. Ofer Feldman, and Sonja Zmerli. New York: Routledge, 2019. 145-164.

Pinker, Steven. "Why Nature and Nurture Won't Go Away." *Language, Cognition, and Human Nature. Selected Articles.* Ed. Steven Pinker. New York: Oxford UP, 2013. 214-227.

Pizarro Pedraza, Andrea. "Pardon my Spanish: Attenuation of Taboo through Metapragmatic Euphemistic Formulae." *Taboo in Discourse. Studies on Attenuation and Offence in Communication.* Ed. Eliecer Crespo-Fernández. Linguistic Insights 240. Bern: Peter Lang, 2018. 181-208.

Powell, Jason L. Foucault. *Issues and Legacy*. New York: Nova Science, 2013.

Price, Vincent. *Public Opinion*. Communication Concepts 4. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1992.

Przyrembel, Alexandra. *Verbote und Geheimnisse. Das Tabu und die Genese der europäischen Moderne*. Frankfurt: Campus, 2011.

Reese, Stephen D., and Lucig H. Danielian. "Intermedia influence and the Drug Issue: Converging on Cocaine." *Agenda Setting: Readings on Media, Public Opinion, and Policymaking.* Ed. David Protess, and Maxwell McCombs. London: Routledge, 1991. 237-249.

Renkema, Jan. *Introduction to Discourse Studies*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2004.

Sánchez Ruiz, Raquel. "Taboo in Prison: X-phemistic Language in Orange Is the New Black." *Taboo in Discourse. Studies on Attenuation and Offence in Communication.* Ed. Eliecer Crespo-Fernández. Linguistic Insights 240. Bern: Peter Lang, 2018. 233-256.

Schmitt, David P., Anu Reao, Martin Voracek, and Jüri Allik. "Why Can't a Man Be More Like a Woman? Sex Differences in Personality Traits Across 55 Cultures." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 94.1 (2008): 168-182.

Schechner, Richard. "Incest and Culture: A Reflection on Claude Levi-Strauss." *Psychoanalytic review* 58 (Dec. 1971): P. 563-572.

Seibert, Scott E., and Maria L. Kraimer. "The Five-Factor Model of Personality and Career Success." *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 58 (2001): 1-21.

Shanahan, Marie K.. *Journalism, Online Comments, and the Future of Public Discourse*. New York: Routledge, 2018.

Simoes Lucas Freitas, Elsa. *Taboo in Advertising*. Pragmatics & Beyond New Series 179. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2008

Smith, Gérard Fernández, and Miguel Casas Gómez. "From Lexicon to Discourse in the Linguistic Expression of Taboo: Configuring New Social Realities." *Taboo in Discourse. Studies on Attenuation and Offence in Communication.* Ed. Eliecer Crespo-Fernández. Linguistic Insights 240. Bern: Peter Lang, 2018. 25-52.

Sterk, Helen, and Annelies Knoppers. *Gender, Culture, and Physicality: Paradoxes and Taboos*. Plymouth: Lexington, 2009.

Tabery, James. *Beyond Versus. The Struggle to Understand the Interaction of Nature and Nurture*. Cambridge Ma.: MIT Press, 2014.

Tasca, Cecilia, Mariangela Rapetti, Mauro Giovanni Cara, and Bianca Fadda. "Women and Hysteria in the History of Mental Health." *Clinical Practice & Epidemiology in Mental Health* 8 (2012): 110-119.

Taylor, Stephanie. *What is Discourse Analysis?* London: Bloomsbury, 2013.

Tolmach Lakoff, Robin. *The Language War.* Berkley: University of California Press, 2000.

Topper, Keith. *The Disorder of Politial Inquiry*. Harvard: UP, 2005.

Transliminal. "Jordan Peterson Questioned on Alt-Right Fanbase." Online video clip. *Youtube*. Youtube, 03 Jan. 2018. 09 Jan. 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0oJBJc9Ou2A>

Trenton, Thomas Norman. "Generation X and Political Correctness: Ideological and Religious Transformation among Students." *The Canadian Journal of Sociology* 22.4 (Autumn 1997): 417-436.

Turk, Judy VanSlyke. "Public Relations' Influence on the News." *Agenda Setting: Readings on Media, Public Opinion and Policymaking.* Ed. David Protess, and Maxwell E. McCombs. London: Routledge, 1991. 211- 222.

University of Toronto Faculty of Arts & Science. Department of Psychology. Faculty of Arts & Science, University of Toronto, 2020. 09 Jan. 2020. <https://www.psych.utoronto.ca/people/directories/all-faculty/jordan-peterson>

Van Dijk, Teun A. *News as Discourse*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1988.

Vandermassen, Griet. *Who's Afraid of Charles Darwin? Debating Feminism and Evolutionary Theory.* Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005.

"verboten." OED Online, Oxford UP, December 2019. 9 Jan. 2020. <www.oed.com/view/Entry/222402>

Vianello, Michelangelo, Konrad Schnabel, Natarajan Sriram, Brian Nosek. "Gender differences in implicit and explicit personality traits." *Personality and Individual Differences* 55 (2013): 994-999.

Vice Media Group. Vice Media LLC, 2019. 10 Jan. 2020. <https://company.vice.com/about/>

Walsh, Clare. *Gender and Discourse: Language and Power in Politics, the Church and Organisations.* Harlow: Pearson Education, 2001.

Watson, Amy. "Leading newspapers in the U.S. 2017-2019, by circulation." 13 September 2019. 09 November 2011 <https://www.statista.com/statistics/184682/us-daily-newspapers-by-circulation/>

Whitmarsh, Ian. "The No/Name of the Institution." *Anthropological Quarterly* 87.3 (Summer 2014): 855-881.

Whittington, Keith E. *Speak Freely. Why Universities Must Defend Free Speech*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2019.

Widdowson, Henry George. *Discourse Analysis*. Oxford Introductions to Language Study. Oxford: UP, 2007.

Wiggins, Jerry S., and Paul D. Trapnell. "Personality Strutcture: The Return of the Big Five." *Handbook of Personality Psychology.* Ed. Robert Hogan, John Johnson, and Stephen Briggs. San Diego: Academic Press, 1997. 737-765.

Wolfgang, J. David. "Self-Governance on Trial: A Public Sphere Analysis of News Website Forum Comments." *Romanian Journal of Communication and Public Relations* 3 (2014): 7-22.

7.2. Articles

Associated Press. "Google cancels town hall meeting, and fired engineer tells his side of the story." *Los Angeles Times* 11 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020.

<https://www.latimes.com/business/technology/la-fi-tn-google-diversity-20170811-story.html>

Batchelor Warnke, Melissa. "Op-Ed: In the tech industry, sexism is in the water." *Los Angeles Times* 9 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/opinion-la/la-oe-warnke-silicon-valley-google-sexism-20170809-story.html >

Bergen, Mark, and Ellen Huet. "Google fires author of divisive memo on gender differences." *Houston Chronicle* 7 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://www.chron.com/business/article/Google-fires-author-of-divisive-memo-on-gender-11740786.php>

Bergen, Mark, and Ellen Huet. "Google says meeting on diversity is off as staff safety in doubt." *Houston Chronicle* 11 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020 <https://pressreader.com/@nickname12736210/csb_H0mBEWvVzPZpZeMK-ON0o3yykTxl8GomeFOp96kRWWamfepi-yNb9nA19BqfnQIK>

Brooks, David. "Sundar Pichai Should Resign as Google's C.E.O." *New York Times* 11 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/11/opinion/sundar-pichai-google-memo-diversity.html>

Brown, Raymond J. "Was Google Being Evil in Firing Mr. Damore." *Wall Street Journal* 11 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/was-google-being-evil-in-firing-mr-damore-1502486516>

Charen, Mona. "Google engineer tells truth about gender and is burned as a heretic." *Arizona Republic* 13 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://pressreader.com/@nickname12736210/csb_H0mBEWvVzPZpZeMK-ON0oytDT9P2KuPwoR2jfAv01eI--tyatgACT222IQzQwwS9>

Dallas Morning News Editorial. "Google's termination of James Damore just exacerbates the tech giant's diversity problem." *Dallas Morning News* 10 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020.<https://www.dallasnews.com/opinion/editorials/2017/08/10/google-s-termination-of-james-damore-just-exacerbates-the-tech-giant-s-diversity-problem/>

Damore, James. "Why I was Fired By Google" *Wall Street Journal, New York*. 11 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020 <https://www.wsj.com/articles/why-i-was-fired-by-google-1502481290>

DeBoer, Fredrik. "Corporations are cracking down on what employees say, even outside work, writes Fredrik deBoer. That's easier now than ever." *Washington Post* 13 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://pressreader.com/@nickname12736210/csb_H0mBEWvVzPZpZeMK-ON0o45X8Xe3TBFNxKbE1WyP15Nm8K_eVM4sowsQWWgMToFG>

Devlin, Whitney. "Google got it right." *New York Daily News* 10 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://pressreader.com/@nickname12736210/csb_H0mBEWvVzPZpZeMK-ON0o5Fn-jbUg83-S86GTGDQizlZS29QrsMGFOwIs0-HD-MS>

Dwoskin, Elizabeth. "Google employees express fear, uncertainty in aftermath of divisive memo." *Washington Post* 12 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://pressreader.com/@nickname12736210/csb_H0mBEWvVzPZpZeMK-ON0o3MSKbm-JGSVhLINaz5hKu2bc5ts9RVPv5cRipDgiwC5>

Dwoskin, Elizabeth, and Hamza Shaban. "More conservative." *Washington Post* 25 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://pressreader.com/@nickname12736210/csb_H0mBEWvVzPZpZeMK-ON0o-lAexL7YfvQxHz0v-Wf4JM8oH_gEzFNdErz4oEECupw>

Eidelson, Josh, and Jordyn Holman. "Man fired for Google essay may lack case." *Chicago Tribune* 9 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://pressreader.com/@nickname12736210/csb_H0mBEWvVzPZpZeMK-ON0o6txb0HZ1BDZhnnrAaGxJ3OZizEzHnq5RJppaUmegIJ7>

Emba, Christine. "The Google memo isn't the interesting part of the story." *Washington Post* 11 August 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-google-memo-isnt-the-interesting-part-of-the-story/2017/08/11/de3f8876-7ecb-11e7-9d08-b79f191668ed_story.html>

Erickson, Erick. "Why this Google firing alarms conservatives." *Chicago Tribune* 9 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://pressreader.com/@nickname12736210/csb_H0mBEWvVzPZpZeMK-ON0oyYHcekKX0junEvxVOoKm5ZqQIvH8GUzABIFl8rNfkA1>

Friedersdorf, Conor. "The Most Common Error in Media Coverage of the Google Memo." *Atlantic* 8 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/08/the-most-common-error-in-coverage-of-the-google-memo/536181/>

Goldberg, Jonah. "Google seeks conformity, not diversity." *San Francisco Chronicle*. 13 August 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://www.pressreader.com/usa/san-francisco-chronicle/20170813/282802126445256>

Greenell, Alexis. "Be grateful for the power of shame." *New York Daily News* 1. Sept. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://pressreader.com/@nickname12736210/csb_H0mBEWvVzPZpZeMK-ON0o3_vFTWSXODUcZHXmztz3fNfJyYCvUn1mKgOe53id2mp>

Hensley, Nicole. "Google gal-basher canned." *New York Daily News* 8 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://pressreader.com/@nickname12736210/csb_H0mBEWvVzPZpZeMK-ON0o-8iPLdD2CgWqfThH_ezWxFz82LA7USp5YB4u1XR1yJ6>

Hiltzik, Michael. "Column: The Google uproar shows that Silicon Valley isn't a center of innovation, but behind the times." *Los Angeles Times* 11 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://www.latimes.com/business/hiltzik/la-fi-hiltzik-google-diversity-20170811-story.html>

Hromada, Miklós Pál. "Don't be evil." *New York Daily News* 14 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://pressreader.com/@nickname12736210/csb_H0mBEWvVzPZpZeMK-ON0o5LMl_AEXC1zHWCvECS-rJQjXbHKgBv5ZmAcknnGi0p8>

Huet, Ellen. "After firing, engineer says hypocrisy is rife at Google." *Houston Chronicle* 10 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://pressreader.com/@nickname12736210/csb_H0mBEWvVzPZpZeMK-ON0ow1e_E6zuQh54GVYtHAWBxCRvihBqWS53wtBlh1sv8dz>

Huet, Ellen. "Ex-Google engineer says gender memo began on 12-hour flight." *Houston Chronicle* 9 August 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://www.houstonchronicle.com/business/technology/article/Ex-Google-engineer-says-gender-memo-began-on-11746551.php>

Jackson, Janine. "Women Were in Fact Pioneers in Computing Work." *FAIR* 25 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://fair.org/home/women-were-in-fact-pioneers-in-computing-work/>

Jaeger, Max. "'Sexism' bro slaps Google." *New York Post* 9 Aug. 2017. 24 Jan. 2020. <https://pressreader.com/@nickname12736210/csb_H0mBEWvVzPZpZeMK-ON0oxwNlX-lfs5TsslMJMTYZBHsrF0vOnNRfq9-cpj1SUoZ>

Jan, Tracy, and Elizabeth Dwoskin. "Silicon Valley aims to limit online reach of hate groups." *Washington Post* 17 Aug. 2017. 24 Jan. 2020. <https://pressreader.com/@nickname12736210/csb_H0mBEWvVzPZpZeMK-ON0ow631SPiBBzznwViJGveVPjMwZOvCP0o42htyvivyqxA>

Jenkins, Sally. "Kaepernick may not be the only one hurt by NFL blacklisting him." *Washington Post* 24 Aug. 2017. 24 Jan. 2020. <https://pressreader.com/@nickname12736210/csb_H0mBEWvVzPZpZeMK-ON0o3HTxuWfG4PpquMLAEbWAuwNhVXWi5i8bPx9GIalLYa0>

Jones, Charisse, and Elizabeth Weise. "Google Feud: How to have an opinion and still keep your job." *Arizona Republic* 9 Aug. 2017. 24 Jan. 2020. <https://pressreader.com/@nickname12736210/csb_H0mBEWvVzPZpZeMK-ON0o0NxOdGO3wAAgjE7c9I5y0gzsPX7giGQuLEjHl-z57Lh>

Kazakoff, Lois. "Women (and robots) will rule." *San Francisco Chronicle*. 9 Sept. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://pressreader.com/@nickname12736210/csb_H0mBEWvVzPZpZeMK-ON0o6KrwaVJCsyHA4thfAumqN_VofMstVVGX9OJiMKFpDCv>

Kulbis, Ruta. "The value of diversity." *Chicago Tribune* 13 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. https://pressreader.com/@nickname12736210/csb_H0mBEWvVzPZpZeMK-ON0o4fJvDv2fkmdu5sV-GRbR7Q7ZJDT4z82fDhQVzSkijx4

Lang, Marissa. "Google Engineer's Firing Seems to Please No One." *San Francisco Chronicle*. 9 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://pressreader.com/@nickname12736210/csb_H0mBEWvVzPZpZeMK-ON0o_4xIV8DW6dP79E0gvwj33m8rhhVJpJWHNMKaSl6HKAx>

Lang, Marissa. "'Political correctness' may be a taboo term, but could be good for business." *San Francisco Chronicle*. 5 Sept. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://www.sfchronicle.com/business/article/Political-correctness-may-be-a-taboo-term-12172498.php>

Lee, Thomas. "Execs step up amid chaos." *San Francisco Chronicle*. 16 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://pressreader.com/@nickname12736210/csb_H0mBEWvVzPZpZeMK-ON0ow4F8ERqJPk52d_ln30AZyAA_Mean2QW5ylpq_83RaQ8>

Lee, Wendy, and Marissa Lang. "Google Fumbles Planned Diversity Discussion." *San Francisco Chronicle* 12 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://www.pressreader.com/usa/san-francisco-chronicle-late-edition/20170812/textview>

Lee, Wendy, and Trisha Thadani. "Google protests postponed." *San Francisco Chronicle* 17 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. https://pressreader.com/@nickname12736210/csb_H0mBEWvVzPZpZeMK-ON0o7jCsodzheagmfGWCLES6KXydAce1-RuUZNprwox-Teu

Lien, Tracy, and David Pierson. "Google employee's memo triggers another crisis for a tech industry struggling to diversify." *Los Angeles Times* 07 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://www.latimes.com/business/la-fi-tn-google-diversity-20170807-story.html>

McArdle, Megan. "Living in fear of the internet mob." *Chicago Tribune* 24 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan.2020. <https://pressreader.com/@nickname12736210/csb_H0mBEWvVzPZpZeMK ON0o3HQgh_RYOu77hVIDYfjX7s9tDmo7FtU3ZAW8ePf8O57>

McArdle, Megan. "That google memo about women in tech wasn't wrong." *Chicago Tribune* 11 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://pressreader.com/@nickname12736210/csb_H0mBEWvVzPZpZeMK-ON0o9js7ie96_21J5x4AMHa49hmRACS25MgkYMfb0NbpxMA >

McGregor, Jena. "Google fires author of divisive memo on gender differences." *Los Angeles Times* 07 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://www.latimes.com/nation/ct-google-fires-memo-author-20170807-story.html>

McGregor, Jena. "One of Google's highest-ranking women has answered that controversial memo with a very personal essay." *Washington Post* 9 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/on-leadership/wp/2017/08/09/one-of-googles-highest-ranking-women-has-answered-that-controversial-memo-with-a-very-personal-essay/>

McGregor, Jena. "The firing of." *Washington Post* 9 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://pressreader.com/@nickname12736210/csb_H0mBEWvVzPZpZeMK-ON0owlnoIsFII3mT-0rjeznX-ozMMq-AQjnf0DkIEJIlVRT>

Mims, Christopher. "What the Google Controversy Misses: The Business Case for Diversity." *Wall Street Journal* 13 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/what-the-google-controversy-misses-the-business-case-for-diversity-1502625603>

Moore, Lela, and Brianna Milord. "'Thought Bullies' or Right Move: A Divide Over James Damore Firing." *New York Times* 10 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/10/technology/google-james-damore-memo-commentary.html>

Nicas, Jack, and Yoree Koh. "At Google, Memo on Gender and Diversity Sparks Firestorm." *Wall Street Journal* 9 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/memo-sparks-firestorm-at-google-1502246996>

New York Post. "Don't Google 'Dissent'." *New York Post* 9 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://pressreader.com/@nickname12736210/csb_H0mBEWvVzPZpZeMK-ON0o-vBlOF7-6mY_wYn5-Fk9jB8OpKZoJZPS2z4tedhGzrF>

New York Post. "Libertarian: Silicon Valley Problem Is Not Just Google." *New York Post* 16 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://pressreader.com/@nickname12736210/csb_H0mBEWvVzPZpZeMK-ON0o46jegjSG45EPT78w2G16n-Cf_Yj7KXBbqYOAvM15O2->

New York Post. "Memo is last write." *New York Post* 8 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://pressreader.com/@nickname12736210/csb_H0mBEWvVzPZpZeMK-ON0ozZJ4u2cfzttJ_BkdTZ-prqVCy9cLnU2QVunEW1I7Ml9>

Ohlheiser, Abby. "How James Damore went from Google employee to right-wing Internet hero." *Washington Post* 12 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2017/08/12/how-james-damore-went-from-google-employee-to-right-wing-internet-hero/>

To the editor. "Opinion: Google memo message: No dissenting view welcome?" *Los Angeles Times* 13 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/readersreact/la-ol-le-sunday-20170813-story.html>

Ortutay, Barbara. "Debacle speaks to tech culture." *Dallas Morning News* 10 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. < https://pressreader.com/@nickname12736210/csb_H0mBEWvVzPZpZeMK-ON0o-Jy8KWdQeJQH8NX80KwPk-MOeH3RcdFPOTDKEfEOisW >

Ou, Elaine. "Google can't bring itself to tolerate diversity." *Dallas morning News* 11 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://pressreader.com/@nickname12736210/csb_H0mBEWvVzPZpZeMK-ON0o98qiJU2gWpqQqiAjZR_n5sDNFELD0q4hWCqc0yUTX0C>

Page, Clarence. "Why Google was wrong to fire James Damore." *Chicago Tribune* 13 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://pressreader.com/@nickname12736210/csb_H0mBEWvVzPZpZeMK-ON0o5QvrWuQstBlcOv0sytH2kgLtMP26LKrmOhENRcGlt40>

Petrecca, Laura. "Google Manifesto Fuels Sexism Debate." *Arizona Republic* 11 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://pressreader.com/@nickname12736210/csb_H0mBEWvVzPZpZeMK-ON0o2fiAt3zLBN2zxAGhor8aKjiqpUeiWNe4P0eycuxd6ez>

Pichai, Sundar. "Note to employees from CEO Sundar Pichai." *Google Blog* 9 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://www.blog.google/outreach-initiatives/diversity/note-employees-ceo-sundar-pichai/>

Pierson, David, and Tracey Lien. "Diversity training was supposed to reduce bias at Google. In case of fired engineer, it backfired." *Los Angeles Times* 9 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://www.latimes.com/business/technology/la-fi-tn-james-damore-google-20170809-story.html>

Rhodan, Maya. "Read Google's Response to An Employee's Controversial Diversity Memo." *Fortune* 7 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://fortune.com/2017/08/07/google-diversity-memo/>

Roose, Kevin. "The Alt-Right Finds a New Enemy in Silicon Valley." *New York Times* 9 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/09/business/alt-right-silicon-valley-google-memo.html>

Rosenblum, Cassady. "Opinion: If Google doesn't say why diversity is goog, how can the fragile white men there grasp it?" *Los Angeles Times* 8 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/opinion-la/la-ol-google-damore-20170808-story.html>

Sandler, Rachel. "Ads posted outside Google offices slam CEO for firing controversial memo's author." *USA Today* 11 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/tech/2017/08/11/anti-google-ads-appear-outside-google-offices-response-controversial-memo/559603001/>

Samples, John. "Cagey Times." *New York Post* 20 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://pressreader.com/@nickname12736210/csb_H0mBEWvVzPZpZeMK-ON0oyJNozsdby9EuLrN_folnOP9p4a1hp9v8qwouzxr6iIi>

Schmidt, Samantha. "'I'm not a sexist': Fired Google engineer stands behind controversial memo." *Washington Post* 10 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2017/08/10/im-not-a-sexist-fired-google-engineer-stands-behind-controversial-memo/>

Scott, Kim. "An Open Letter to James Damore." *San Francisco Chronicle* 9 Aug. 2017 22 Jan. 2020. <https://www.sfchronicle.com/opinion/openforum/article/An-open-letter-to-James-Damore-11746420.php>

Singer, Peter. "Google was wrong to fire its heretic." *New York Daily News*. 11 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://pressreader.com/@nickname12736210/csb_H0mBEWvVzPZpZeMK-ON0o2zVfENhHAS5sAfYFXwURnyASJpxuLPIUw6NKBPIGqjr>

Smith, Nancy F. "America must fight efforts to accept bigotry." *Houston Chronicle* 16. Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://pressreader.com/@nickname12736210/csb_H0mBEWvVzPZpZeMK-ON0o8K14q0nEiB_DTTccp8JRc46LEAH8kCW54mOqMECCIFX>

Swartz, Jon, and Elizabeth Weise. "Alt-right finds a new hero: ex-Googler James Damore. *USA Today* 14 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/tech/columnist/2017/08/12/alt-right-finds-new-hero-ex-googler-james-damore/556570001/>

Tacopino, Joe. "Google fires employee who wrote manifesto blasting women in tech." *New York Post* 7 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://nypost.com/2017/08/07/google-fires-employee-who-wrote-manifesto-blasting-women-in-tech/>

Tacopino, Joe, and Max Jaeger. "Google engineer fired for memo on women wants his job back." *New York Post* 8 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://nypost.com/2017/08/08/google-engineer-fired-for-memo-on-women-wants-his-job-back/>

Tannen, Deborah. "The gender war we must stop fighting." *New York Daily News* 13 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://pressreader.com/@nickname12736210/csb_H0mBEWvVzPZpZeMK-ON0o4S1nFaOIztxdMCzb3G3TmpSjvn0YHYJLy88GhBtLXmf>

Times Editorial Board. "Editorial: The 'left bias' of Google, where 70% of employees are male, comes under attack." *Los Angeles Times* 8 August 2017. 26 October 2019 <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/editorials/la-ed-google-diversity-bias-20170808-story.html>

Tomlinson, Chris. "Bill of Rights likely won't shield your employment prospects." *Houston Chronicle* 16 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://pressreader.com/@nickname12736210/csb_H0mBEWvVzPZpZeMK-ON0o01j0WUIqIgWdyqnjZ5YJopnIisCOy593pLFjuE1yrFA>

Wakabayashi, Daisuke. "Contentious Memo Strikes Nerve Inside Google and Out". *New York Times* 8 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/08/technology/google-engineer-fired-gender-memo.html>

Wakabayashi, Daisuke. "Google Fires Engineer Who Wrote Memo Questioning Women in Tech." *New York Times* 7 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/07/business/google-women-engineer-fired-memo.html >

Wakabayashi, Daisuke. "Search giant fires writer of memo." *Houston Chronicle* 9 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://pressreader.com/@nickname12736210/csb_H0mBEWvVzPZpZeMK-ON0o1tlN-vLvjobnDYnU9-FvLnCtL1vSymyBI_0-bLmYvau>

Weise, Elizabeth. "Engineer behind Google anti-diversity memo confirms firing: report." *USA Today* 8 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/tech/2017/08/07/engineer-behind-google-anti-diversity-memo-reportedly-fired/547348001/>

Weise, Elizabeth. "Ex-Google engineer files complaint over firing." *USA Today* 8 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://wlna-webservice.gannettdigital.com/articleservice/view/550563001/michigan-state-spartans/20.1.55/tacoschiwas.com?apiKey=57646bc6bca4811fea00000126a000bb6941 4f2a44f75039173cf104>

Weise, Elizabeth. "Women coders respond to ex-Googler Damore: Nope." *USA Today* 16 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/tech/news/2017/08/16/women-coders-respond-ex-googler-damore-nope/566515001/>

Wojcicki, Susan. "Read YouTube CEO Susan Wojcicki's Response to the Controversial Google Anti-Diversity Memo." *Fortune* 9 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://fortune.com/2017/08/09/google-diversity-memo-wojcicki/>

Young, Cathy. "Googler fired for diversity memo had legit points on gender." *USA Today* 9 Aug. 2017. 22 Jan. 2020. <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2017/08/08/googler-fired-diversity-memo-had-point-researchers-agree/548518001/>

8. Appendix

8.1. Abstract

In July 2017, James Damore, an engineer at Google, caused an international media uproar. He published a memo on the company's internal servers in which he argued that the relative lack of women in engineering jobs at Google was due, at least in part, to inherent biological differences between the sexes. In making his point, Damore relied on a variety of sources, some of which were pieces of popular writing which mirrored contemporary debates in the study of personality differences between the sexes. After the memo was leaked to tech-news websites, several voices inside and outside the company called for his dismissal, and he was fired on August 7th, 2017. Subsequently, his memo was widely discussed within the public and, although the text was openly accessible on the internet, journalists offered a wide array of seemingly contradictory views on its contents. The subsequent media discussion ranged from issues of freedom of speech, overt sexism and political correctness to cultural orthodoxies and taboos. This thesis tries to establish that the coverage of Damore's memo is indicative of a broader social taboo regarding biological differences between women and men in parts of the US-American media. This thesis analyzes a total of seventy-nine newspaper articles that were published in major US- American newspapers, around the time of Damore's termination. In this analysis, the thesis establishes that the media conversation about Damore's memo is highly indicative of a taboo around the biological differences between the sexes. To argue these points, this thesis draws on critical discourse analysis and ideas about taboos, as well as several contemporary political debates in order to argue these points.

8.2. Zusammenfassung

Im Juli 2017 sorgte James Damore, ein Softwareentwickler des Unternehmens Google, durch die Veröffentlichung eines Memos, welches er zunächst auf dem internen Server der Firma gepostet hatte, international für Aufsehen und rückte ins Zentrum einer öffentlichen Debatte. In seinem Memo führt er die relative Unterrepräsention von Frauen in Googles Softwareentwicklungsbereich teilweise auf inhärente biologische Unterschiede zwischen den Geschlechtern zurück. Damore untermauert seine Argumente durch die Angabe verschiedener Quellen. Obwohl diese zum Teil populärwissenschaftlich sind, spiegeln sie kontemporäre Debatten innerhalb der wissenschaftlichen Persönlichkeitsforschung wider. Nach dem Bekanntwerden und der Veröffentlichung des Memos wurde Damore aufgrund wachsenden internen und externen Drucks im Folgemonat, am 7. August 2017, entlassen. Sein Memo wurde daraufhin in der breiten Öffentlichkeit ausführlich diskutiert, doch von Journalisten unterschiedlich auf- und zusammengefasst, sodass sogar der Eindruck verschiedener Ausgangstexte entstehen könnte. Die durch das Memo ausgelöste mediale Debatte setzte sich mit Fragen der freien Meinungsäußerung, mit Sexismus, Political-Correctness und gesellschaftlichen Tabus auseinander. Die vorliegende Arbeit untersucht die These, dass Damores Memo exemplarisch für ein Tabu in weiten Teilen der US-amerikanischen Medienlandschaft steht. Insgesamt werden 79 Zeitungsartikel analysiert, die in großen US-amerikanischen Zeitungen um die Zeit von Damores Kündigung veröffentlicht wurden. Methodisch wird dabei auf die kritische Diskursanalyse, auf die Tabuforschung, sowie aktuelle relevante zeitpolitische Diskurse zurückgegriffen. Die Analyse der Zeitungsartikel führt zum Schluss, dass biologische Unterschiede zwischen den Geschlechtern in Amerika immer mehr zum Tabu werden.