

## CHAPTER 6

### Discussion

As delineated in the introduction, systematic inequality in career experiences and outcomes between dominant ethnic and minority ethnic professionals cannot entirely be explained by differences in education or other factors of human capital (Heath, Rothon, & Kilpi, 2008; SCP, 2012). By means of exploring the role of social capital, ethnic identity, and active network development, this thesis discussed underlying processes affecting individual careers of diverse professionals in Dutch organizations. Adopting a power lens, these elaborations show how inequality is constructed and reproduced through individual sensemaking, interactions, and the creation of and compliance with organizational practices by all organizational members.

In the following, I will first give a summary of the findings per chapter. By subsequently presenting and discussing crosscutting themes, I will integrate the findings of the separate chapters and allude to theoretical contributions of this integration. This elaboration will be based on the argument that the prevalence of prototypes, norms, and scripts constructed by the example of the dominant social group within the organization, and the normalization of resulting processes of othering form the underlying core of observed systematic career inequalities between different social groups. Furthermore, I will delineate how structure and agency components and how the relationship between identities and social networks plays a role in constructing systematic career inequalities between different social groups. I will conclude the integration of the findings with a section presenting *food for thought* as a means of reflection on the meaning of these crosscutting themes and discussion of opportunities to approach these themes as an effort to reduce systematic career inequalities between different social groups in organizations. Next, I will present implications for future research and practice, followed by the

limitations of this thesis. Similar as to how I concluded Chapter 2, I will conclude this final chapter with *some final words*, introducing some ideas on how to potentially approach diversity in organizations in the future.

### **6.1. Summary of the Findings per Chapter**

*Chapter 2* consists of three empirical teaching cases intended to “enter the field”, both theoretically as well as practically. Teaching case 1, entitled “Careers in numbers”, quantitatively illustrates how careers develop differently for dominant ethnic and minority ethnic men and women professionals at a large Dutch professional service firm. In addition, teaching case 1 also raises the question whether quantitative data are sufficient in understanding such complex and multi-layered phenomena as diverse professionals’ careers in organizations. Teaching case 2, entitled ““(You are) who you are’ – And what does this mean?”, illustrates how a particular organizational prototype can affect professionals’ careers differently, depending on the professionals’ personal experience of (dis)similarity with the legitimized and (re)produced organizational prototype. In this teaching case, the question about the role of (ethnic) identity arises, which has further been elaborated on in Chapter 4. By the example of the *borrel*, or company drinks, Teaching case 3, entitled “To b(orrel), or not to b(orrel): That is the question”, illustrates how the promotion and implementation of organizational practices are often attuned to the habits and preferences of one particular group (mostly the dominant social group), and how this can play out more favorably for members of this particular group compared to others. Thereby, Teaching case 3 alludes to the question concerning organizational practices as a means of creating (un)equal career opportunities among diverse professionals. This has further been elaborated on in Chapter 5.

The main findings of *Chapter 3*, entitled “Ethnic diversity and social capital in upward career mobility systems: Problematizing the permeability of intra-organizational career boundaries” are best reflected in the four propositions developed throughout the conceptual chapter. We base these propositions on the three mechanisms of return deficit of social capital defined by Lin (2001), which feature the inappropriate use of social capital, the reluctance to share social capital, and biased evaluations. In doing so, we further refer to what we define as underlying principles, namely stereotype fit (Heilman, 2012), status construction (Ridgeway, 1991), homophily (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954), and reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960). We conclude with the final proposition that, as intra-organizational career boundaries are more permeable for dominant ethnics compared to minority ethnics, dominant ethnics do not only achieve more social capital and greater objective career success, but that dominant ethnics also advance exponentially faster in their careers compared to minority ethnics. At the same time, this chapter discusses various opportunities for future research, some of which also inspired me in developing the subsequent empirical chapters of this thesis. For instance, Chapter 5 includes an illustration of network structure of diverse trainees, which we believe refines our understanding of the relationship between identity and social networks (Ibarra & Deshpande, 2007) and its respective meaning for individual careers. Also, this conceptual elaboration serves as a response to the calls for more theorization on ethnic identity and careers (Kenny & Briner, 2007) and for the study of underlying patterns and processes in diversity research (Prasad, D'Abate, & Prasad, 2007).

*Chapter 4*, entitled “Ethnic Identity Positioning at Work: Understanding Professional Career Experiences” shows how processes of othering are represented along the lines of Jenkins’ (2004, 2008) three orders of identity construction, namely the individual, the interaction, and the institutional order. Furthermore, this chapter illustrates how normalization of othering resonates

at three levels, namely in terms of individual sensemaking, interaction, and institutional practices. The chapter concludes with the main proposition that applying the concept of alterity can effectively break through the normalization of othering in organizations.

*Chapter 5*, entitled “Enlaced in a network of inequality? How an organizational practice plays out in diverse trainees’ career opportunities” shows how some appearances and consequences of the organizational practice of active network development are similar, while others are different for dominant ethnic and minority ethnic, men and women trainees over time both in terms of network agency as well as network structure. Also, the chapter illustrates how these similarities and differences may, but do not necessarily have to be tied to similarities and differences in diversity attributes, such as ethnicity and gender. The chapter shows how an organizational practice is influenced by the habits and practices of the dominant social group and how this can play out in systematic inequalities in terms of access to social capital and subsequent career opportunities. As an alternative, this chapter suggests that both letting go of categorical thinking and creating a truly diverse environment at all organizational levels can effectively countervail unequal outcomes of active network development for members of different social groups.

## **6.2. Integration of the Findings and Theoretical Considerations**

In an effort to integrate the findings of this thesis and to further advance the scholarly conversation on ethnic diversity and careers, I will elaborate on five themes that cut across the empirical chapters of this thesis. As presented in the previous sections of this discussion, considered separately, these chapters have their own unique contribution to understanding underlying processes of observed systematic career inequalities between dominant ethnic and minority ethnic professionals. Situated in the broader context of this thesis, however, these

chapters contain and underline the relevance of power established and maintained through prototypes, norms, and related processes of othering and their normalization on the individual, the interactional, and the institutional level as the core of the emerging systematic career inequalities observed between members of different social groups. Also, the interplay between organizational structures and individual agency appears to be of importance in the construction and maintenance of power and subsequent systematic career inequalities between different social groups across all chapters of this thesis. In addition, the mutual relationship between identity, social relationships or networks and resulting social capital in the particular context of careers in organizations is alluded to in all previous chapters as another factor for the creation and maintenance of power and matching systematic inequalities in career experiences and outcomes between different social groups in organizations.

Subsequently, I will discuss the overarching role of *power*, followed by a discussion of *prototypes, norms, and scripts, of the normalization of othering, of structure and agency, and of networks, careers, and intersecting identities* as a means to better understand the (re)production of systematic career inequalities between different ethnics groups. For each theme, I will first present how these themes arise in each of the chapters, followed by an elaboration of how these findings may further previous research and thinking. While at first glance some of the five themes seem to be closer related to my research than others, they all touch upon ongoing scholarly conversations relevant to my studies. In this sense, the discussion of these themes builds a bridge between what is presented in this thesis and future conceptualizations and empirical work. I will conclude this section with *food for thought*, in which I will reflect on what I think these interrelated themes mean to each organizational member, and how the discussed

themes may be approached in order to reduce the construction of systematic career inequalities between different social groups.

**6.2.1. Of power.** The previous chapters show how systematic inequality in career outcomes and experiences is constructed through the association of power with particular identity characteristics. Chapter 3 shows how both a particular career system and dominant ethnic and minority ethnic actors within this system (re)produce power inequality between different ethnic groups. By complying with the system and (un)consciously (re)acting to unquestioned mechanisms and underlying processes, both dominant ethnics and minority ethnics contribute to unequal permeability of intra-organizational career boundaries for members of different ethnic groups. Thereby, hierarchical power relations between dominant ethnics and minority ethnics are (re)constructed and reflected in systematic career inequalities between different ethnic groups. Chapter 4 shows how individual identity salience leads to power differences on the individual, the interaction, and the institutional level, which is reflected in (the normalization of) processes of othering discovered at all three levels. As a consequence, it is considered “normal” by both dominant ethnics and minority ethnics that those who deviate from the dominant ethnic norm receive fewer privileges than those complying with this norm. Through these processes of normalization, unequal distribution of privileges and thus power along the lines of ethnicity are generally accepted and maintained, ultimately leading to systematic career inequalities between dominant ethnics and minority ethnics. Focusing on one particular organizational practice, Chapter 5 illustrates how the dominant ethnic norm of how to engage in active network development is reflected in its promotion, construction, and outcomes within a diverse ethnic environment. As a consequence, those who fit this norm are usually more privileged in terms of access to and returns on social capital, and thereby receive more access to

power compared to those who do not (entirely) fit this norm. Again, the distribution of privileges and power in social networks along the lines of ethnicity are reflected in systematic career inequalities between dominant ethnics and minority ethnics. As such, the previous chapters illustrate how the interplay of power and identity is closely intertwined with the emergence and maintenance of systematic career inequalities in organizations.

In the introduction of this thesis, I discussed both the mainstream view of power (e.g. Dahl, 1957; Foldy, 2002; Hardy & Clegg, 1996) and the discursive view of power and the discursive view of power (e.g. Foldy, 2002; Foucault, 1977; Hardy & Clegg, 1996), as a means to consider both tangible as well as tacit aspects of power. Throughout each of the previous chapters, aspects of both perspectives of power appear and illustrate how systematic career inequalities between different social groups are constructed and maintained. As such, obvious manifestations of particular hierarchical structures, such as the construction and promotion of prototypical characteristics or behaviors associated with certain professional roles or positions, or the establishment and adherence to particular career or evaluation systems prescribing the prototypical way to career success and advancement are examples of the mainstream view of power. Examples of the discursive view of power are tacit aspects of power, such as generally accepted and therefore unchallenged patterns of sensemaking and behavior pervading everyday (inter)actions of actors within a particular environment.

In the following sections of this integration of the findings, I will discuss the additional four themes, which cut across the empirical chapters of this thesis. By these means, I will further delineate how aspects of both the mainstream view of power and the discursive view of power play a role throughout these four themes and thereby support a better understanding of the underlying processes and practices leading to systematic career inequalities between different

ethnic groups. First I will show how the establishment of prototypes, norms, and behavioral scripts clearly defines a structure evoking the idea of meritocracy, while (re)producing hierarchical power structures benefitting the dominant organizational group are pervaded by tacit forms of power. Second, I will show how the normalization of othering reflects the (re)enactment of hierarchical power relations in favor of the dominant ethnic group through individual sensemaking, (inter)actions, and the enactment of organizational practices by both dominant ethnic and minority ethnic professionals. Third, I will discuss how both structural and agency components are involved in (re)constructing hierarchical power relations between dominant ethnic and minority ethnic professionals. Fourth, I will illustrate how the promotion of and the involvement in social networks (re)create hierarchical power relations between dominant ethnic and minority ethnic professionals.

**6.2.2. Of prototypes, norms, and scripts.** To begin with, Chapter 2 – Teaching case 2 illustrates the central position a prototype, defined as “an abstract set of representative features that define members of a category” (Gioia & Poole, 1984, p. 450), may hold in organizations. As Chapter 2 – Teaching case 2 shows, the standard or the norm this prototype resemble often mirrors characteristics and features of the dominant social group within the organization (Siebers, 2010). Even though not explicitly discussing prototypes, the theoretical elaboration in Chapter 3 assumes the existence of an ideal or prototypical professional reflecting dominant ethnic characteristics. Chapter 3 elaborates on how possessing such prototypical characteristics is necessary in order to maximally benefit from the reciprocal relationship between social capital and objective career success. Our theoretical elaboration delineates how gatekeepers’ decisions of whom to grant access to social capital or objective career outcomes are often affected by underlying principles of social interaction (e.g. stereotype fit, status construction, homophily, and

reciprocity) leading to decisions in favor of those candidates representing the generally accepted prototype of a successful employee. As such, the legitimized norm within the upward career spiral reflects a dominant ethnic prototype. In Chapter 4, we explicitly delineate how the organizational prototype or norm is enacted and experienced by both dominant ethnics and minority ethnics at the individual, the interaction, and the institutional level. As such, individual experiences of identity salience, interactions within and across ethnic groups, and the enactment of organizational practices all take place in reference to the legitimized dominant ethnic prototype or norm within the organization. In Chapter 5, we particularly see how the dominant social norm in the organization pervades the organizational practice of active network development. First, particular frames of reference resembling the dominant social group's preferences and behavior are observed to affect the building, maintaining, and using of social network contacts. Second, the enactment of these kinds of behavior by members of the dominant social group is rewarded within the organization. Third, the organizational practice as such is promoted and constructed according to the dominant social group's habits and preferences. This is illustrated in more detail in Chapter 2 – Teaching case 3, in which the prototypical aspects reflecting the dominant social group of having a *borrel* are delineated and illustrated with experiences of both dominant ethnics and minority ethnics.

The previous chapters do not only show the existence of a prototypical employee reflecting dominant ethnic and male features, but they also show the existence of prototypical or standardized behavior reflecting dominant ethnic and male preferences expected and rewarded within organizations. Such prototypical or “appropriate” behavior within a given situation is known as a “script”, which is defined as “a schema held in memory that describes events or behaviors (or sequences of events or behaviors) appropriate for a particular context” (Gioia &

Poole, 1984, p. 450). Scripts are suggested to help individuals to understand and make sense of situations and to guide the way to appropriate behavior in these situations (Gioia & Poole, 1984). Barley suggests that “careers can be thought of as extended scripts that mediate between institutions and interactions (...) [and that these career scripts] offer actors interpretative schemes, resources, and norms for fashioning a course through some social world” (1989, p. 53). As such, career scripts can be viewed as a template of the prototypical career within a particular organization.

While career scripts may offer a valuable guideline for making a career in a particular context, the danger of career scripts is that they prescribe and thereby predefine the particular and dominant way of making a career, without allowing room for alternatives. As such, with particular scripts in place, “scripted interactions not accounting for individual employee differences are likely to take place and therefore be ineffective” (Gioia & Poole, 1984, p. 455). The previous chapters of this thesis show how holding up and enacting a particular norm, either of the image of a prototypical employee, of prototypical behavior, or of particular career scripts constantly reflecting features of the dominant social group, (re)construct and maintain hierarchical power relations between dominant ethnic and minority ethnic groups. In my view, the establishment, promotion, and enactment of a particular prototype, norms, and scripts within organizations reflect tangible aspects of power, as they clearly define and reward the prototypical criteria of career success and advancement. However, I consider the process of constructing such a prototype, norms and scripts as reflecting tacit aspects of power. As the previous chapters illustrate, the constructions of a prototype, norms, and scripts often model the dominant ethnic example without being aware of it. By creating a prototype, norms, and scripts according to the dominant ethnic model, the hierarchical power relation between dominant ethnics and minority

ethnics is transferred to the career context, as dominant ethnics are systematically more likely to fulfill these prototypical criteria defined to be relevant for career success and advancement than minority ethnics. As such, through prototypes, norms, and scripts, hierarchical power relations between dominant ethnics and minority ethnics are (re)created and maintained, leading to systematic career inequalities between those ethnic groups.

**6.2.3. Of the normalization of othering.** In Chapter 4, the experience, the emergence, and the consequences of the normalization of othering are developed in detail, based on the qualitative data collected at a Dutch professional service firm. When reconsidering the findings of Chapter 3 and Chapter 5, and also the teaching cases presented in Chapter 2, I come to the conclusion that the systematic career inequalities observed between different social groups, in essence also come about through processes of othering and the normalization thereof.

Considering the three mechanisms of return deficit of social capital (Lin, 2001) referred to in Chapter 3, I argue that in a diverse environment four underlying principles of social interaction (stereotype fit, status construction, homophily, and reciprocity) all (re)produce processes of othering. First, all of these processes lead to a decision being made as to whom to include and whom to exclude from granting access to social capital or objective career success. Second, as our theoretical elaboration shows, by comparing diverse candidates to the dominant ethnic prototype, it can be assumed that this decision may systematically be made along the lines of diversity attributes, such as ethnic group membership, based on perceived (dis)similarity with the particular prototype or prototypical behavioral scripts. Third, by making this decision according to these premises, dominant ethnics will be systematically privileged in terms of returns of social capital while minority ethnics will be systematically underprivileged, merely due to ethnic group membership. In other words, othering is both a cause and a consequence of

privilege in returns on social capital. Due to processes of normalization, these processes of othering are generally accepted within the organization. As a consequence, particular dominant ethnic stereotypes are maintained and systematic unequal access to social capital and matching inequalities in career advancement (re)occur between dominant ethnics and minority ethnics in organizations.

Chapter 5 partly takes Chapter 3's theoretical thinking to practice in looking at how the organizational practice of active network development plays out for members of different social groups. In Chapter 5, processes of othering are reflected in how trainees build, maintain, and use social contacts. This is illustrated by the individual network structures, which often show signs of homophily in terms of diversity attributes. Chapter 5 also shows the normalization of these processes of othering, as systematic differences in preferences of networking or differences in network structures are not explicitly mentioned, let alone challenged, as a reason for inequality between different social groups. However, the data shows several examples of how being part of the dominant social group (i.e. dominant ethnic and man) leads to privileges in both building, maintaining, and using network contacts and subsequent network structure. Following the theoretical elaboration of Chapter 3, these inequalities in networking, network structure and subsequent access to social capital due to the normalization of othering are likely to translate into matching career outcomes and experiences.

In Chapter 2, Teaching case 2 and Teaching case 3 illustrate how processes of othering and their normalization translate into real-life situations in organizations. Chapter 2 - Teaching case 2 shows how the general acceptance of the dominant ethnic man prototype leads to a general and normalized understanding of minority ethnics and women as being different by dominant ethnics and men, and by minority ethnics and women themselves, to some extent.

Teaching case 3 illustrates how the normalization of processes of othering affect the perception of the participation of dominant ethnic and minority ethnic professionals in a particular organizational event reflecting mainly dominant ethnic habits and preferences.

Referring to the definitions of diversity, identity, and ethnicity I use throughout this thesis the concept of “the other” plays a crucial role in order to define the self (Eriksen, 2002; Ghorashi, 2003; Guillaume, Brodbeck, & Riketta, 2011; Jenkins, 2004, 2008; Kenny & Briner, 2007). In these definitions, “the other” is considered not more or not less than a pure necessity for the self to either identify the self with or contrast the self from. In essence, “the other” is needed in order to constitute (dis)similarity with the self to describe the self. However, the previous chapters show that within diverse organizational contexts, processes of othering often lead to perceptions of “the other” in terms of hierarchical power relations (Ghorashi & Ponzoni, 2014; Jensen, 2011). My findings implicitly and explicitly illustrate that due to processes of othering on the individual, the interaction, and the institutional level, the dominant ethnic group claims or is ascribed a more powerful position compared to the minority ethnic group. Adopting a power lens helps to understand why dominant ethnics are usually constructed as the norm, while minority ethnics differing from this dominant ethnic norm are positioned as “absolute others” (Ghorashi, 2010) and are ascribed an underprivileged position (Traustadóttir, 2001).

As delineated in detail in Chapter 4, normalization means that any arbitrary phenomenon is believed to be a fact by a relevant audience (Inkson, Gunz, Ganesh, & Roper, 2012). As we have continuously observed throughout the previous chapters, normalization leads to little criticism or challenge of the normalized phenomenon (Maguire & Hardy, 2013). As such, the normalization of othering along the lines of ethnicity leads to a situation in which unequal power relations between dominant ethnic and minority ethnic professionals often stay unchallenged and

are accepted as a fact of organizational life, maintaining and legitimizing systematic career inequalities between different ethnic groups within organizations.

**6.2.4. Of structure and agency.** Throughout the chapters of this thesis, the importance of a dynamic and mutual relationship between structure and agency in constructing systematic career inequalities between dominant ethnics and minority ethnics became apparent, both implicitly and explicitly. In Chapter 3, both structural aspects, such as the clearly defined upward mobility career systems, and the individual decisions and actions featuring the three mechanisms of return deficit of social capital (Lin, 2001) go hand in hand when constructing systematic career inequalities between dominant ethnics and minority ethnics. Chapter 4 empirically illustrates how particular organizational structures for instance reflected in normalized organizational practices, and individual agency reflected in enactment of these organizational practices, interactions with others, or individual sensemaking within the organizational context are intertwined and (re)enforce each other. Chapter 5 refers to structure and agency in two ways. First, Chapter 5 focuses on how the organizational practice of active network development as a structural aspect of career advancement is enacted by both dominant ethnic and minority ethnic men and women of the organization. Second, Chapter 5 discusses the importance of simultaneously considering structure and agency components when studying social networks in organizations. While each of these two foci has its own literature tradition, they both share the general premise of considering the combination of both structural and behavioral aspects when studying a particular phenomenon.

Studying social networks by means of combining both structure and agency components has been asked for previously (Ibarra, Kilduff, & Tsai, 2005; Kilduff & Brass, 2010; Shaw, 2006; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2014). By means of adhering to this call, Chapter 5

empirically illustrates the benefits of combining both perspectives. Combining aspects of structure and agency, as we did in combining quantitative data on network development and qualitative data on networking, serves a better understanding of the underlying processes and subsequent outcomes of the role of ethnic or gender group membership and its relation with social network development and subsequent career opportunities.

This thesis shows furthermore, that also when studying careers in organizations, both structure and agency components mutually affect and (re)enforce each other. For instance, the normalization of othering, as described previously, is constructed through an interplay of structural determinants, such as the establishment and continuous promotion of a particular dominant prototype and norm, and individual actions, such as the enactment of this norm and the general acceptance of the dominant prototype. Previously, Janssens and Zanoni (2005) described another form of the interplay between structure and agency in diverse organizations, when suggesting that “specific constellations of work/understanding of diversity/diversity management enable and/or constrain employees’ agency, including the possibility to challenge existing power relations” (p. 311). This point of view suggests a (vicious) circle, in which structure (e.g. the organization’s understanding of diversity and its management) affects individual agency and simultaneously predefining the range in which individual agency can affect, challenge, or change the organizational structure in the form of existing power relations. Barley’s model of career scripts (1989) offers an illustration of how structure and agency are mutually related through career scripts. In this model, career scripts are understood as a mediator between “institution” and “individual action and interaction” (Barley, 1989, p. 54). As such, Barely’s model (1989) suggests that career scripts may be altered through structure, agency, or both.

In this chapter, I already mentioned the danger of career scripts to create systematic inequality in career experiences or outcomes between members of different ethnic groups by strictly prescribing a particular and dominant way of making a career, without providing room for alternatives. As I also already discussed in this chapter, the same is true for holding up particular images of prototypical successful employees or appreciated prototypical behavior on the individual, the interaction, and the institutional order. As delineated previously, the visible establishment of one particular and dominant way to achieve career success and advancement is pervaded by invisible patterns of normalized hierarchical power relations. Structurally defining and promoting one dominant way to career success and advancement asks for individual (inter)actions (re)enforcing such normalized and therefore often unrecognized hierarchical power relations, ultimately leading to systematic career inequalities between dominant ethnics and minority ethnics within the organization. Thus, the previous discussion shows how both structure and agency components play a role in creating systematic career inequalities between different ethnic groups. At the same time, this discussion also suggests that altering, diluting, or erasing prototypes, norms, or career scripts in order to decrease career inequality between dominant ethnics and minority ethnics may be achieved through structural interventions, agency interventions, or both.

**6.2.5. Of networks, careers, and intersecting identities.** While Chapter 5 explicitly explores and illustrates the relationship between ethnic and gender identity, active network development, and the individual experience of career opportunities, Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 also contain aspects highlighting this interplay. Chapter 3 conceptually elaborates that the reciprocal relationship between social capital derived through access to relevant social networks and objective career success is constantly affected by ethnic group membership. Chapter 4 refers to

the role of ethnic identity salience in interactions and social relationships, which can be considered as being a crucial aspect of social networks (Brass and Krackhardt, 1999). All in all, these previous three chapters illustrate how the interplay between identities and social networks leads to persistent systematic career inequalities between dominant ethnics and minority ethnics through the adherence to dominant ethnic prototypes, norms, (career) scripts, and the normalization of othering.

Similar to what became apparent in relation to prototypes, norms, and scripts, the interplay between identity and social networks translates hierarchical power relations between dominant ethnics and minority ethnics into systematic career inequalities between those same groups. On the one hand, the relationship between access to social networks, resulting social capital, and particular career success or advancement is a visible reflection of the distribution of power within the organization. If building, maintaining, and using the “adequate” or prototypical networks, career success and advancement will follow. On the other hand, the previous chapters have illustrated how also the building, maintaining, and using of social networks is invisibly pervaded by hierarchical power relations between dominant ethnics and minority ethnics. As such, through defining “adequate” ways of building, maintaining, and using network contacts along the lines of dominant ethnic preferences of (inter)action, hierarchical power relations between dominant ethnics and minority ethnics are transferred into and maintained through social networks in organizations. Thereby, both tangible and tacit aspects of power in relation to social networks and identities lead to systematic career inequalities between dominant ethnics and minority ethnics.

Ibarra and Deshpande (2007) are among the few to discuss “Networks and identities: Reciprocal influences on career processes and outcomes”. Before explaining this relationship in

detail, Ibarra and Deshpande (2007) consider previous findings that diversity characteristics, such as ethnicity and gender, may affect the relationship between individual access to networks and career outcomes. For the particular situation of career transitions, Ibarra and Deshpande (2007) delineate how relevant network contacts may support individual employees to adapt their professional identity to a new professional role. At the same time, while developing these new professional identities by, for instance, more frequently interacting with some and less frequently interacting with others, individual networks change, due to changes in professional identities (Ibarra & Deshpande, 2007).

Ibarra and Deshpande (2007) establish professional identities as representing particular characteristics essential for a particular professional role. In light of this thesis, such a view of professional identities can also be understood in terms of a prototypical identity for each professional role new incumbents are expected to adopt. As prototypes are often modeled after the dominant ethnic group within the organization, those professional identities linked to a (new) role most likely also reflect dominant ethnic characteristics. While Ibarra and Deshpande (2007) include ethnicity and gender as contingency factors into their model, they do not explicitly describe how diversity attributes such as ethnicity or gender affect the reciprocal relationship between networks and professional identity. Based on the previous discussion and on the observations and findings of my own studies, I argue that while both ethnic and gender identities may be more or less salient in particular situations, they still affect each individual continuously through their degree of salience to the individual, as particularly Chapter 2 – Teaching case 2, and Chapter 4 illustrate. As a consequence, when simultaneously considering multiple identities, such as ethnic identity and professional identity, adapting from one professional identity to the next after career advancement may be easier for a dominant ethnic incumbent compared to a

minority ethnic incumbent. This privileged position of dominant ethnics compared to minority ethnics may ultimately lead to systematic career inequalities between dominant ethnics and minority ethnics.

Considering multiple identities in whichever context brings in the question of the consequences of how identities intersect. In Chapter 2 – Teaching case 2 and in Chapter 5 there are subtle mentions of how gender and ethnicity affect individual networking, career experiences, and identity work. While not alluded to specifically in this thesis, others have raised questions about the potential interplay of multiple identities and their role in systematic career inequalities between members of different social groups (Boogaard & Roggeband, 2010; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Guje & Czarniawska, 2005; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). For instance, it has been suggested that sometimes, being categorized in two minority groups, such as women and minority ethnics, may be more beneficial to career outcomes and opportunities compared to being categorized as belonging to only one minority group, such as women or minority ethnics (Guje & Czarniawska, 2005). The notion of intersectional invisibility (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008) suggests that those diverging more from the prototype of a certain minority category will suffer from less disadvantage compared to those who closely resemble this prototype. Recently, Ramarajan (2014) suggested to consider intrapersonal identity networks as a means to approach multiple identities in the future. Considering multiple identities and the patterns of power and privilege associated with these identities in such a way (Ramarajan, 2014) may enhance the acknowledgement of all identities relevant to an individual, and reduce the danger of recognizing only a small set of predefined ones. As a consequence, our understanding of underlying processes constructing systematic career inequalities between different social

groups through the acknowledgement of both tangible and tacit aspects of power may benefit from such an approach.

The consideration of how multiple identities intersect adds new perspectives to the study of systematic career inequalities between different social groups. In the implications-section, I will mention the additional questions and opportunities adopting such a perspective will provide both for research and practice.

**6.2.6. Food for thought.** The previous chapters have illustrated how the distribution of power and subsequent power positions is closely tied to particular diversity attributes through normalized processes of othering. We have also seen how individual sensemaking, interactions, and institutional practices and processes affect individual ethnic identity salience and thereby further stimulate inequality construction. As a consequence, organizational members are all enlaced in a power structure created along the lines of ethnicity and additional diversity attributes, in which everyone holds a particular power position and acts accordingly. From this power position, organizational members continuously (re)act upon the context, which they simultaneously co-create. This line of thought illustrates that inequality is something constructed by and therefore concerning all organizational members. Extending this line of thought, if striving towards more equality, and particularly in the context of professional careers, organizations need to address and involve everyone.

As delineated in Chapter 4, adopting the concept of alterity could be useful (Janssens & Steyaert, 2001) as a means to break through the cycle of the normalization of othering ultimately leading to systematic career inequalities between different social groups. By practicing alterity, one encounters the other from the position of the other (Janssens & Steyaert, 2001). Thereby, the concept of alterity addresses and involves everyone, as organizational members embodying

“different positions” are needed by definition. Practicing alterity, or “stepping aside” as a means to give space to the perspective of the other (Janssens & Steyaert, 2001) provides the possibility to (temporarily) disengage from established, normalized, and potentially unequal power relations (Ghorashi & Sabelis, 2013).

This brings the listener closer to the perspective of the other, creating possibilities of connection through points of identification with parts of the story. Through this connecting and shifting of positions, sameness is created through space for difference and not in spite of or instead of difference (Ghorashi & Sabelis, 2013, p. 83).

Through allowing for difference in stories or perspectives other than the dominant organizational discourse, the importance of prototypes, norms, and scripts reflecting this dominant organizational discourse may be challenged and potentially decreased. By encountering others in a space which is not defined by prototypes, norms, and scripts modeled after the dominant organizational group, it is possible to perceive the other as being different from the self, without defining this perception in terms of hierarchical power structures. As such, differences in terms of diversity attributes can be perceived without immediately associating them with normalized differences in power. In essence, practicing alterity can be understood as a means to disentangle normalized associations between identity and power. Without pre-ascribed power-structures related to particular identity characteristics, underlying principles such as stereotype fit, status construction, homophily, and reciprocity affecting individual agency or interactions may be less eminent along the lines of particular diversity attributes. Thereby, processes of othering may fade. Similarly, individual encounters and building, maintaining, and using network contacts may be less affected by particular prototypes, norms, and behavioral scripts modeled after the example of the dominant social group. Also, through practicing alterity on an institutional level, the enactment of organizational practices such as active network

development or the *borrel* may be re-examined. Through equally considering different perspectives, alternatives to the dominant organizational way to achieve particular objectives may come to the fore. As presented in Chapter 4, minority ethnics see and claim space not *instead of*, but *next to* the dominant organizational norm. Similarly, alternatives to the dominant organizational way of doing things do not necessarily have to be considered as a threat to the dominant organizational group's habits and preferences. However, disentangling the association between diversity attributes or identity and power, may lead to an equally balanced acceptance and acknowledgement of alternatives *next to* the dominant organizational way of doing things.

### **6.3. Implications**

While the more specific theoretical and practical implications for each scientific chapter have been mentioned before, I will now discuss the most prevalent implications for future research and practice based on this thesis as a whole.

**6.3.1. Implications for future research.** I will subsequently discuss the *operationalization of diversity attributes*, the importance of considering the *individual, the interaction, and the institutional order*, the use and the added value of *mixed methods*, and the meaning of the *specific research context* as implications for future research.

***Operationalization of diversity attributes.*** As I already alluded to in the introduction, the operationalization of ethnic diversity in scientific research is a challenge, as it constantly points into the direction of absolute, a priori categorization along the lines of ethnicity. In case of this thesis, following the rationale of “strategic essentialism” as explained by Ghorashi and Sabelis (2013) allowed me to find a balance between applying categorization along the lines of ethnicity and gender when operationalizing these concepts for my empirical studies, while theoretically pursuing the relational approach to diversity (Guillaume et al., 2011; Riordan, 2000). However,

rethinking and further elaborating on the concept of ethnic diversity in theoretical terms may open up additional ways of operationalization. As stated previously, Kenny and Briner suggest considering ethnic identity as a means to studying ethnicity in organizations (2007).

Furthermore, as we have seen previously, the (self-)perception of ethnicity is conflated, or at least intersects with other attributes of diversity, such as religion or gender, in which it is difficult to consider, let alone analyze one without the other. In addition, power has been suggested to be essential when studying diversity (Foldy, 2002; Linnehan & Konrad, 1999).

This complex conglomerate of peculiarities in relation to studying ethnicity and ethnic diversity asks for a reconsideration of the common conceptualization and operationalization of ethnicity and ethnic diversity along the lines of “countries of origin” as reflected in the CBS-definition, for instance (CBS, 2012). Recently, taking a power perspective, Tatli and Özbilgin (2012) elaborated five steps to identify dominant and less dominant actors within a particular context without an a priori categorization of organizational members along the lines of particular diversity attributes. Instead, Tatli and Özbilgin (2012) suggest to start with exploring the power holders in the particular organizational context by means of identifying those who hold the most symbolic capital. Only in the final step, Tatli and Özbilgin (2012) propose to explore similarities and differences between the power-holding and the less-power-holding group in terms of common diversity attributes and intersectionalities. As such, Tatli and Özbilgin (2012) first focus on the essence of the phenomenon, namely the distribution of power among individuals, and only later explore how emerging groups of similar levels of power may be either similar or dissimilar in terms of particular diversity attributes. By letting go of a priori categorization along the lines of pre-defined diversity categories, this approach allows for operationalizing diversity without restraining it by a priori categorization. Since this approach is less sensitive to predefined

categories and related pre-ascribed power positions, it also resonates well with the relational approach to diversity (Guillaume et al., 2011; Riordan, 2000), which considers *relative* differences between members of a particular unit. In addition, this approach allows for intersectionalities (Crenshaw, 1989) between different diversity attributes to emerge, if they appear relevant in a particular context. As such, Tatli and Özbilgin's (2012) approach to studying diversity in organizations from a power perspective seems to offer an alternative approach to the current study of diversity, providing room for including sensitivity to ethnic identity (Kenny & Briner, 2007) and the balancing act of strategic essentialism (Ghorashi & Sabelis, 2013). Recognizing these alternatives to using a priori essentializing categories in diversity research as an example, I plea for even more theoretical thinking about how to more adequately operationalize social group membership in diversity research.

***Individual, interaction, and institutional order.*** As identity forms the basis for understanding diversity (Nkomo & Cox, 1996), the study of ethnic diversity is closely related to the study of ethnic identity (Kenny & Briner, 2007; Nkomo & Cox, 1996). Based on my own mostly exploratory and inductive research, I agree with Jenkins (2004, 2008) that it is insufficient to consider the individual, the interaction, or the institutional order of identity construction separately. While much social psychological research often focuses on either one of these orders, the interplay between them has caught little attention (Costa-Lopes, Dovidio, Pereira, & Jost, 2013). However, the importance of being aware of how the individual, the interaction, and the organizational order are intertwined when creating inequality between members of different social groups is for instance illustrated by DiTomaso et al.'s (2007) elaboration on how diversity only becomes meaningful through the embeddedness in a particular institutional structure. Therefore, to better understand (ethnic) diversity in organizations, it is

necessary to include all three orders of identity construction elaborated by Jenkins (2004, 2008). In addition, I suggest opening up even more beyond the boundaries of organizations, as previous research has shown that societal contexts play an important role in identity construction at work (Siebers, 2009, 2010). Only by simultaneously being sensitive to these different aspects affecting (ethnic) identity construction, consequences such as career inequalities between (ethnic) diverse professionals can be fully understood and adequately approached.

***Mixed methods.*** By using both qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection, I pursued to be as comprehensive as possible in terms of retrieving relevant information for the phenomena under study. For instance, even though the focus of Chapter 4 is clearly based on the qualitative data collected at the professional service firm, my understanding of the relevance of analyzing the data in such a way was also fueled by the insights derived from the quantitative data collected at the same organization. Also, by combining qualitative data on network agency and quantitative data on network structure in Chapter 5, we recognize the crucial role of the actors' agency reflected in subsequent network structure. Thereby, we give an example of the added value of incorporating qualitative data in social network research, which traditionally used to be more driven by quantitative data (Kilduff & Brass, 2010; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2014). As I alluded to in Chapter 2 – Teaching case 1, *numbers* provide the opportunity to illustrate a certain status quo in a clear, convincing manner. However, to really understand the “why” and the “how”, we need the *story* behind these numbers. With its mixed methods design, this thesis exemplifies the benefits of combining various kinds of quantitative and qualitative sets of data. As such, I encourage the use of mixed methods approaches in social sciences and management studies, as this thesis clearly points out the added value of it – not only by declaring this topic a point of discussion, but also by showing it in the findings of the separate studies.

*Specific research context.* As this thesis is explicitly situated in the context of the Netherlands, it adds to a better understanding of the peculiarities of ethnic diversity in careers in this specific context. Many contemporary theories on social inequality in general and in careers, in particular, are based in the North American context. As the understanding of diversity and the social construction of inequality in relation to it are extremely context dependent (Prasad, Pringle, & Konrad, 2006), it is important to study these phenomena in relation to the immediate context they are situated in. As such, this thesis a) underlines the importance of contextualization of diversity research within the specific environment and b) contributes to a better understanding of ethnic diversity and professional careers in the Netherlands. Nevertheless, the findings of this thesis are also relevant outside of this particular context, as they suggest alternative ways of studying and approaching diversity in organizations. As such, exchange of knowledge and insights, even though derived in particular contexts, can further develop our thinking about and development of approaches to diversity in organizations.

In addition, the data was collected in both private and public organizational environments. The findings of the different chapters illustrate the situation of the phenomenon under study in their specific contexts. Notwithstanding differences in the overall context, similarity in clearly structured career systems at the time of the data collection supports general conclusions across the findings presented in the different chapters of this thesis. As such, I consider the presented propositions and suggestions for future research relevant for both the private and the public sector.

**6.3.2. Implications for practice.** As delineated previously, systematic inequality in careers between members of different ethnic groups is constructed through the combination of power and ethnic identity, and maintained through processes of othering, normalization, and

legitimation. As I adopted a power lens in order to better understand systematic career inequalities between ethnic diverse professionals, I will also choose power as my point of departure when discussing practical implications to challenge and approach this phenomenon in practice. I am convinced that consequently disentangling power and particular aspects or markers of identity is the key to decrease systematic career inequality between different social groups.

Next to power, the interplay of the individual, interaction, and institutional order when studying ethnic diversity in organizations was a central theme throughout this thesis. In terms of practical implications, this understanding of ethnic diversity in organizations suggests a “holistic approach” to ethnic diversity. As a consequence, so called “diversity policies” or “diversity interventions” should not focus on one particular order only. Instead, I encourage policy makers and change agents to think about what kind of interventions may be adopted in order to address the individual, the interaction, and the institutional order in their attempts to approach diversity within their organization. The practical implications I will discuss in the following will take *the creation of awareness of systematic inequalities between different social groups in organizations, the creation of space for interaction between different social groups, the creation of space for the re-examination of institutional norms and organizational practices*, and the importance to *include everyone* into account.

**Create awareness.** As discussed in the previous chapters, thoughts, behavior, and decision-making create and maintain systematic career inequalities between different social groups. As I have learned throughout my research, often employees may acknowledge the existence of systematic career inequalities between different social groups in other organizations as a distant piece of information. However, they will not believe that similar inequalities exist in their own organizations, until they see it proven. As such, I see the need for creating awareness

for the existence of systematic career inequalities between different social groups among both employees and management. In order to create a sense of urgency for the particular organizational context, presenting data from the own organization may show to be most effective.

Next to presenting the existence of systematic career inequalities, I also suggest to direct employees' and management's attention to the underlying processes affecting thoughts, behavior, and decisions leading to systematic career inequalities. By discussing concrete examples of such systematic career consequences related to various diversity attributes creates a common basis of knowledge and also provides the adequate language for employees and management to further broaching the issue of systematic career inequalities within (their own) organization. Thereby, employees and management are equipped and empowered to discuss experiences and potential approaches related to diversity and potential inequality emerging within the organization. This can be done through carefully developed training programs, either externally or internally. Furthermore, presentations of findings from academic research (Guillaume, Dawson, Woods, Sacramento, & West, 2013), or using teaching cases as the ones presented in Chapter 2 can be an alternative to traditional training sessions. However, whenever using training to approach questions related to systematic inequalities in terms of particular diversity attributes, it is essential to use highly qualified trainers, as to minimize the risk of reification of categorical thinking and stereotypes (Liff, 1997).

Another consequence of such training sessions may be that employees feel more empowered to challenge existing systematic career inequalities or acts of (subtle) (dis)advantage for members of particular social groups, because they know that these inequalities do exist within the organization. Empowering employees to challenge such inequalities goes hand in

hand with the organization's willingness to provide an "infrastructure" to do so. As such, the organization needs to provide a forum where employees can voice such observations, be it virtually or physically. In addition, the organization needs to communicate that voicing such observations are valued instead of penalized within the organization, as prior research has shown that those valuing diversity may be penalized in terms of performance ratings, for instance (Hekman, Yang, & Foo, 2014).

***Encourage interaction.*** As suggested in Chapter 4, the concept of alterity offers a theoretical possibility to stepping aside and letting go of one's own power position with the aim of creating space for the other's perspective. Translating this abstract thought into practice, the concept of alterity asks for interaction and sharing personal experiences and information with others in a safe environment. Exchange of personal experiences, if the environment permits, can be beneficial in several ways. First of all, exchanging personal experiences related to systematic career inequalities can be a means of raising awareness for and mutual understanding of particular situations not all employees or management may be aware of. Second, sharing personal experiences can also create a sense of common ground. Some employees may learn that they are not the only ones confronted with situations of systematic inequality. Others may learn that different social groups are facing similar challenges within the organization. Enhancing the interaction between employees of different social groups and encouraging the exchange of experiences will empower both employees and management to challenge and to approach existing systematic career inequalities.

Admittedly, creating a safe environment within a traditional organization and among long-term colleagues with clearly defined power relations can be difficult. Therefore, an

intervention is needed, which can break through the dragged-in power structures. I will return to this challenge in the final section of this discussion.

*Re-examine “how we do things here”.* On the institutional level, we saw in Chapter 2 – Teaching case 1 that interests related to power and biases pervade evaluation procedures and career advancement decisions, thereby creating opportunities for the construction of systematic career inequalities. Also, Chapter 5 illustrated how particular organizational practices, such as active network development, often stimulate systematic career inequalities between different social groups. A careful re-examination of existing procedures and organizational practices in light of hidden biases can help to redesign procedures offering more equal opportunities to all employees. As we have seen especially in Chapter 2 – Teaching case 1, and Chapter 3, while general organizational trajectories for individual career advancement appear to be quite transparent at first sight, the decision-making factors certainly at higher organizational levels, often stay blurry and less clearly defined. Therefore, after re-examining the career advancement procedure, for instance, organizations should develop a clearly defined trajectory with clear objectives and performance criteria. Similarly, also individual evaluations should be clearly structured and documented according to a format, which potentially even asks for describing both positive and negative critical incidents to back up a particular evaluation.

In addition, the organization should take the responsibility to ensure that those taking selection-, career advancement-, or evaluation-decisions are aware of the challenges and pitfalls of taking such decisions in a diverse environment. Again (awareness) training and regular peer consulting could stimulate and maintain high standards. As one interviewee in Chapter 4 put it: “It is in the little, little things”, also in language use, for instance, both in practice and in research (Vinkenburg, 2014). In addition, organizations could choose to involve an external advisor in

those decision-making processes. Instead of taking over the decision-making process, this advisor could monitor the process and ask critical questions about particular decisions about to be made. Being an “outsider” to the organization, the advisor would ideally be able to keep a professional distance to the organization, which allows for critical reflections on processes often taken for granted by “insiders” to the organization. This way, common favoritism, which I have often heard about in my research especially in up-or-out career systems, can be decreased. Since a third party ideally is less intertwined in the organization’s power structure, such advisors can more easily pose challenging questions to anyone in the decision-making team, compared to a “devil’s advocate” chosen among the members of the team itself.

***Include all organizational members.*** Another important practical implication is that all of the discussed activities and interventions should be directed towards the entire organization, including both dominant ethnics and minority ethnics, as this thesis has clearly shown that ethnicity and (in)equality is something constructed and maintained by all organizational members. In the realm of my research, I often heard or saw myself how diversity managers were forced, mostly by financial restrictions or little commitment from higher management, to direct diversity initiatives only towards minority ethnics or women. While this is often argued “to be better than doing nothing at all”, the danger of reification of categories and processes of othering and their normalization is often not taken into account. Therefore, making a change towards more equality will not work, if it is, again, divided into groups and decided by management that only the minority group “needs to be fixed”. Instead, continuous exchange of information and experiences between all involved within the organization is necessary. Taking it one step further, I also encourage organizations and practitioners to open their doors to research and learn about the latest insights. At the same time, I encourage researchers to be receptive to the needs and

challenges faced by practice. In addition, research needs to look for ways beyond publishing in academic journals in order to effectively communicate their findings to practice. Only with a collective effort we can nurture and benefit from exchange about challenges and opportunities in both worlds. Similarly as to what alterity can do in creating more exchange, understanding, and equality between different social groups, I am convinced that stepping aside and opening doors in the context of research and practice can bring about similar beneficial effects.

#### **6.4. Limitations**

As I have presented the particular limitations of each study in the respective chapters, I will now discuss the *level of abstraction*, *potential bias in qualitative data*, and the *narrow focus of this research* as limitations overarching the separate chapters.

**6.4.1. Level of abstraction.** Next to its academic value, I certainly consider my research as a topic of practical relevance and interest, as it is continuously discussed in society, in the media, in organizations, in the classroom and even among my friends. The findings of my particular studies, however, remain rather abstract. Starting off with the individual experience of professionals in organizations, I mainly used my empirical data as a stepping-stone to further develop theoretical thinking and understanding of the underlying phenomena. In that sense, the findings of my studies contribute more to the conceptualization of and thinking about, rather than offering concrete solutions for practically approaching and changing the described inequalities and challenges. While I certainly believe in the need for and the necessity of this kind of research, the general question, which has to be posed, is: (How) can such findings *enter the field*? What is the practical benefit for my interviewees, for instance, to read that “the concept of alterity” may be an effective way to “break through the organizational legitimization of the normalization of othering”?

Reports presenting an overview of the findings written for participating organizations are one way to transmit information to the field. However, these reports often differ from the more theoretical understanding developed in academic manuscripts. Thereby, new insights often stay within the academic community. In the practical implications, I already alluded to alternatives, such as presentations of the data to groups of practitioners (e.g. Guillaume et al., 2013), or the teaching cases I included in Chapter 2 of this thesis. Still, I believe that the translation of the more abstract findings of my research to practice is a challenge. Even though based on empirical data, my abstract suggestions often neglect practical and financial constraints pervading everyday organizational life. While it is certainly important to encourage theoretical thinking about specific phenomena, it is equally necessary not to lose sight on how to adequately transfer the acquired insights to the field.

**6.4.2. Potential bias in qualitative data.** Except for the quantitative data collected at the professional service firm and presented in Chapter 2 – Teaching case 1, the data collected on individual career outcomes are all based on retrospective self-reports of the interviewees. These accounts may be pervaded by individual sensemaking and attributions, which may color the interviewees' accounts, to better resonate with their individual situation at the time of the interview. To prevent or at least recognize these biases in interviewees' accounts, I suggest to also pursue to collect empirical data on actual career outcomes for each interviewee. This can either be done by asking for access to an organization's personnel information system, or by asking structured questions during an interview concerning the interviewees career steps, for instance. Also, if possible, including assessments of third parties, such as a 360-degree feedback, may provide more reliable information on actual career steps or evaluations, than information derived from retrospective self-reports. At the same time, it remains a challenge to structurally

collect data in this way, especially when pursuing a statistical comparison between dominant social group members and minority social group members. Particularly at higher organizational levels, minority social group members are often underrepresented (Essed, 2002), making it difficult to compare groups statistically. However, there is an opportunity for future research to strive towards combining more objective career information with individual career experiences to further advance our understanding of the construction of career inequalities.

**6.4.3. Narrow research focus.** My research focused on one particular group of employees, namely highly educated professionals within large Dutch knowledge-intensive organizations, such as professional service firms and municipalities. While the narrow focus on this particular group and context offers the opportunity for in-depth analysis and understanding, all findings need to be understood in this particular context and cannot be generalized to other groups or environments. Future research could further investigate similar questions for different groups of employees, such as less educated employees, or within different organizational environments, such as medium or small size organizations. Similarly, my research also only focused on linear career systems. Therefore, more research is needed on how ethnic group membership affects career development in other, less hierarchical career systems or among entrepreneurs, for instance. Finally, as this research is situated in the Dutch context, more research on a similar topic is needed in other European and non-European countries. Taking it one step further, comparative research on similar questions within different international environments could lead to a more integrative assessment of general patterns and specific particularities of the emergence of systematic inequalities in careers related to ethnic diversity in organizations.

Notwithstanding these limitations, I argue that this thesis enhances our understanding of systematic inequalities in diverse professionals' careers in the Netherlands by exploring the role of social capital, ethnic identity, and active network development in Dutch organizations.

## **6.5. Some Final Words**

When thinking about what is often called “diversity management”, the focus is either on valuing equality, or on valuing difference (Liff, 1997). Valuing equality is directed towards supporting individual talents and goals, without recognizing group based characteristics as potential reasons for systematic inequalities between different social groups (Liff, 1997). Valuing difference, on the contrary, acknowledges systematic inequalities among groups and therefore also promotes difference as a means to success (Liff, 1997). Practical implications for diversity management are often designed in line with one of these two approaches. As Liff (1997) extensively delineates, both approaches have their benefits and their shortcomings. For instance, not acknowledging any kind of group difference may seem to promote equal opportunity for everyone, but it may also lead to “gender-blind” or “color-blind” organizations, in which systematic inequalities between particular groups do exist, but are not acknowledged as such. At the same time, affirmative action programs, which prefer the selection of underrepresented candidates to candidates from overrepresented groups in case of equal qualification (Cox, 1993), may increase the absolute number of members of underrepresented groups. However, affirmative action programs may also increase skepticism and doubt about the reasons for the appointment of members of underrepresented groups to the particular position and their actual qualifications (Cox, 1993). In the end, many of these approaches are not directed at fundamentally changing the underlying processes and practices leading towards systematic inequalities, for instance in career experiences and outcomes. In the worst case, such diversity

approaches reify categories and fuel stereotypical thinking, as it is the danger of many affirmative action policies and practices, if not applied carefully. Thus, after many years of practical exploration and scientific discussion, where does this lead us? In the introduction, I already refer to statements illustrating that many traditional diversity initiatives in organizations are either completely ignored or only marginally effective (Groeneveld & Verbeek, 2012; Prasad et al., 2006). Maybe, it is time for something new?

Within this thesis I regularly refer to the concept of strategic essentialism (Ghorashi & Sabelis, 2013) as a means to approach theoretical questions around diversity. Bound to a particular (time)context, strategic essentialism advocates the use of relevant predefined diversity categories as a means to focus on and better understand situations in which difference leads to systematic inequality (Ghorashi & Sabelis, 2013). Through constantly being aware of the context-dependence of the use of such predefined categories, the danger of reification and essentialization of these categorizations is minimized (Ghorashi & Sabelis, 2013). Ghorashi and Sabelis (2013) also theorize about how strategic essentialism can be used as a diversity strategy:

This kind of approach to difference means beginning from the situation in the here-and-now instead of from a present cultural understanding, yet having in mind that in the present culturalist (discursive) space we (both people from majority and minority groups) are culturally positioned. Creating space in organizations and communicative settings always entails taking 'time out' as well. Then, adapting contiguity means starting with the awareness of hierarchies or cultural difference, yet choosing to create conditions for encounters based on openness and curiosity (p. 83).

This excerpt partly alludes to the comment I posited previously in the practical implications about the difficulty to create a safe space to practice alterity in a long-term environment, such as particular working groups or organizational departments. Taken literally, this excerpt can be understood as suggesting to get out of the usual environment and to create a new situation in which traditional hierarchies and power positions are less important.

With this idea in mind, the previous excerpt may possibly also be understood as an encouragement to take “time out” from traditional, often marginally successful approaches to diversity. Thus, when thinking about practical implications for diversity management in organizations, why not take a “time out” and dare to take a look “outside” to see what kind of activities or best practices are used in other fields? For instance, in many organizations professionals are taken out of their everyday environment for teambuilding events, leadership courses, or brainstorm-sessions. Taking another example from mental health care, in cases where traditional forms of therapy are ineffective, and patients do not show significant signs of improvement, turning towards animal assisted therapy often has shown to be effective in making a change (Kovács & Umbgrove, 2014).

Discussing the importance of being in the “here- and-now” and “creating encounters based on openness and curiosity” when approaching diversity in organizations (Ghorashi & Sabelis, 2013), encourages me to also consider animal assisted interventions to practically approach questions related to diversity in organizations. Animals always live and (re)act in the here-and-now and in their (inter)actions with humans they do not relate external markers of identity or status characteristics to particular power hierarchies normalized and generally accepted in society. As such, in human animal interactions, identity characteristics, such as ethnicity or gender, are disconnected from power. Through the interaction with animals, employees may therefore experience interactions, which are solely based on individual actions and related outcomes within the particular context. Reflecting upon and relating concrete experiences of the interaction with the animal to the employees’ experiences in daily working life may encourage and assist employees to disentangle identity markers and power in everyday situations, and thereby alter (inter)actions or encounters within the organizational environment.

While the effectiveness of animal assisted interventions is reported scientifically only on a small scale up until today, a great amount of cases and anecdotal arguments reflect their positive effects in various contexts (Johnson, Odendaal, & Meadows, 2002; Kruger & Serpell, 2006).

Taking a “time out” from the organizational environment and encountering each other in a space free of traditional power relations is what the concept of alterity suggests in order to meet the other from the perspective of the other (Janssens & Steyaert, 2001). As such, choosing for animal assisted interventions can practically help to support setting the first steps towards practicing alterity in organizations. Taking and translating these experiences to the actual work environment will help employees to both recognize existing power relations and hierarchies, and to step aside (Janssens & Steyaert, 2001) to interact with the other in a safe space within the actual work environment. Through *experiencing* interaction free of existing power differences with the help of animal assisted interventions, I believe that the theoretical concept of alterity is translated and becomes more tangible for practical interventions in organizations.

By briefly *stepping aside* to the field of animal assisted interventions, I want to encourage the consideration of opening up to additional approaches as a means of practical interventions related to diversity in organizations. After applying more of the same throughout the past years without satisfactory results, it may be about time for making room for something new next to more traditional interventions through the combination of recent findings from diversity research and innovative practical knowledge from the field.

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