

Diversity and In_Equality in Organizations

Reflections on Detecting and Deconstructing Power and Dominance

Inaugural-Dissertation

zur Erlangung des akademischen Grades einer Doktorin der Wirtschaftswissenschaft des
Fachbereichs Wirtschaftswissenschaft der Freien Universität Berlin

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aus

Memmingen

2020

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Tag der Disputation: 23. April 2021

Erklärung zur Autor_innenschaft

Kapitel 1-3

- Eigenständig verfasst

Kapitel 4

- In Zusammenarbeit mit Prof. Dr. Barbara Sieben und Prof. Dr. Michael Müller-Camen
- Veröffentlicht als Collien, I., Sieben, B., & Müller-Camen, M. (2016). 'Age Work in Organizations: Maintaining and Disrupting Institutionalized Understandings of Higher Age'. *British Journal of Management*, **27**, 778–795, DOI: [10.1111/1467-8551.12198](https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8551.12198).

Kapitel 5

- Eigenständig verfasst
- Veröffentlicht als Collien, I. (2018). 'Critical–Reflexive–Political: Dismantling the Reproduction of Dominance in Organisational Learning Processes'. *Management Learning*, **49**, 131–149, DOI: [10.1177/1350507617724882](https://doi.org/10.1177/1350507617724882).

Kapitel 6

- Eigenständig verfasst
- In Begutachtung als Collien, I. 'Power Concepts in Boundary Spanning Research: A Review and Research Agenda'. *International Journal of Management Reviews* (under review).

Kapitel 7-8

- Eigenständig verfasst

Hamburg, den 27. Juni 2020

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Erklärung gem. §4 Abs. 2

Hiermit erkläre ich, dass ich mich noch keinem Promotionsverfahren unterzogen oder um Zulassung zu einem solchen beworben habe, und die Dissertation in der gleichen oder einer anderen Fassung bzw. Überarbeitung einer anderen Fakultät, einem Prüfungsausschuss oder einem Fachvertreter an einer anderen Hochschule nicht bereits zur Überprüfung vorgelegen hat.

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Hiermit erkläre ich, dass ich für die Dissertation folgende Hilfsmittel und Hilfen verwendet habe: Microsoft Excel, NVivo, Freeplane.

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Courage starts with showing up and letting ourselves be seen.

Brené Brown

Acknowledgements

They call this a community
I like to think of it as home
Pet Shop Boys

Over the course of a dissertation, there are times when you doubt yourself and lack confidence. It can be quite a challenge to stay motivated in the face of revising and rewriting entire papers to which you have already devoted so much time and brainpower. Companions are key when it comes to sitting (!) through your dissertation marathon, and I now want to thank them.

First, I want to thank my first dissertation advisor, Professor Barbara Sieben. Without her, I would not have begun a dissertation in the first place. From her, I have learnt how to endure setbacks throughout a review process. Her willpower is incredible and has motivated me to pursue my dissertation. Furthermore, I want to thank my second advisor, Professor Mona Weiß. Even though we did not get to know each other until the late phase of my dissertation, she has welcomed me and my research with open arms.

A special thanks goes to my comrade (in suffering), Inga Nüthen. We both have the tendency to engage in many professional and private projects simultaneously. Our dissertations therefore sometimes became unstuck. The theoretical, political and personal talks with Inga have encouraged me to continue and her politically courageous and theoretically profound perspectives on research and science have regularly enriched my theory and practice.

I have intensely discussed many ideas for and drafts of my papers with Hanah Abucar and Claire Jin Drescher in the context of our self-organized dissertation colloquium. Our discussions, accompanied by countless pots of black tea, have significantly improved my manuscripts. The two of them always found the weak spots in my argument and helped me to address them. Thank you very much!

Various journal editors and anonymous reviewers have provided invaluable feedback on my submitted manuscripts. Often, their criticism was challenging yet helped me propel my papers to the next level, for which I am deeply grateful. I particularly valued the review process of the paper published in *Management Learning*. Thus, I was delighted when one of the

anonymous reviewers, Professor Vince Russ, contacted me after the publication of my article to ask permission to use the paper in the context of the review workshops for Early Career Scholars. He wanted to present the review process as an example of how developmental reviews can help authors develop their theoretical contribution. A special thanks goes to my academic colleagues Thomas B. Lawrence, John M. Amis and Kamal A. Munir, who organized the sub-theme on ‘Institutional Work and the Institutionalization of Inequality’ at the EGOS colloquium in 2012. My co-author Barbara Sieben and I profited from the joint discussions and greatly enjoyed the cooperative atmosphere.

At a time when it was unclear whether or not I would finish my dissertation, a small group of people took off for a writing retreat. I spent productive and funny days with Heike Pantelmann, Inga Nüthen, Christina Schäfer and Luca Ulrich in Mainthal during a hot summer. The common writing process was the wind of change I required to overcome my lack of motivation! The subsequent summer hours spent side-by-side writing with my flatmate, Heike Nöth, in our ‘rooftop office’ at Hafenstraße have further helped me stay on track. Overall, these writing retreats have been extremely effective and have, to this date, resulted in one doctor’s degree, one master’s degree, one bachelor’s degree, a high school diploma, a submitted dissertation (mine), and a soon-to-be-submitted dissertation. Thanks to all of you who have sweated with me through both despair and joy!

I also want to thank Christiane Prochnow-Zahir, my former boss at Hamburg University of Applied Sciences. She agreed to reduce my working time in the final phase of my dissertation. Furthermore, I want to thank the entire team of the Office for Gender Equality and Diversity at HAW Hamburg for an inspiring and supportive working environment. Special thanks must also go to my Team Diversity, namely Tanja Böhm, Susanne Wilkens, Josephine Akinyosoye, and Lynn Mecheril. They all bravely stepped in so that I could more intensely focus on my dissertation.

Other dear companions during those dissertation years were less directly involved in my research project but were nonetheless important for my overall wellbeing. I want to thank my flatmates at Hafenstraße and Max-Brauer-Allee. I furthermore thank Enno Meyer, Claude Förster, Sabine Lange, Nina Fraeser, Deniz Utlu, Boris Gilsdorff, Augustin Süßmair, Jossi Fickler, Adelinde Mang, Steffen Wiegert, Jana J. Janicki and many more magnificent people for their patience, laughter, love, trust, passion and courage.

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Abbreviations

CDS	Critical Diversity Studies
CMS	Critical Management Studies
OMS	Organization and Management Studies

Chapter 1

Introduction and Personal Motivation

I always wondered why somebody doesn't do something about that. Then I realized I was somebody.

Lily Tomlin

Diversity has become 'a hot topic in the public sphere' (Vertovec, 2015, p. 1) of Western countries. Multinational corporations, medium-size companies, public administrative bodies and universities are increasingly introducing diversity management policies (Özbilgin et al., 2013). In Germany, the implementation of the *Allgemeine Gleichbehandlungsgesetz* (General Equal Treatment Act) since 2006 has propelled the dissemination of diversity management in the private and public sector (Merx and Vassilopoulou, 2007).¹ The Act forbids discrimination on grounds of gender, race, age, disability, religion and sexual orientation on the labour market. It incorporates four European anti-discrimination directives into German law (Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency, 2010), which seek to propagate a potential-oriented, non-hierarchical perspective on diversity as 'the problem is not the fact that there are differences but that they are connected to a hierarchical ranking' (Council of Europe, 1998, p. 19). German organizations have reacted to the implementation of the General Equal Treatment Act, as well as to societal discussions on an ageing and increasingly multicultural workforce, with an expansion of diversity management policies (Merx and Vassilopoulou, 2007).

In Germany, diversity management is strongly associated with a business- and potential-oriented perspective on (demographic) diversity because it 'entered the

¹ Stefan Süß and Markus Kleiner (2008) show that diversity management has significantly gained prominence in Germany since 1998. Their neoinstitutionalist approach reveals that, back then, diversity management was primarily present in companies' mission statements. Furthermore, in a neoinstitutionalist tradition, Sabine Lederle (2007) demonstrates that the increased implementation of diversity was rather a result of external pressures and organizations' isomorphism than being based on actual improved efficiency and performance. Similar to Andreas Merx and Joana Vassilopoulou (2007), Lederle (2007) highlights that the implementation of the General Equal Treatment Act has significantly facilitated and further promoted the dissemination of diversity management in Germany since 2006.

research and management rhetoric as a human resource management notion' (Tatli et al., 2012, p. 301). From this perspective, organizations seek to appreciate and harvest the creativity, knowledge and skills of an ageing and increasingly multicultural workforce to improve customer orientation and team performance (Bleijenbergh et al., 2010). In addition to this business-case argument for diversity, the German discourse on diversity is also populated by ideas of antidiscrimination, equal opportunity and social justice. This is partly because the (original) diversity discourse has its roots in US-American social justice movements and equality legislation (Vedder, 2006). In addition, many German gender studies researchers have entered this new research field and shaped it with their strong will to fight institutionalized inequalities of gender, race and class (Tatli et al., 2012). Broadly speaking, proponents of the business perspective on diversity stress the performance benefits of a diverse workforce and condemn incidents of discrimination, whereas those of the equity or social-justice perspective focus on preventing discrimination and ensuring equality, also by compensating for the structural disadvantages of particular societal groups (Bleijenbergh et al., 2010).²

Similar to diversity management, diversity studies are shaped by various discourses (Krell and Sieben, 2007; Shore et al., 2009; Zanoni et al., 2010). German diversity researcher Andrea Bührmann (2019) identifies and contrasts two main competing discourses: The positivist–functionalist perspective regards diversity as given and studies whether and how it contributes to improving team performance and customer orientation. By contrast, critical–emancipatory approaches to diversity show that constructed differences often serve to legitimize inequalities in organizations and trace acts of resistance against homogenizing identities and discriminatory practices. From an ideology–critical and/or poststructuralist perspective, they thus focus on power and dominance in relation to diversity in organizations (Krell and Sieben, 2007). In the

² Researchers have developed different categorizations of diversity management discourses (e.g. Ely and Thomas, 2001; Vertovec, 2015). For the purpose of this introduction, I solely contrast what I consider to be the two main competing discourses. Although these discourses may seem incompatible, researchers have stressed that fruitful combinations of these discourses exist in diversity management practice (Bleijenbergh et al., 2010). German diversity researchers Gertraude Krell and Barbara Sieben (2007) have further stressed that diversity management may be a philosophy rather than a consensually defined concept. Referring to Cox (1993), they outline that this philosophy is commonly based on aspects such as valuing diverse employees and customers, fostering pluralism in favor of acculturation or promoting organizational structures which include all employees.

research field of diversity studies, these approaches have also been labelled Critical Diversity Studies (CDS; Zanoni et al., 2010).

The title of my dissertation '*Diversity and In_Equality in Organizations: Reflections on Detecting and Deconstructing Power and Dominance*' already indicates that I am studying diversity in organizations through the lens of CDS. In this tradition, I am interested in how social inequalities of race, class, gender etc. are perpetuated (and altered) in and through organizations (Acker, 2006; Proudford and Nkomo, 2006). In particular, I want to understand why discriminatory practices and limiting social identities are frequently taken-for-granted and reproduced, even by those disadvantaged by them.

By understanding the maintenance of social inequalities and by detecting acts of resistance and change, I ultimately seek to identify starting points for equality measures in organizations. Detecting opportunities for change is increasingly important to me because, in addition to my role as a researcher in organization and management theory, in my other life I am also a diversity manager at a large German university. I have been working in the field of gender equality and diversity management for many years, and my practical work is enriched by my theoretical reflections as researcher and vice versa. In the tradition of CDS and feminist research, my perception of equality³ thereby encompasses the provision of equal starting opportunities, compensation for structural inequalities, and the questioning of the norms and processes of normalization.

Feminist research has highlighted how the provision of equal starting opportunities is insufficient to ensure social justice, because structural disadvantages pervade the life of particular social groups, such as women and/or Black people (Pimminger, 2012). In this research, I argue it is essential to serve justice by structurally compensating for the historically grown disadvantages of these groups. This approach to equality resonates with CDS and its proponents' quest for social justice (Ahmed and Swan, 2006; Zanoni et al., 2010). Scholars in the multifaceted research field of CDS share a scepticism towards the construction of difference and question taken-for-granted identities and

³ Equality is an essentially contested concept, and this is true also in diversity management practice. For a deeper discussion see Inge Bleijenberg et al. (2010) who differentiate three approaches to equality which may affect diversity management in organizations: treating diverse groups equally, treating diverse groups differently to compensate for structural inequalities, and treating individuals equally based on their individual talents and merits.

norms (Bührmann, 2019; Zanoni et al., 2010); much like the feminist, postcolonial and other critical–emancipatory authors they build on (Vertovec, 2015). In this vein, I also claim that research and practice on equality and diversity should go beyond adapting the disadvantaged side to the privileged norm. As feminist sociologist Irene Pimlinger (2012, p. 143) demands, connecting equality to the ideal of justice requires questioning dominant notions of meritorious work and a successful life.

In this cumulative dissertation, the notion of equality relates to social justice, understood in the broad sense of Pimlinger (2012). My dissertation project seeks to understand why and how social inequalities are perpetuated in organizations. It consists of the following three research articles, which all add a piece to solving this puzzle:

- Collien, I., Sieben, B., & Müller-Camen, M. (2016). ‘Age Work in Organizations: Maintaining and Disrupting Institutionalized Understandings of Higher Age’. *British Journal of Management*, *27*, 778–795.
- Collien, I. (2018). ‘Critical–Reflexive–Political: Dismantling the Reproduction of Dominance in Organisational Learning Processes’. *Management Learning*, *49*, 131–149.
- Collien, I. (under review). ‘Concepts of Power in Boundary Spanning Research: A Review and Research Agenda’. *International Journal of Management Reviews*.

The research articles of this cumulative dissertation expand the prior insights of CDS, as detailed in Chapter 3. First, they support the claims made by CDS scholars that we need a multi-level analysis to reveal when social inequalities are maintained or altered (Tatli, 2011; Tatli and Özbilgin, 2009; Zanoni et al., 2010). Otherwise, critical diversity researchers may fall into the trap of ‘rhetoric modernization’, as equalling a rhetoric deconstruction of stigmatizing social identities by a change in discriminatory practices (Wetterer, 2005). The article on ‘*Age Work in Organizations*’ (Collien et al., 2016) best supports this claim. In the paper, my co-authors and I innovatively combine the popular, neoinstitutionalist concept of institutional work (Lawrence et al., 2011; Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006) with CDS on age (e.g. Ainsworth et al., 2014; Posthuma and Campion, 2009). The resulting multi-level framework produces a counterintuitive research insight: rhetorically maintaining stereotypical images of higher age does not necessarily reproduce age inequalities. Instead, it can serve as a defence of older workers’ employee rights, whereas disrupting (negative) age images can be used to dismantle them and reinforce age inequalities.

Second, I point to the value of ‘social comparison information’ (McIntosh, 2012) in helping scholars to understand why actors maintain stereotypical social identities or

comply with disadvantageous organizational practices even when disadvantaged by the identities and practices themselves. The multi-sector, multi-actor comparative study on ‘*Age Work in Organizations*’ investigates how a context-specific fear of job and income loss drives older workers to accept unfavourable working conditions. In addition, a comparison between male steel workers and female retail employees reveals that fear of status loss is also connected to notions of masculinity. The research expands on prior CDS which show that privilege is situational, context-dependant and therefore shifting (e.g. Atewologun and Sealy, 2014; Spedale, 2018). It further responds to calls for broadening the notion of gender in (critical) diversity studies (Krell and Sieben, 2007), which have primarily focused on the intersectional experiences of women at the workplace (e.g. Essers et al., 2010; de Jong, 2015).

Third, in my theoretical research paper entitled ‘*Critical–Reflexive–Political*’ (Collien, 2018), I argue that a context-sensitive reading of diversity practices should imply a historization of these practices. The paper fuses organizational learning research (e.g. Lawrence et al., 2005; Nicolini et al., 2004; Vince and Saleem, 2004) with French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s (1977) theory of practice to highlight that the reproduction of unequal power relations and dominance structures is an inherent part of the learning processes in organizations. To dismantle the taken-for-granted nature of dominance structures, researchers should be aware of the historical continuities underlying particular differences and social identities. I therefore propose ‘counter-hegemonic reading’ (Heinemann, 2014; Witson, 1995) as a research tool, which draws on marginalized voices and alternative histories to reveal the workings of power and dominance in organizations.

Fourth; counter-hegemonic reading is but one tool in my larger reflection on necessary steps which researchers should undertake when seeking to dismantle historically-grown dominance in organizations; therefore, in my theoretical paper entitled ‘*Critical–Reflexive–Political*’, I argue that researchers should account for three research steps: being critical, being reflexive *and* being political. The triad of research steps assembles and systematizes the theoretical and methodological research insights currently dispersed throughout CDS (e.g. Ahmed and Swan, 2006; Pringle and Ryan, 2015; Zanoni and Van Laer, 2015). I contend that a critical stance towards essentializing identities and an awareness of one’s own position in societal power

relations, as often proposed in CDS, are important yet insufficient to address the effects of dominance in research and practice. In addition, scholars should explicate their normative underpinnings to encourage ethical dialogue regarding their methods and findings.

My article on '*Concepts of Power in Boundary Spanning Research*' underlines the importance of this claim. It responds to calls for a more nuanced approach to power in CDS (Ahonen et al., 2013) by providing a framework against which researchers can reflect and expand their power concepts. Depending on their research perspectives (e.g. functionalist or ideology-critical), scholars focus on particular aspects of power while overlooking others. In addition, they may interpret their results differently. For example, resource-oriented researchers may praise actors' power of influence over improving innovation and collaboration resulting from organizational power bases, whereas dominance-critical scholars show how societal power relations hinder learning and collaboration in organizations. In the article, I build an analytical framework for studying power in Organization and Management Studies (OMS), which highlights the common differences between functionalist and critical research perspectives on power (Clegg et al., 2006; Clegg and Hardy, 1996) and facilitates the called-for integration of research insights across these perspectives in diversity studies (Krell and Sieben, 2007).

This dissertation is structured as follows. First, I provide an introduction to the origins of CDS and present the key characteristics of the research field (Chapter 2). Against this background, I discuss the overriding theoretical contributions of my three papers to the CDS field and provide avenues for future research (Chapter 3). The following three chapters contain the three research articles in this order: '*Age Work in Organizations*' (Chapter 4), '*Critical-Reflexive-Political*' (Chapter 5), and '*Concepts of Power in Boundary Spanning Research*' (Chapter 6). Finally, I reflect on how my own societal positioning and my political convictions, as well as the logics of the scientific field, have shaped my research process and outcomes (Chapter 7). My concluding remarks (Chapter 8) are followed by lists of tables, figures and references. In the Appendix, I provide an overview of the three research articles (Appendix A) and provide brief summaries in English and German (Appendix B to D). The original published versions of the papers are added at the end of the dissertation (Appendix E).

Chapter 2

Studying Social Inequalities through the Lens of Critical Diversity Studies

Confronting my rage, witnessing the way it moved me to grow and change, I understood intimately that it had the potential not only to destroy but also to construct. ... Rage can act as a catalyst inspiring courageous action.

bell hooks

My cumulative dissertation is driven by the quest to detect starting points for social justice and equality measures in organizations. Therefore, I seek to understand how social inequalities are maintained (and altered) in and through organizations. In the field of OMS, CDS scholars have produced rich insights into the nexus of unequal power relations, difference and diversity in organizations. I therefore provide an introduction of the history (Chapter 2.1) and key aspects of CDS (Chapter 2.2), before locating my research in this research tradition (Chapter 2.3). In the next chapter, I proceed to explain how my research articles contribute to advancing this research field.

2.1 The origins of Critical Diversity Studies

CDS emerged in the mid-1990s in the United States ‘as a reaction to the re-appropriation of equal opportunities by business through the notion of diversity’ (Zanoni et al., 2010, p. 10). Prior to that, considerable institutional pressure had led to the establishment of equal opportunity legislation and measures in organizations.

Beginning in the 1960s, the pressure of the Black civil rights movements drove the implementation of affirmative action⁴ legislation in the United States (Vedder, 2006), as

⁴ US-American historian Terry H. Anderson (2004) claims that a forerunner to affirmative action had emerged in the US already in the 1930s, when Interior Secretary Harold L. Ickes issued an order stating that in cities with an appreciable Black population, a fixed percentage of Black workers had to be employed in Public Works Administration projects. The term affirmative action itself was first used in 1935, as white union workers were given the right to organize and bargain. When discriminated against

‘a response to the entrenched systems of segregation and racist ideology that would not be dismantled by voluntary effort’ (Collins, 2011, p. 517). For example, it became illegal to discriminate against employees based on their race, colour, sex, national origin and religion according to Title VII of the Civil Rights Act (Herring and Henderson, 2011). In the 1970s, identity-focused feminist, Black power and gay social movements joined the struggle for social justice and ‘moved into white male social and economic domains to stake their claim’ (Collins, 2011, p. 518), which further intensified the pressure on organizations to adopt equal opportunity measures.

A further source of institutional pressure was the publication of a report by the Hudson Institute in 1987 entitled “*Workforce 2000: Work and Workers for the Twenty-First Century*” (Johnston and Packer, 1987). The authors of the report predicted that minority groups would constitute the majority of the workforce by the year 2000. They further claimed that the workforce would become older, more female and more racially diverse and socially disadvantaged. On the basis of this forecast, they recommended the better integration of Black and Hispanic workers and measures to improve the work–life balance of families, and urged companies to address the challenges of an ageing workforce. In the wake of these events, organizations developed diversity management as an attempt to attract diverse workers and leverage their potential for the profit of the organization. Critical diversity scholar Pasi Ahonen and colleagues (2013, p. 270) therefore conclude that ‘[d]iversity management has emerged as a strategic approach to managing difference between individuals to bring about positive workplace relations and to improve organizational performance in the face of demographic shifts in society’.⁵

because of their union engagement, they had the right to obtain a salary level or position, which they would have obtained without the discrimination.

⁵ It must be mentioned that, to date, diversity practices and policies span a variety of context-specific approaches (Tomlinson and Schwabenland, 2010). For instance, practices range from redistributing resources to redressing the historical discrimination of particular groups, and from increasing the representation of minorities to gaining competitive advantage through improved customer service (Vertovec, 2012). However, in private sector organizations, a potential-oriented, functionalist perspective on diversity (business case for diversity) dominates the equality and inclusion perspectives on diversity. For the purpose of briefly outlining the history of diversity management, I portray diversity management as a potential-oriented, functionalist approach to diversity while being aware that I am thereby (re)producing a particular diversity management narrative.

Following practitioners' strong interest in how to best manage an increasingly diverse workforce, diversity research emerged in the 1990s. As Zanoni and Janssens note (2004, p. 55), '[t]hese managerial roots have left their imprint on the first generation of diversity studies, which mainly focus on the effects of diversity in organizations, without questioning the nature of the construct'. For example, research on team diversity and performance has sought to and still attempts to detect under which conditions organizations benefit from racially or gender diverse teams in terms of intensified customer relations, improved (team) performance or innovation (Gonzalez and DeNisi, 2009; e.g. Hassan et al., 2017; Kelemen et al., 2019). Meta-analytic studies and assessments of the research field have revealed that relationships between diversity and performance show ambivalent results, are highly context dependant and are moderated by multiple other factors (van Dijk et al., 2012; Joshi and Roh, 2009; Krell and Sieben, 2007). In contrast to CDS, positivist–functionalist diversity studies have primarily focused on the effects of team diversity on team and organizational outcomes and have largely excluded societal levels of analysis (Jackson et al., 2003).

In the mid-1990s, CDS problematized the fact that prior conceptualizations of diversity 'lack rigour, theoretical development, and historical specificity' (Zanoni and Janssens, 2004, p. 55). Researchers in this tradition have claimed that diversity management gained prominence in corporate America because 'its inclusive philosophy was seen as an attractive alternative to "affirmative action" policies, which were causing widespread unease' (Lorbiecki and Jack, 2000, p. 20). More emphatically, some scholars have deemed diversity management 'a neoliberal response to the reactionary backlash against affirmative action' (Herring and Henderson, 2011, p. 630). These quotes exemplify the critical–emancipatory perspective from which CDS examines the construction of differences in organizations and related power relations and dynamics, as detailed next.

2.2 Key characteristics of Critical Diversity Studies

CDS problematize the functionalist perspective on diversity contained in many diversity management policies and studies contain. Instead,

‘[t]hey share, at the core, a non-positivistic, non-essentialist understanding of diversity (...) as socially (re)produced in ongoing, context-specific processes. Crucially, they underline how such processes and the resulting understandings both reflect existing unequal power relations within a given context and contribute to maintaining, resisting and/or transforming them.’ (Zanoni et al., 2010, p. 10)

CDS are thus intimately linked to understanding the maintenance and transformation of unequal organizational power relations related to race, class, gender, disability, age etc.. US-American sociologist Joan E. R. Acker (2006) has labelled the complex, interwoven societal power relations embedded in and structuring organizations as ‘inequality regimes’. These inequality regimes are deeply inscribed in societies, organizations and individuals, and are therefore sticky and complex to change.

Critical diversity researchers have highlighted that the production of difference and related social inequalities is historically grown and highly context-dependant (e.g. Knights and Omanović, 2016; Özbilgin et al., 2013; Tatli et al., 2012). Discriminatory classifications and related social inequalities have a longstanding history of exploitation, dominance and oppression (as well as of resistance and change). Consequently, resources, such as money, social networks or titles, are unequally distributed in societies and organizations along the lines of gender, race, class, migration, age, sexual orientation and disability. The fact that specific societal groups possess more resources and have better living conditions and opportunities to fulfil their dreams over a long period is referred to in sociology as social inequality (Hradil, 2012).

Critical diversity researchers confront issues of oppression and stratification that revolve around issues of diversity ‘and challenge hegemonic notions of colorblindness and meritocracy’ (Herring and Henderson, 2011, p. 632). They assert that the systematic exclusion or disadvantaging of women, Black people or disabled persons in the labour market, the political sphere or the education sector has resulted in seemingly monocultural organizations (Krell, 1996). Such organizations cater to the needs and living conditions of white, non-disabled men without care responsibilities. Critical

diversity scholars have shed light on the (re)production of an organizational norm through practices of labelling particular groups as other and establishing organizational structures which cater primarily to that norm (for gender see Bleijenbergh et al., 2012; for disability see Mik-Meyer, 2016; for age see Riach, 2007). They question taken-for-granted assumptions about normal practices and behaviour in organizations as well as in OMS (Zanoni and Janssens, 2007). Thereby, they also problematize the underlying binary logics, which produce differences between the margin and the centre or between the norm and its gendered, racialized or disabled other (Pullen and Knights, 2007). Management and organization researcher Sara Louise Muhr (2008, p. 187) highlights the illusion behind clear cut notions of difference because ‘diversity is always about encountering the Other who, by definition, is always other, and always overturns and overwhelms my categories’. Critical Diversity scholars have thus traced the manifold acts of resistance to processes of normation and normalization in organizations, and how essentialist notions of diversity can never represent the diverse reality of identity constructions and meaning making. Researchers in this tradition have also problematized the discourse on diversity itself ‘because it individuates differences, conceals inequalities and neutralizes histories of antagonism and struggle’ (Ahmed and Swan, 2006, p. 96). Decolonizing the centre by telling histories from the margins and giving a voice to oppressed actors in organizations is thus an important aspect of the critical research perspective in OMS (Jammulamadaka et al., 2019).

The research field of CDS represents no unitary theoretical and methodological framework but an ‘epistemological and methodological mix’ (Pullen et al., 2017, p. 451) which provides ‘multidisciplinary, intersectional, and critical analyses of diversity, its organizing and management in organizations’ (Bendl et al., 2015, p. 2).⁶ Scholars of CDS draw on a variety of longstanding, critical–emancipatory research traditions, such as postcolonial studies, feminist research or disability studies. For instance, Karen L. Proudford and Stella Nkomo (2006) promote critical–race theory and postcolonial studies to examine how organizations are pervaded by racial inequalities. Meanwhile, Jannine Williams and Sharon Mavin (2012) draw on disability research to show how the notion of an able-bodied worker structures organizations, and Anshuman Prasad (2003,

⁶ Besides highlighting the multi-disciplinary nature of CDS, researchers (Krell and Sieben, 2007) have also called for multi-paradigmatic approaches to diversity, which, for instance, cross boundaries between (ideology-)critical and functionalist research perspectives on diversity.

2006) reveals the colonial continuities of constructing the other of a white, Western norm in organizations from a postcolonial perspective. For many scholars, queer, feminist and gender studies have been an important theoretical resource for unveiling the heteronormative⁷, sexist culture underlying everyday practices, identities and structures in organizations (e.g. Acker, 1990; Bendl et al., 2008; Simpson and Lewis, 2005).

Related to third wave feminism in the 1970s and 1980s are discussions on the intersections between societal power relations. Black (lesbian) feminists have criticized the women's' movement for primarily representing the perspectives and interests of white, middle-class, heterosexual women (Combahee River Collective, 1977). In 1991, US-American lawyer Kimberlé W. Crenshaw (1991) introduced the label of 'intersectionality' to refer to the idea that power relations are interwoven and produce unique social positions and related experiences of oppression and exclusion. CDS scholars have embraced this idea and studied intersecting power relations and hybrid identities in organizations (Styhre and Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2008). For instance, researchers have traced how Muslim business women construct and negotiate their identities at the intersection of religion, gender and nationality (Essers et al., 2010; Essers and Benschop, 2009). Others have examined dynamics of invisibility and hypervisibility experienced by Black or disabled women in organizations (Stead, 2013; Zitzelsberger, 2005).

Related to discussions on intersectionality is an awareness of how critical diversity researchers' own position in social power relations shape their perception of and access to studying diversity in organizations (Bührmann, 2019). Regine Bendl and colleagues (2015), for example, point to further context factors influencing researchers' interests, perspectives and conclusions, such as geographical location:

'[Researchers] may have in common some starting points or parts of theoretical frameworks for their perspectives on diversity in organisations (e.g. inclusion, equality,

⁷ Heteronormativity is a term that emerged in the context of queer (lesbian) movements and theorizing (Jackson, 2006). It highlights that Western societies in particular are shaped by two fundamental assumptions about sex, gender and desire (Warner, 1991): Humans are divided into two opposing sexes, who are expected to act and think in different ways and are further supposed to naturally desire each other. Judith Butler (1990) has referred to this nexus between sex, gender and desire as the heterosexual matrix.

anti-discrimination, intersectionality, or gender theories) and they may refer to the same sources but what diversity issues they consider, how they address and analyse phenomena of diversity not only depends on their disciplinary approach but also on their geographical location' (Bendl et al., 2015, p. 3).

The critical diversity literature itself has been criticized for focusing primarily on Anglo-Saxon and Western European study contexts (Jonsen et al., 2011; Syed and Özbilgin, 2009), and scholars have therefore advocated for a diversification and comparison of studied country contexts (Bosch et al., 2015; Syed and Özbilgin, 2009; Tatli et al., 2012) as well as a transnational and global perspective on diversity in organizations (Özbilgin et al., 2013; Özkazanç-Pan and Calás, 2015).

Critical diversity scholars have further highlighted that diversity studies themselves (re)construct the notion of diversity and diversity management (Bührmann, 2019; Zanoni et al., 2010). This phenomenon has been labelled as 'doing diversity' (Ahmed and Swan, 2006). In this vein, Ahu Tatli (2011) problematized dichotomous constructions of critical and functionalist diversity discourses, showing how they lead to diversity research; ignoring that in diversity management practice, social justice approaches may coexist with performance-oriented, individualistic perspectives on diversity.

Many of the scholars cited in this section do not explicitly label their research as CDS. However, they share a scepticism towards fixed notions of identity and difference which spring from a historic consciousness that these very same identities have been and still are used to legitimize the unequal treatment and access to organizational resources of women, Black people, Persons of Colour, disabled, older or queer folks (Ahmed and Swan, 2006). The field of CDS thus represents a loosely coupled research domain characterized by critical–emancipatory, intersectional research approaches and a quest for social justice. In this vein, my research strongly resonates with the ideological underpinnings of CDS, as outlined below.

2.3 Situating the research in Critical Diversity Studies

My research stands in the tradition of CDS, understood as an umbrella term for studies unified by a quest for social justice and equal opportunities regardless of diversity-related differences in organizations. In the above section, I stressed that CDS scholars promote an understanding of diversity and difference as socially constructed, whereby these differences often serve to legitimize social inequalities of race, class, gender, etc. Consequently, my cumulative dissertation revolves around tracing how unequal social power relations are created, maintained and altered, both in and through organizations. In line with the Black feminist and poststructuralist research traditions of CDS, I understand identities as hybrid and power relations as interwoven, as opposed to hegemonic discourses and practices, which often divide people based on binary logics of a norm and its racialized, gendered or disabled other.

Reflecting the theoretical and methodological diversity of the research field, my papers are all located at the intersection of CDS and more ‘mainstream’⁸ theories in OMS. Thereby, I seek to intervene in ‘the mainstream’ to highlight how established theories could profit from critical–emancipatory research perspectives. I am also convinced that CDS scholars can profit from better integrating the research insights and theories of rather ‘mainstream’ research fields to deepen their theoretical understanding of the differences and social inequalities in organizations and expand their outreach. In the following section, I outline how my research articles have contributed to advancing the field of CDS.

⁸ Following public administration researcher Max Visser (2010), I broadly define as mainstream those diversity studies and other Organization and Management Research that does not explicitly label itself as critical, or draw on theories which shed an ideology-critical light on established theories. Furthermore, I am aware that scholars can be critical in parts of their research, while being more mainstream in others. A clearcut differentiation is therefore always a matter of representation, which constitutes the reality it claims to represent.

Chapter 3

Theoretical Contribution to Critical Diversity Studies and Avenues for Future Research

The paradox of privilege is that it shields us from fully experiencing or acknowledging inequality, even while giving us more power to do something about it. So, privilege allied with ignorance has become an equally pernicious, and perhaps more pervasive, *enemy* to justice.

Darren Walker

My cumulative dissertation contributes to understanding how social inequalities are (re)produced in organizations, and thereby also highlights possibilities for equal opportunity measures and changes. Examining the maintenance of differences and related social inequalities is a key characteristic of CDS (see Chapter 2.2). In this chapter, I specify how the three research articles of this cumulative dissertation – when read together – advance CDS.

Each research paper caters to further scientific audiences, in this case neoinstitutional researchers (*‘Age Work in Organizations’*), boundary spanning scholars (*‘Concepts of Power in Boundary Spanning Research’*) or specialists in organizational learning research (*‘Critical–Reflexive–Political’*). I briefly outline the theoretical contributions of each article to these audiences in the summary sections (Appendix B to D) as well as in the discussion section of each article (Chapter 4 to 6).

3.1 Desmasking persisting power relations and rhetoric modernization through multi-level analysis

Interwoven power relations of gender, race, class and so forth pervade organizations. Joan E. R. Acker (2006, p. 443) refers to the ‘loosely interrelated practices, processes, actions, and meanings that result in and maintain class, gender, and racial inequalities within particular

organizations' as inequality regimes. Meanwhile, Acker (2006) defines five components characterizing these inequality regimes:

- the bases of inequality (e.g. gender, race, class, disability, etc.),
- the shape and degree of inequality (e.g. steep organizational hierarchies as to race or gendered horizontal job segregation),
- organizing processes that create and recreate inequalities (e.g. designing working environments for non-disabled, white men with no care responsibilities),
- the invisibility of inequalities (e.g. differing awareness of inequalities depending on actors' social positioning),
- the legitimacy of inequalities (e.g. democratic values in organizations which delegitimize steep hierarchies),
- and the controls and compliance that prevent the protest of inequalities (e.g. punishment for rule breaking).

Acker's (2006) five components of inequality regimes emphasize that the (re)production of social inequalities is a complex process which is nested on the macro-level of nations and societies, the meso-level of fields and organizations, and the micro-level of everyday interactions and identity work. It is therefore unsurprising that scholars have deemed the study of the interactions between these levels of analysis important in CDS (Tatli, 2011; Zanoni et al., 2010). Interestingly, CDS scholars have also been criticized for focusing predominantly on the individual level of analysis while neglecting organizational structures and processes and further contextual factors in their studies (Ashcroft, 2004; Martin, 2006; Zanoni et al., 2010). These researchers have pointed out that the focus on single-level explorations in diversity research limits the understanding of diversity, difference and inequality in organizations (Tatli, 2011; Tatli and Özbilgin, 2009), and proposed a multi-level analysis to ensure that CDS scholars account for the intersecting levels of analysis which (re)produce social inequalities (Porter & Hilde, 2015; Zanoni et al., 2010) and bridge the 'gap between the diversity discourse and practice' (Tatli, 2011, p. 238).

In my research paper '*Age Work in Organizations*', my co-authors and I respond to these calls by providing a multi-level, cross-sector and multi-actors analysis of age inequalities in organizations. The counterintuitive findings of the study clearly show the benefit of the called-for multi-level analysis: in contrast to assumptions of CDS on age (e.g. Ainsworth et al., 2014; Posthuma and Campion, 2009), we find that a rhetoric deconstruction of negative age images does not automatically coincide with a change of discriminatory age management

practices. Furthermore, maintaining stereotypical images of higher age does not necessarily reproduce age inequalities. Instead, it can support older workers' employee rights, whereas disrupting (negative) age images can be used to dismantle them. Our study expands on prior research on age stereotypes, which explains age discrimination at the workplace through ageist behaviour, yet seldom accounts for the broader context (Shiu et al., 2015), as well as discourse-based age research which predominantly focuses on identity work and acts of resistance (Riach, 2007; Riach et al., 2014) but less frequently on related management practices (Spedale et al., 2014).

The research on '*Age Work in Organizations*' further contributes to the study of social inequalities in CDS via multi-level theoretical frameworks (Syed and Özbilgin, 2009; Tatli and Özbilgin, 2009) and is amongst a slowly growing number of studies which connect their multi-level framework to an empirical analysis of diversity practices (Pringle and Ryan, 2015; Tatli, 2011). The mentioned studies use Pierre Bourdieu's (1977, 2011) concept of field and capital to provide a context-sensitive approach to notions of privilege and disadvantage in organizations (Tatli and Özbilgin, 2012). Their approach enables a context-sensitive evaluation of the relative importance and contestedness of categories of difference (e.g. gender). Our theoretical framework enables agency to be specified which contributes to differently positioned actors maintaining and/or altering social inequalities on various levels. We therefore innovatively link the neo-institutional theory⁹ of institutional work (Lawrence et al., 2011; Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006) to age diversity research (Posthuma and Campion, 2009; Riach et al., 2014; Trethewey, 2001). Therewith, we seek to account for the multi-level nestedness of social inequalities (here: age inequalities) as well as for actors' efforts to maintain or change these complex phenomena.

The concept of institutional work (Lawrence et al., 2011; Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006) builds on the notion of institutions defined as 'enduring elements in social life ... that have a profound effect on thoughts, feelings and behaviour of individual and collective actors' (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006, p. 216). Over time, these institutions become taken-for-granted and are nested on the level of individual behaviour and interaction, as well as the

⁹ Neo-institutional theory emerged in the late 1970s with the central claim that 'organizations adopted new structures and practices not because they were particularly effective or efficient, but because they gave the organization a sheen of legitimacy' (Alvesson and Spicer, 2019, p. 200). Three papers by John W. Meyer and Brian Rowan (1977), Paul J. DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell (1983) and Lynne G. Zucker (1977) are often referenced as the founding core of neoinstitutional theory (Walgenbach and Meyer, 2008), which has over the years diversified and developed into the dominant theory in organization studies (for a detailed review see Alvesson and Spicer, 2019).

levels of organizational and societal rules, processes and structures (Barley and Tolbert, 1997; Scott, 2001). Criticizing the neoinstitutionalist theory's tendency towards structural determinism, the concept of institutional work stresses actors' agency by examining how they constantly create, maintain or alter these institutions and providing a rich theoretical repertoire for categorizing specific forms of institutional work (e.g. Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006; Lok and de Rond, 2013; Micelotta and Washington, 2013).

In our paper, we maintain that actors stabilize or change age inequalities and related age images in organizations through a particular form of institutional work, so-called 'age work' (Collien et al., 2016). For example, the trade union representatives studied strategically pointed to the declining physical capabilities of older workers to argue for the preservation of part time retirement options, which they deemed highly valuable in the context of a decreasing social welfare system (so-called age work of 'restoration'). By contrast, HR managers deconstructed age images to support the idea of ever-healthy workers who are entirely responsible for their health, even in detrimental working conditions (so-called age work of 'disassociating moral foundations').

In addition to underlining the necessity of multi-level analysis, the contrasting examples of the trade union representatives and HR managers further demonstrate that an analytical focus on the discursive level of speech may render the persistence of discriminatory practices invisible. CDS scholars have therefore called 'for more empirical studies that specifically show how linguistic and non-linguistic practices produce asymmetrical differences between and among social groups' (Porter and Hilde, 2015, p. 298). The asymmetry between the culture and the structure of an organization or society has been referred to as 'rhetoric modernisation' in the context of gender equality policies.

German sociologist Angelika Wetterer (2005) introduces the term 'rhetoric modernization' to criticize the asynchrony between a rhetorical disapproval of stereotypical gender roles and inequalities and the reality of persistent, blatant gender inequalities, such as a gender pay gap of 21 per cent in Germany.¹⁰ She concludes that changes in social equality within the culture and within the structure of a society or organization may be characterized by asynchrony (Wetterer, 2005). Our study supports her claim and shows that the phenomenon also holds

¹⁰ There are two different approaches to measuring the gender pay gap. The unadjusted gender pay gap accounts for the overall difference between the average gross income of men to the average gross income of women in per cent. The adjusted gender pay gap is lower, as it also considers gender-specific differences, such as length of work experience, maternity leave, level of education or sector of employment (for a critical discussion of the two approaches see Rubery et al., 2005).

true for the case of age inequalities. Asynchrony may thus be a general characteristic of struggles for equal opportunities and justice in organizations and societies, as CDS scholars acknowledge. Scholars have revealed how the rhetoric use of colour blindness and particular forms of justice are used to undermine racial equality (Knowles et al., 2009). To justify racial inequalities, white anti-egalitarian study participants switched from distributive justice which reduces discrepancies between groups' outcomes to procedural justice which ensures fairness and transparency in organizational processes. Discourse-based, ideology-critical research has further criticized essentializing notions of female leadership by showing how characteristics of female leaders and their advantages for companies are constructed, and how these narratives are maintained even in the face of contradictory research insights on gender-mixed teams, leadership and firm performance (Krell, 2008).

Other critical diversity researchers have gone even further in their critique of rhetoric modernization and asynchrony: They have problematized that 'diversity has replaced terms such as gender equality and anti-racism, thus masking its political and contested nature' (Ahonen et al., 2013, p. 271), concluding that diversity rhetoric

'may be nothing more than a tool in the struggle for symbolic domination in which organizational power holders attempt to extent their domination at the workplace by reducing employee diversity into individual level, whilst trying to strip themselves of as many ethical and legal obligations as possible under the banner of voluntarism' (Tatli, 2011, p. 247).

Organization theorist Pasi Ahonen and colleagues (2013, p. 271) additionally caution that 'diversity through its technologies, taxonomies and specific practices, then, categorizes and often commodifies sameness rather than enables difference'. Scepticism towards organizations ready embrace and celebration of difference is important, as the case study on '*Age Work in Organizations*' shows. However, a general dismissal of the rhetoric of diversity policies may not be entirely helpful, because researchers may overlook the potential, positive effects of these policies (Krell et al., 2007). Multi-level diversity research can help reveal the asynchrony between rhetoric of inclusion and its underlying material reality in organizations, and it can also highlight where fundamental change takes place.

For future research, it could be of value to connect proposed multi-level frameworks for understanding the maintenance and change of inequalities in organizations. Frameworks applying Bourdieu's notion of field and capital (e.g. Pringle and Ryan, 2015; Tatli and Özbilgin, 2009) could be linked to agency-focused, neoinstitutionalist approaches to

inequality, diversity and difference (Collien et al., 2016) to account for context and actors' situatedness as well as their power to change and/or reproduce disadvantageous structures and cultures.

3.2 Discovering the complex motives behind compliance through social comparison information

In her article on inequality regimes in organizations, Acker (2006) names compliance and control as the sixth characteristic of inequality regimes. She stresses that compliance in organizations often results less from direct force than from internalized and taken-for-granted structures, rules and regulations perpetuating inequalities of gender, race, class, etc. The findings in Chapter 4 on *'Age Work in Organizations'* support this theoretical claim. My fellow researchers and I show that all actors maintain negative, stereotypical images of higher age, even in organizations which seek to develop a resource-oriented or deconstructivist perspective on age and ageing: 'Almost all actors constructed and maintained higher age predominantly as an organizational problem by stressing older workers' declining physical abilities or their resistance to technological and organizational changes' (Collien et al., 2016, p. 784). This finding applied to HR managers and line managers as well as to employees over 50 years old in our study and held true across various sectors, such as retail, steel or education. We refer to this phenomenon as 'maintaining age work', understood as the often automatic (re)production of age and age images as a mechanism of social stratification and differentiation; that is, of age as an institution.

In Chapter 5 entitled *'Critical-Reflexive-Political'*, I theoretically explain this co-construction of social inequalities, even by those disadvantaged by discriminatory practices and structures. Drawing on the concept of habitus by sociologist Bourdieu (1977), I outline how actors in organizations often accept social divisions because they are inscribed into their habitus as their 'schemata of perception, appreciation, and action' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992a, p. 126). These schemata are developed over the course of their lives, depending on the specific fields and the forms of capital which these actors have access to and live in. Acker (2006, p. 454) also outlines that control is often invisible and hidden in beliefs, and that this is just 'the way things naturally and normally are'. In the paper on *'Age Work in Organizations'*,

I and my co-authors label particular ways of accepting unfavourable working conditions and stigmatizing identities as ‘normalizing work’.

The maintenance of social inequalities in organizations is thus a co-production of all actors, yet these actors have access to different power bases (or forms of capital), operate in different contexts (e.g. sector, organization), and therefore have different powers of influence and interests. In ‘*Critical–Reflexive–Political*’, I further outline that the co-production of social inequality is highly dependant on context and social position of specific actors in organizations (Collien, 2018), as some recent CDS have also started to emphasize (Atewologun and Sealy, 2014; Mavin and Grandy, 2016; Tatli et al., 2012). Depending on their prior accumulated capital (e.g. money or social networks) and their actual position within the organization, actors have more or less (potential) power to alter practices, behaviour and identities in organizations (Collien, 2018). The multi-level, multi-actor and cross-sector study on ‘*Age Work in Organizations*’ reveals how actors’ specific position in interwoven power relations shapes their interests, experiences and perspectives. My co-authors and I show that actors maintain (or deconstruct) stereotypical age images for very different reasons and with very different effects on age inequalities nested on multiple levels: For example, despite worsened working conditions, school teachers ‘hardly perceive any possibility to stand against the changes of the Federal authority such as increased teaching hours and reduced personnel’ (Collien et al., 2016, p. 785). They extensively complained about these working conditions in the interviews from a position of high job security, yet also blamed the higher-age dependant declining physical abilities and psychological capabilities of dealing with stress for their decreasing performance. By contrast, the studied older steel workers remained silent because they feared being relocated to lower status jobs with equal pay when reporting injuries and illnesses.

Interestingly, their context-dependant fear of status loss intersected with notions of gender, in particular with masculinity. These hidden gender dynamics only became clear when comparing the reactions of the male steel workers to the responses of the predominantly female retail workers in the study. The male steel workers remained silent because they feared status loss, whereas the female retail workers ‘rather accepted the relocation and hoped for more appreciation of their skills, [yet] one of the male retail workers fought to get his previous position back after the relocation’ (Collien et al., 2016, p. 791f.). The accepting attitude of the (female) retail workers was further connected to the precarious work contracts

and a weaker trade union presence in comparison to the steel sector. The findings support Acker's (2006) thoughts on emotions and the acceptance of control related to unequal power relations of gender, race and class:

'Similarly, a belief that there is no point in challenging the fundamental gender, race, and class nature of things is a form of control. These are internalized, often invisible controls. Pleasure in the work is another internalized control, as are fear and self-interest.' (Acker, 2006, p. 454)

The invisibility of inequalities is another characteristic aspect of Acker's (2006) concept of organizations as inequality regimes. Invisibility thereby refers to actors' intentional or unintentional degree of awareness of existing inequalities in organizations. Acker (2006, p. 452) adds that visibility and awareness of inequalities 'varies with the position of the beholder'. Critical Whiteness Studies (Dietze et al., 2006; Wollrad, 2005) have, for instance, outlined how white people are often unaware of their privileged position because they lack the experience of racial discrimination and take many aspects of their life for granted, which Black persons or People of Colour do not have access to. Not knowing may thus be the result of active denial as well as the lack of experience and requirement to know about discrimination, exclusion and violence (Walker, 2016).

The study on *'Age Work in Organizations'* advances intersectional perspectives on privilege, fear, silence and in/visibility at work by uncovering how masculinity affects these dynamics and emotions. So far, CDS scholars have mainly researched the influence of gender roles on visibility and acts of resistance for the case of female workers (Collinson and Hearn, 2000), with an increasing interest in the experiences of Black or Muslim female leaders and entrepreneurs (e.g. Bell, 1990; Combahee River Collective, 1977; Essers et al., 2010; de Jong, 2015).¹¹

My research also supports CDS in terms of the context-dependency of notions of privilege (e.g. Atewologun, 2014; Atewologun and Sealy, 2014; Mavin and Grandy, 2016). In addition to privilege resulting from historically grown power relations of race, class or gender, privilege may also be connected to and accumulated through inhabiting particular organizational positions. In their study on female leaders, leadership and organization specialists Sharon Mavin and Gina Grandy (2016, p. 381) conclude that 'as simultaneously One and the Other, women elite leaders may move in and out of privilege'. The male steel

¹¹ From the standpoint of a female researcher of Color, feminist theorist Evangelina Holvino (2008) stresses the importance of researching and publicizing the hidden stories at the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, class, nation and sexuality which are often overlooked or neglected in OMS.

workers' fear of status loss is such an indicator of privilege related to an organizational position (Collien et al., 2016). My research thus responds to calls for a context-sensitive reading of diversity practices (Atewologun and Sealy, 2014; Mavin and Grandy, 2016; Tatli et al., 2012) and stresses that critical diversity research on age must pay attention to the intersections of actors' organizational and societal positions to understand the reproduction of age inequalities. Thereby, it strengthens calls for a context-sensitive perspective on age inequalities in organizations (Spedale, 2018; Thomas et al., 2014).

The study on *'Age Work in Organizations'*, which accounts for differences of gender and age as well as for differences across sectors and types of organizations, also highlights the benefits of comparative analysis in CDS. Such comparative approaches are particularly helpful in uncovering the dynamics related to privilege, because these are often invisible to those profiting from them. Critical whiteness researcher Peggy McIntosh (2012, p. 197) therefore stresses the analytical value of *'social comparison information'*, which avoids peculiarizing the identities and experiences of the less powerful by comparing the experiences of particular societal groups, detecting patterns, and thereby highlighting shared, structure-based experiences of exclusion and discrimination. Such comparison information may also help to reveal *'the fluidity of privilege'* (Atewologun and Sealy, 2014, p. 423), which is the simultaneity of privilege and marginalization experienced by many actors in organizations. Social comparison information highlights the double presence of victim and perpetrator, which has been studied in relation to ageism at the workplace (Collien et al., 2016; Riach, 2007; Spedale, 2018). Intersectional perspectives in CDS on age reveal that there is no clarity as to whether a particular actor is *'a "winner" or a "loser" and as to whether he [or she or they] benefits [or benefit] from privilege more than he [or she or they] suffers [or suffer] from discrimination'* (Spedale, 2018, p. 49). The study on age work reveals differences in the age work of the male steel workers and the male chemical employees with regard to status and class. Thus, men are privileged in our society – but not all men are the same. On the one hand, they profit from what gender theorist Raewyn Connell (2009) has termed *'the dividend'*, which is a relative advantage resulting from a societal system devaluing femininity and disadvantaging women. On the other hand, men are diverse as to class, race or sexual orientation and therefore profit struggle harder to achieve an ideal masculinity and profit to a different extent from the patriarchal dividend. Black feminists and feminists of Colour have long stressed that the distinction in feminist discourses between women as victims and men as perpetrators is primarily based on the experiences of white, bourgeois, heterosexual women

(Holvino, 2008). In contrast, they have highlighted the importance of families and communities to surviving racism and class hierarchies in everyday life.

The study on *'Age Work in Organizations'* aligns with calls to develop theoretical tools suited to revealing the complex, intersecting system of inequality at work (Spedale, 2018). The study shows the complex interwoven inequality structures of gender and class (regarding job and income security) with sector and organization, which produce specific reactions to age management practices. It connects to later studies which conclude that there is no homogenous identity of the older worker and claim that CDS scholars should reject simplifying binary opposition (Spedale, 2018). Finally, the study on *'Age Work in Organizations'* underlines the benefits of the emic approach to studying diversity, whereby researchers 'start with the specific context of investigation and identify a number of salient categories of difference (*ex post*), which lead to privilege and disadvantage, by focusing on the relations of power in that setting' (Özbilgin et al., 2013, p. 188). This approach contrasts with the etic approaches, which examine the intersections between predefined categories of difference in relation to workplace diversity.

The research paper on *'Age Work in Organizations'* accounts for gender, organizational position, sector and organization size as contextual factors shaping power, influence and interests in organizations. However, actors' power of influence could have been refined in terms of their actual position in informal networks, class background or their negotiation skills. The article on *'Concepts of Power in Boundary Spanning Research'* outlines how boundary spanning studies have primarily used the concept of power bases (French and Raven, 1959) to explain actors' varying power of influence. Different bases of power, such as a management position, expert status or negotiation skills, enable actors to convince others of new ideas or to stabilize collaboration (e.g. Ibarra, 1993; Jemison, 1984). The importance of particular power bases varies by context (Schwab et al., 1985; Williams, 2002) and their effect increases with the uniqueness and importance of the skill for the organization (Barner-Rasmussen et al., 2014). Furthermore, the power bases of the targeted actor are relevant for actors when using their power of influence (Marrone, 2010). A more differentiated perspective on various kinds of power bases in organizations could therefore enrich and refine the notion of power in CDS, as has recently been called for (Ahonen et al., 2013), and it could propel a context-sensitive perspective on privilege and inequality (Özbilgin et al., 2013).

3.3 Power, ideology and counter-hegemonic reading

A key characteristic of CDS is understanding how the (re)construction of difference maintains societal relations of power (Zanoni et al., 2010). Consequently, power is an important concept in this field of research; yet critical diversity scholars seldom detail their particular perspective on power (Ahonen et al., 2013). In *‘Concepts of Power in Boundary Spanning Research’*, I develop an analytical framework which helps scholars locate their understanding of power and discover new ways to examine the phenomenon. The article responds to claims to develop ‘more refined understandings of power ... within diversity discourse’ (Ahonen et al., 2013, p. 263) as well as in more ‘mainstream’ theories, such as institutional work (Clegg, 2010; Munir, 2015).

My framework of power concepts shows that they have three main foci (structure, agency, discourse). They are either primarily interested in power as structural relations, as a precondition and outcome of agency, or as pervading discourses and knowledge. Each power concepts thus highlights different aspects of power which, when read together, result in a completer picture of power dynamics and power effects in organizations. The following Table 1 portrays the six power concepts with reference to diversity management processes and outcomes, and thereby is a diversity-specific adaptation of Table 6 in the review paper on *‘Concepts of Power in Boundary Spanning Research’* (Chapter 6).

Power is a highly contested concept in numerous research fields (Göhler, 2009; Haugaard, 2012), as well as OMS (Clegg et al., 2006; Courpasson et al., 2015). In particular, functional and critical research perspectives on power appear irreconcilable (Clegg and Hardy, 1996). My analytical framework highlights the common differentiations of power (Clegg and Hardy, 1996; Göhler, 2009), showing that scholars of critical and functionalist perspectives may depart from a similar perspective on power. However, their normative underpinnings may lead them to study these structures on different levels and with significantly different interpretations as to relations of domination and exploitation.

Table 1. Concepts of power and their contribution to understanding diversity management processes and outcomes.

Structure-oriented perspective (power over)	
Power is a structural and individual resource which can be leveraged to drive organizational innovation through diversity management practices. Power is primarily exercised in the form of force/command or persuasion/consent. An diversity professional’s agency is relational, depending on their structural position and skills.	
Power-as-resource	Power-as-domination
Diversity management activities need to be coupled with power bases (e.g. expert knowledge, management position) to drive innovation. Diversity professionals can increase their power of influence by gaining access to new power bases, combining power bases (also by collaborating with others) or redefining the importance of power bases in a field or organization.	Diversity management processes and diversity professionals are entangled in societal power relations. Related social boundaries of gender, race or class hamper diversity management efforts of knowledge sharing and learning in organizations. Often, these obstacles to learning and collaboration remain invisible.
Agency-oriented perspective (power to)	
Power emerges in (inter-)action and is a synonym to individual and collective agency. Diversity professionals create spaces of collaboration to achieve common ends and empower others to collaborate. Power is not a possession but exists only in its actualization.	
Power-as-empowerment	Power-as-emancipation
Diversity professionals need to empower themselves and others to enable collaboration. Jointly created spaces of collaboration across gender, race, or class serve to improve team performance, product quality and service; as does empowerment through diversity management efforts. Diversity management success is often a common endeavour.	Less powerful actors often stabilize collaboration in diversity management processes by skilfully navigating historically-grown societal and global power relations. Postcolonial research can help to detect these contributions as well as subtle acts of resistance to stereotypization embedded in diversity management.

Discourse-oriented perspective (power through)	
Discourses (re)constitute the objects they talk about and thus have two powerful effects: objectification and subjectification. Power cannot be located in the position of a powerful diversity professional but rather permeates societies and organizations.	
Power-as-objectification	Power-as-governmentality
Objects (e.g. diversity scorecard) also play agentic roles in diversity management processes. Discourses have reality-constituting effects, also on these objects. Over time, objects become associated with certain possibilities for learning and action. They thereby enable and hinder learning and knowledge sharing between actors.	Diversity professionals and their tools are entangled in technologies of governing the self and others. Logics of flexibility and transparency may appear free of power but have various objectifying and subjectifying power effects. They may subtly drive diversity managers and other actors into self-discipline and self-surveillance.

Diversity researchers with a discourse- and governmentality-based perspective on power have cautioned that:

‘there is no diversity-in-general; the conditions under which diversity becomes an object to be known (and critiqued) is a result of particular and specific circumstances and processes of knowledge production. Similarly, the ways in which some people become legitimate subjects of diversity research are contextual and products of relations of power in which the modality of power has distinctive effects in the processes of subjectivation and objectivation’ (Ahonen et al., 2013, p. 269).

Power is analysed from a governmentality perspective ‘in its effects rather than its sources and at the margins rather than at the centre’ (Gunn, 2006, p. 709). By contrast, domination-critical concepts of power seek to locate power in historically grown, longstanding relations of domination and blame particular actors (e.g. the state, the capitalist) for persisting structures of domination. Dominant actors who are privileged by certain structural, societal relations seek to secure their resourceful, influential position – also by masking social inequalities. From a dominance-critical power perspective, the masking of social inequalities results from an actors’ structural position shaping her or his interests, perception and experiences.

In ‘*Critical–Reflexive–Political*’, I draw on the notion of ‘misperception’ by French sociologists Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J. D. Wacquant (1992b) to further explain the masking of social inequalities. The term refers to ‘the fact of recognizing a violence which is wielded precisely inasmuch as one does not perceive it as such’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992b, p. 168). The principle of meritocracy, for instance, masks unequal opportunities in the school system between children with and without a migratory background because degrees appear to objectively portray a student’s intelligence and skills. In turn, unequal power relations are naturalized and become taken-for-granted. Bourdieu termed this dynamic symbolic power, or alternatively symbolic violence (Crossley, 2005).

Diversity initiatives and equal opportunity measures are embedded in a societal and organizational environment characterized by symbolic violence and a resulting misperception of social inequalities. Therefore, it is unsurprising that HR managers seek to blame individual workers for their declining physical ability and performance, instead of critically reflecting on the health consequences of detrimental working conditions, as shown in the paper on ‘*Age Work in Organizations*’. My co-authors and I conclude that

‘[t]hose fighting against age inequalities ... should thus critically address the dismantling of social security systems and the related tendency of individualizing risks and responsibilities. Without such a strategy, the deconstruction of age images will predominantly serve the corporate interests in reinforcing the norm of the ever-healthy organizational performer’ (Collien et al., 2016, p. 793).

Our claim resonates with other context- and power-sensitive diversity studies which highlight that factors such as the neoliberal environment or the colonial history of particular countries shape the perception of diversity and the treatment of particular societal groups (Pringle and Ryan, 2015). In this vein, researchers have problematized that

‘[t]he extant diversity literature lacks a sense of the interplay between historical and geographic contexts and the construction of difference. It is essential to avoid overlooking the situated nature of intersectionality of diversity across time and place, because differences that define individuals and groups are highly specific across temporal and spatial dimensions’ (Tatli and Özbilgin, 2012, p. 193).

In ‘*Critical–Reflexive–Political*’, I therefore demand that to question normalized social identities and practices, researchers must read them in their historical context (historization). The context-dependant, historically grown nature of identities, behaviour and practices becomes forgotten over time, because history itself produces its own forgetting ‘by incorporating the objective structures it produces in the second nature of the habitus’ (Bourdieu, 2004, p. 114). Bourdieu (2001, p. 84) therefore emphasizes that scholars must ‘reconstruct the history of the historical labour of dehistoricization’; that is, trace ‘the collective work, oftentimes accomplished through competition and struggle, that proved necessary to make such and such issues to be known and recognized ... as legitimate problems, problems that are avowable, publishable, public, official’ (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 238).

In my research, I thus highlight the benefit of studies which historicize the examined organizational practices from a postcolonial perspective. These perspectives enable a counter-hegemonic reading and reinterpretation of the observed practices. For example, in ‘*Concepts of Power in Boundary Spanning Research*’, I apply an emancipation-oriented perspective on power, which highlights collective agency and acts of resistance. I draw on business information technology researcher M. N. Ravishankar and colleagues (2013) to reveal the hidden acts of emancipation behind practices of seeming adaptation. The authors detect the subversive behaviour of mimicry in the assumed adaption practices of Indian vendors to European management norms and standards. Even though the vendors ‘underplayed their

Indian identity, staged deliberate shows of un-Indianness, and tried to sound and act like Americans’, they were nonetheless aware of their mimicry and the unequal power relations underlying their global interactions. Postcolonial writer Homi K. Bhabha (1984, p. 129) stresses that mimicry poses a threat to ‘the narcissistic demand of colonial authority’ because it represents a ‘process by which the look of surveillance returns as displacing gaze of the disciplined, where the observer becomes the observed and “partial” representation rearticulates the whole notion of identity and alienates it from essence’. The colonized thus resemble the colonizer, yet the logic of colonization also requires a fundamental difference between the two identities, which is threatened by the strategy of mimicry.

In ‘*Critical–Reflexive–Political*’, I showcase educational scientist Alicia B. Heinemann’s (2014) study on advanced training participation of women with so-called migration backgrounds¹² as an example of counter-hegemonic reading and creating counter-narratives. Instead of ascribing the women’s low participation rate in advanced training to their mentality and foreignness, like the dominant discourse does, she reveals how interlocking systems of denied recognition lead to reduced participation. Interactions with training providers signalling that advanced training is solely for German citizens as well as time-consuming family tasks, limited work permits and precarious citizenship status, produce a complex web of exclusion and demotivation which lead these women to conclude that ‘advanced training is solely for those who belong’ (Collien, 2018, p. 140). Heinemann (2014) labels the resulting behaviour of these women as ‘the habitus of not belonging’. By revealing this web of exclusion, she provides an alternative narrative to the hegemonic discourse.

Counter-hegemonic reading departs from an understanding of power rooted in ‘a dominance model ... reflected in an asymmetrical world view ... often conceptualized as “hegemony”’ (Berger, 2005, p. 15). As outlined in ‘*Concepts of Power in Boundary Spanning Research*’, the term ‘hegemony’ was prominently used by Italian communist writer Antonio Gramsci, who sought to understand the reproduction of dominance structures, even by those disadvantaged by them. He explains their compliance through his concept of hegemony, where dominance is produced ‘by consent rather than force ...; and it is attained through the

¹² Heinemann (2014) consciously refers to her interviewees as ‘German’ and ‘with so-called migration background’ to signal that these women have their centre of life in Germany and that migration background is a socially constructed, homogenizing social identity. Her reflections are detailed in Chapter 7.1. The German Federal Statistical Office defines that ‘the population group with a migration background consists of all persons who have immigrated into the territory of today’s Federal Republic of Germany after 1949, and of all foreigners born in Germany and all persons born in Germany who have at least one parent who immigrated into the country or was born as a foreigner in Germany’ (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2017).

myriad ways in which the institutions of civil society operate to shape, directly or indirectly, the cognitive and affective structures whereby men [and women] perceive and evaluate problematic social reality' (Femia, 1975, p. 31). Education researcher James Tony Witson (1995) stresses that those who adopt a counter-hegemonic perspective are aware of the entanglement of acts of resistance in dominance structures and the fact that we are socialized into systems of oppression and thought, which we often take for granted. He writes:

'The essential and unique contribution of "hegemony" is its revelation of how the programme of dominant groups is advanced, not simply by excluding oppositional programs, but by locating the opposition within the total ideological and sociopolitical structure in places where the opposition may be harmless or even supporting to the structure's viability' (Witson, 1995, p. 131).

Counter-hegemonic reading therefore 'requires some consciousness of the ideological structures operating in the culture generally' and for researchers to highlight 'an alternative articulation of interests' (Witson, 1995, p. 139f.). Critical Diversity researchers have called for an awareness 'that the experiences of women, black people, lesbians and gays are rooted in historical patriarchal, raced, and homophobic structures that are reproduced through generations and acted out in individual biographies' (Healy, 2015, p. 19). Counter-hegemonic reading and related counter-narratives can be powerful tools in revealing the workings of history and for maintaining the link between diversity research and 'histories of discrimination, colonialism, diaspora and economic exploitation' (Ahonen et al., 2013, p. 272). Feminist, postcolonial or queer studies provide a rich basis for such counter-hegemonic perspectives, because they stand in a tradition of advancing marginalized perspectives and voices and telling alternative histories (Ahmed and Swan, 2006).

3.4 Proposing an agenda of being critical, reflexive *and* political

CDS, CMS, Critical Performance Studies, etc.¹³ – there are many research streams in OMS which carry the label ‘critical’. However, what critical actually means remains a difficult concept. Reflecting on the emergence of CMS, organization theorists Valerie Fournier and Chris Grey (2000, p. 16) stress that critical implies ‘at the most basic level, to say that there is something wrong with management, as a practice and as a body of knowledge, and that it should be changed’. They conclude that ‘there is no ultimate way of tracing boundaries between critical and non-critical work [yet] boundaries are nonetheless drawn and recognized by, for example, the kinds of work referenced by authors’ (Fournier and Grey, 2000, p. 17). They add that CMS constitute themselves through the plurality of critical theoretical traditions which they build on, such as the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, poststructuralism or feminism. The same can be said to hold true for CDS, which draw on similar bodies of research with a stronger focus on the construction and management of difference in organizations and its consequences for the (re)production of social inequalities (Zanoni et al., 2010).

The referenced body of research, scepticism towards essentializing identities, and an interest in changing unequal power relations of race, class or gender in organizations appear to account for the ‘critical’ in CDS (see Chapter 2.2 on the key characteristics of CDS). In ‘*Critical–Reflexive–Political*’, I ask what *being* critical could mean as a research agenda for diversity scholars seeking to dismantle the reproduction of dominance and social inequalities in organizations. I argue that three elements are actually required to dismantle dominance structures in research: being critical, being reflexive and being political. Aspects of these elements are already present in CDS, yet in an extremely fragmented and dispersed manner. I thus provide a unitary framework for diversity scholars against which to reflect upon their approach to studying the maintenance (and altering) of social divisions and relations of dominance in organizations. The following Figure 1 provides an overview of the triad’s elements. It is a shortened version of Figure 2 in Chapter 5, which portrays the elements in relation to learning in organizations.

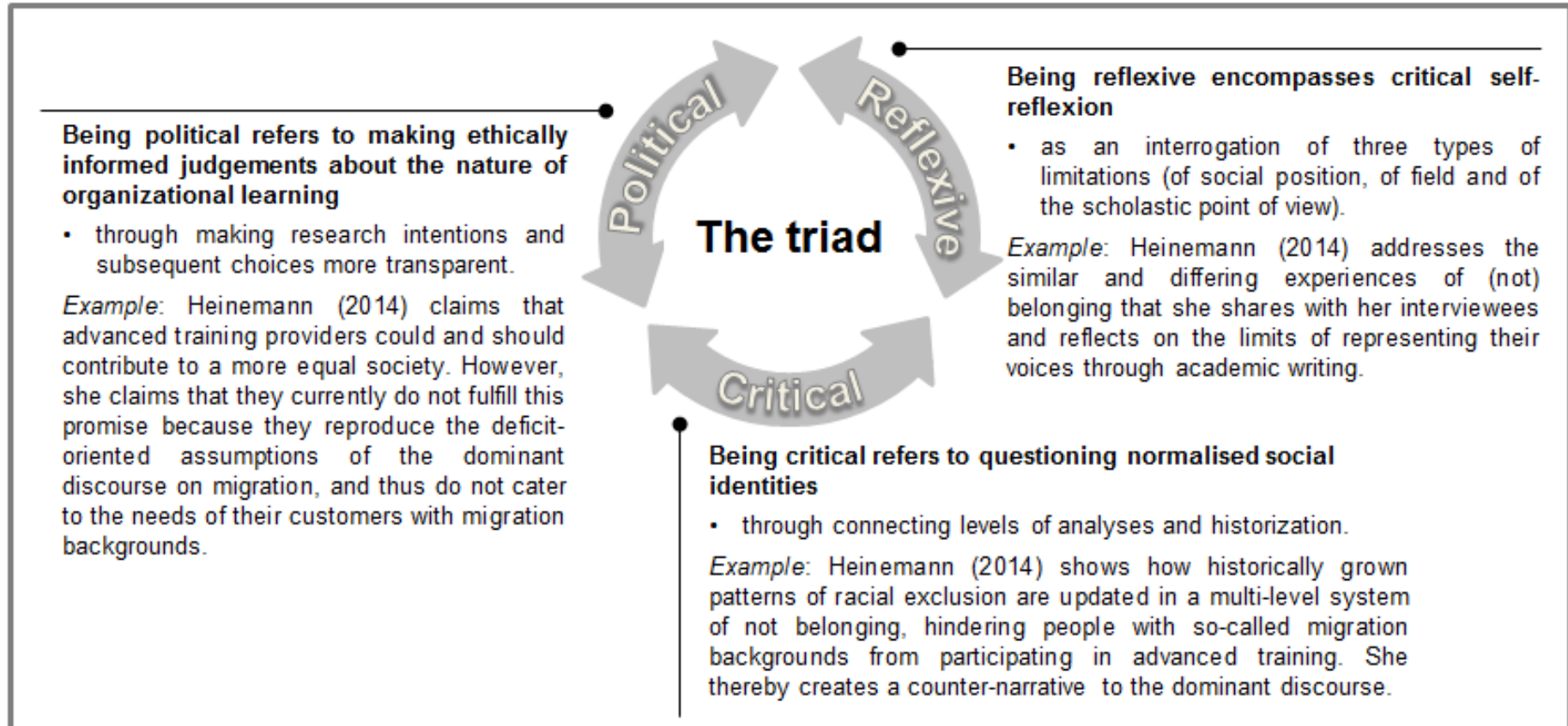
¹³ The roots of the label ‘critical’ emerged in the 1990s in OMS: ‘[T]he enmeshment of management in highly contested changes [in the UK in the 1980s] (e.g. public sector restructuring, downsizing, cultural re-engineering) offered a fertile ground for a more critical appreciation of management’ (Fournier and Grey, 2000, p. 11). Scholars tried to unify these critical analyses under the term CMS.

The element of *being critical* highlights three aspects. First, critical diversity researchers should be sceptical towards and question normalized social identities and related assumptions, beliefs, and practices when seeking to dismantle diversity-related power relations and inequalities in organizations. Questioning taken-for-granted practices and identities resonates with the non-essentialist perspective on difference deemed a core characteristic of CDS (Ahmed and Swan, 2006; Zanoni et al., 2010). Second, as detailed in Chapter 3.2, scholars should conduct a multi-level analysis to reveal the ambivalent dynamics of maintenance and frequently change the characteristics for altering and studying social inequalities in organizations (Meyerson and Scully, 1995).

The third aspect of being critical resonates with a research stream in CDS which points to the importance of context and history in relation to understanding power relations and dynamics in organizations (e.g. Özbilgin et al., 2013; Pringle and Ryan, 2015; Syed and Özbilgin, 2009). I claim that researchers should read the observed practices, behaviour, and identities in their particular historical context with an ideology-critical attitude. I have referred to this practice as ‘counter-hegemonic reading’, as detailed previously in Chapter 3.3.

Being reflexive is the second element of the triad. It encompasses critical self-reflexion ‘as an interrogation of three types of limitations (of social position, of field and of the scholastic point of view)’ (Collien, 2018, p. 137). Reflecting on the effect of one’s own social position on the research connects to a core thought of feminist theory which has also influenced Critical Diversity Studies (e.g. Sinclair, 2000). Feminist researchers have criticized the illusion of a neutral and objective science and revealed the particular male gaze inscribed into these seemingly universal theories (Haraway, 1988). Instead, they have claimed that knowledge is situated and that research is always characterized by scholars’ standpoints shaped by their position in unequal societal power relations. Some have argued that these positionings may be beneficial. For example, the position of Black women as an ‘outsider within’ enables a critical reflection of mainstream research and practice (Hill Collins, 1986).

Figure 1. Three core elements for dismantling relations of dominance in Critical Diversity Studies.



Critical Diversity scholars have also reflected on the other two types of limitations to critical self-reflection: the scientific field and the scholastic perspective. For instance, Patrizia Zanoni and Koen van Laer (2015) consider how the rules of an academic field change the stories they write about the experiences of marginalized groups in organizations. They problematize the notion of filling a research gap and its effect on writing stories on diversity:

‘Then the tricky task comes of problematizing the existing knowledge on diversity to highlight the necessity of the study, out of which new insight will emerge. This process is commonly referred to as showing the ‘gap’, an unfortunate quantitative metaphor which evokes the possibility that knowledge gaps can be filled once and for all, and which obscures the rhetorical dimension of constructing the ‘gap’ in the first place ...’ (Zanoni and Van Laer, 2015, p. 345; in italics in the original)

The third element of the triad is the element of *being political*. This consists of making our ideological underpinnings as researchers transparent to encourage and enable the called-for, ethically responsible dialogue in research and practice (Cunliffe, 2008; Fenwick, 2008). The paper on ‘*Concepts of Power in Boundary Spanning Research*’ underlines the urgency of such a claim. For example, there are fundamental differences in the purpose of empowerment when examined from an emancipation-oriented or rather an empowerment-focused, managerial perspective on power. Both approaches highlight actors’ ability to positively influence others practices, behaviour, and identities as well as the collective ability to jointly build empowering platforms of collaboration and knowledge sharing. However, proponents of empowerment-oriented power concepts predominantly view empowerment as serving to improve customer relations and performance, without unveiling their adopted managerial perspective. Scholars of emancipation-based power concepts, by contrast, regard empowerment as a step towards freedom from restraining ideologies, control and domination (Inglis, 1997). Consequently, researchers interpret practices differently and present different practical implications (see Chapter 6.4).

In ‘*Critical–Reflexive–Political*’, I claim that research that fails to explicate its ideological underpinnings reproduces the illusion of a seemingly neutral and objective standpoint and hampers beneficial dialogue across research perspectives. In the paper on ‘*Age Work in Organizations*’, my co-authors and I therefore introduce an ideology-critical reading of our findings at the end of the paper, demanding that researchers should critically reflect on the dismantling of social security systems and the neoliberal tendency of individualizing responsibilities because otherwise, ‘the deconstruction of age images will predominantly

serve the corporate interests in reinforcing the norm of the ever-healthy organizational performer.’ (Collien et al., 2016, p. 793)

In our research approach, we thus connect seemingly irreconcilable discourse-oriented, poststructuralist research perspectives with ideology-critical perspectives on power. In my review on ‘*Concepts of Power in Boundary Spanning Research*’ (Chapter 6), I also present studies which fruitfully connect these research perspectives and thereby introduce a more agency-focused approach in poststructuralist studies which have been criticized for overemphasizing structure and discourse to the detriment of actors’ agency (Allen, 2002). Therefore, a promising avenue for future CDS lies at the intersection of poststructuralist, discourse-oriented perceptions of power (relations) and dominance- or emancipation-focused approaches, whereby the discursive structuring of a field can be connected to the material networks of actors and objects.¹⁴

¹⁴ Analytically connecting discursive and non-discursive practices has been demanded by researchers studying the Foucauldian notion of ‘dispositiv’ (Bührmann and Schneider, 2015). Thereby, speech acts are amongst a variety of other factors, such as the ordering of physical space, which shape diversity management.

Chapter 4

Age Work in Organizations: Maintaining and Disrupting Institutionalized Understandings of Higher Age

4.1 Introduction

Age diversity studies provide manifold explanations for persisting age inequalities. Research on age stereotypes explains age discrimination at the workplace through ageist behaviour, yet seldom accounts for the broader context (Shiu, Hassan and Parry, 2015). Discourse-based age-research predominantly focuses on identity work and acts of resistance (Riach, Rumens and Tyler, 2014; Riach, 2007), but less frequently on related management practices (Spedale, Coupland and Tempest, 2014). Therefore, age diversity researchers (Thomas, Hardy, Cutcher and Ainsworth, 2014) call for a context-sensitive perspective on age and ageing in organizations, which combines the micro level of everyday (inter)actions with the macro level of societal cultural norms and power structures.

In our study, we respond to such a call through developing the concept of ‘age work’, understood as the institutional work of organizational actors to pursue their particular interests and to (de)legitimize age inequalities. Our innovative approach shows how their material embedding in working conditions and labour relations shapes actors’ age work. We combine critical discourse-based research on age with the concept of institutional work (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006) to examine how and why different actors reproduce or alter age images and related age inequalities. Therewith, we respond to calls for new approaches in age diversity research (Shore et al., 2009; Yang and Konrad, 2011) and to calls in institutional theory for ‘developing a strong foundation for dealing with power’ (Munir, 2015, p. 91) through merging it with critical perspectives (Suddaby, 2015).

We apply our novel theoretical approach to a multi-actor case study of four German organizations known for their age management. We come across a counterintuitive insight: in

contrast to assumptions of critical diversity research on age (e.g. Ainsworth, Cutcher, Hardy and Thomas, 2014; Posthuma and Campion, 2009), we find that maintaining stereotypical images of higher age does not necessarily reproduce age inequalities. Instead, it can serve to insist on older workers' employee rights, whereas disrupting (negative) age images can be used to dismantle employee rights. Applying an intersectional perspective we further see the specific forms of age work as shaped by differences in income and job security (Craciun, Gellert and Flick, 2015) as well as gender roles (Courtenay, 2000).

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. First, against the background of previous research on age inequalities, age management and age discourses, we lay out our theoretical conception of age work, which explains the mechanisms that guide the maintenance and disruption of institutionalized age inequalities. Second, we introduce the context and the specifics of our case study design. Third, we present our main results on different forms of age work. Finally, we summarize and discuss our findings.

4.2 Theoretical approach: A theory of age work

4.2.1 Extant approaches explaining the persistence of age inequalities

Transferring general definitions of social inequalities (Warwick-Booth, 2013) to age relations in organizations, age inequalities can be defined as differences in material and symbolic resources of socially constructed age groups within and between organizations. Accordingly, age inequalities are context-specific and thereby differ depending on country, industry, organization, team, or job (Segers et al., 2014). Age groups are often constructed with reference to the chronological dimension of age, in terms of lived years. Yet they refer to many more, often interacting and context-dependant dimensions such as generational age, relative age, or career stage (Pitt-Catsoupes et al., 2011). In this article, we focus on higher age, hence on chronological notions of age, as the age management practices in Germany studied predominantly address these notions.

There are several research streams, which show that age inequalities are quite persistent (Wood et al., 2008). The most prominent, age stereotype research, explains the emergence and persistence of age inequalities through ageist attitudes and behaviours. Negative stereotypes of older workers refer e.g. to declining physical abilities or less resistance in dealing with stress. Older workers are further ascribed a resistant attitude towards

technological and organizational change; and are stigmatized as less flexible and motivated than younger workers (Posthuma and Campion, 2009; Rabl, 2010). Conversely, positive stereotypes portray older workers as more customer oriented; and they are perceived to work more independently and precisely than their younger counterparts, owing to their work and life experience. They are also portrayed as exceptionally committed to their organization or position, even beyond the work contract (Backes-Gellner et al., 2011; Posthuma and Campion, 2009). While such age stereotypes are widespread, they vary cross-nationally with differing consequences on job satisfaction and inclusion of older workers (Shiu et al., 2015). Nonetheless, literature on age diversity tends to treat age stereotypes and ageist behaviour as individual and/or interactional phenomena, broadly devoid of an account of their context-specific embedding (Marcus and Fritzsche, 2016).

Discourse-based research on age and age management is more explicitly aware of the embedded nature of age stereotypes and age inequalities. However, it focuses on identity work and leaves the effect on related age inequalities rather unspecified. For example, age discourse scholars analyse the discursive production of a ‘new ageism’ through contemporary management practices (McVittie et al., 2003). They show that a simple replacement of negative with positive age images may establish a new (oppressing) norm of an ideal type of older worker (Riach, 2014). Studies also trace how potentially *not* discriminatory practices contribute to the reproduction of age inequalities at work (Spedale et al., 2014) or how physical and psychotherapeutic discourses regulate older workers’ identity (Ainsworth and Hardy, 2008), such that older workers become complicit in their own marginalization. Discourse-based studies also document instances of resistance, when older workers reject age stereotypes or stress another aspect of their identity unrelated to age; including gendered instances of resistance (Trethewey, 2001) and the opposition to heteronormative norms (Riach et al., 2014). While resistance is possible, the taken-for-grantedness of age images often leads to their reification. As all actors are ‘constrained by the same discourses’ (Ainsworth and Hardy, 2009, p. 1225), not only managers reinforce age stereotypes, but also employees themselves and employee representatives who could be expected to tackle age inequalities.

Like discourse-based research on age, psychological research on differing possibilities of active ageing underlines how ‘the rhetorical and discursive accounts of ageing are grounded in material circumstances of participants’ lives’ (Breheny and Stephens, 2010, p. 41). Accordingly, scholars have shown that differences in socio-economic status (Schöllgen et al.,

2011), education level (Shaw and Spokane, 2008) and pension security (Craciun et al., 2015) affect perceptions of ageing. However, the impact of context- and actor-specific meaning of age and ageing on management practices still remains underspecified in this research stream.

In our study, we merge the abovementioned studies to develop a theory of age work, which addresses the shortcoming of each research stream. Thereby, we seek to develop a framework for examining the complex, recursive relationship between the construction of age, an actor's access to material and symbolic resources, the legitimization and impact of management practices and the reproduction of power structures. For this purpose, we draw on the concept of institutional work (Lawrence et al., 2011; Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006), which helps us to understand how and why actors reproduce or alter specific age images and related age inequalities in a specific context.

4.3 Methods

4.2.2 Age work: Constituting practices that maintain or disrupt age inequalities

According to Thomas B. Lawrence and Roy Suddaby (2006, p. 216) 'there are enduring elements in social life—institutions—that have a profound effect on thoughts, feelings and behaviour of individual and collective actors'. Institutions are formal and informal rules, regulations and practices that over time have acquired the 'status of taken-for-granted facts' (Barley and Tolbert, 1997, p. 99) and that 'provide stability and meaning to social life' (Scott, 2001, p. 48). Literature on age discrimination in organizations reveals that age is such a social institution, where age and management discourses are interwoven and thereby shape and normalize rules, regulations and practices driving age inequalities in societies and organizations and vice versa. We refer to such products of intersecting age and management discourses as socially embedded, taken-for-granted, more or less collectively shared age images, which are an integral part of age as an institution. While research on age discrimination applies the term age stereotypes and often focuses on the construction of age categories on the individual level, we use the term age images to explicitly point to the entanglement of macro- and micro-level discourses and practices in producing age as an institution. Accordingly, age images are context specific, multidimensional and intersectional phenomena which are 'nested' (like other social institutions; cf. Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006, p. 249). They shape the categorization, perception and treatment of age groups, and

give sense to and (de)legitimize rules, regulations and practices driving or deinstitutionalizing age inequalities. In turn, age inequalities position actors differently in their access to material and symbolic resources, which influences their perceptions of ageing and possibilities of living up to the current ideal notion of ageing (Craciun et al., 2015).

Although institutionalized age images and related age inequalities are deeply rooted in most societies and therefore relatively persistent over time, they are also inconsistent, contradictory and open to change (Trethewey, 2001; Riach, 2014) as a result of actors' institutional work (Dacin et al., 2002). We refer to the dynamics by which age as an institution is changed and maintained as 'age work'. In their initial definition, Lawrence and Suddaby (2006, p. 215) define institutional work as 'the purposive action of individuals and organizations aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions'. Incorporating their definition with our notion of age images, we conceptualize age work as practices that maintain or disrupt unequal age relations, through invoking and/or modifying existing age images as well as creating new ones.

As discourse-analytical studies on age suggest (Spedale et al., 2014; Ainsworth and Hardy, 2009), ageist organizational practices are the result of effortful accomplishment by a variety of actors. Correspondingly, institutional change and maintenance are 'not a stable property of the institutional order' (Micelotta and Washington, 2013, p. 1138). Institutional maintenance is often intensified when threatened by disruptive events (Currie et al., 2012, p. 20; Lok and de Rond, 2013) and/or becomes apparent after such events through attempts of repairing an institution (Micelotta and Washington, 2013).

Institutional maintenance can be achieved through containment or restoration work. *Containment* stabilizes the flow of practices 'despite small divergences from the relevant script' (Lok and de Rond, 2013, p. 197) and can be distinguished into *normalization* and *custodial work*. In our study, we expect human resource (HR) managers to normalize ageist practices by ignoring employees' claims to change them; and we expect employees to normalize the status quo by accepting it and remaining silent. Custodial work is instead done with a specific strategic intent to stabilize and legitimize practices (Lok and de Rond, 2013). For instance, HR managers could refer to declining physical abilities of older workers to justify ageist wage distributions.

Restoration work is conducted when containment work becomes increasingly untenable and a major breakdown occurs (Lok and de Rond, 2013). It can appear as *repair work*

(Micelotta and Washington, 2013) or *reversing*, whereby actors try to convince others to fully restore an institutionalized practice (Lok and de Rond, 2013). Regarding age work, employee representatives might for example draw on images of declining physical abilities of older workers to argue for restoring early retirement practices. Such a form of maintenance work can be labelled as restoring moral foundations, adapting the term of ‘disassociating moral foundations’ by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) which is associated with institutional disruption.

The institutional disruption work of disassociating moral foundations disassociates ‘the practice, rule or technology from its moral foundation as appropriate within a specific cultural context’ (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006, p. 236). It often rather gradually undermines and not overthrows these foundations. Altering meaning and constructing new identities are especially powerful tools to undermine institutional foundations and induce institutional change (Hardy and Maguire, 2008). Another form of disruption is *undermining assumptions and beliefs*, which facilitates ‘new ways of acting that replace existing templates’ (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006, p. 237). Organizational actors could for example contradict the perceived risks of demographic change through deconstructing taken-for-granted images of higher age.

Research discussing institutional change suggests that marginalized actors might rather seek to disrupt the status quo yet often lack access to material and symbolic resources, while more resource-rich actors might seek to maintain it (Hardy and Maguire, 2008; Currie et al., 2012) or might simply lack the motivation to induce institutional change due to their privileged position (Garud et al., 2007). Material and symbolic resources such as community support or organizational positions have furthermore proven decisive for the institutional work actors engage in (Voronov and Vince, 2012). While even those disadvantaged by particular practices might maintain these practices because of underlying, often taken-for-granted assumptions of their legitimacy (Ainsworth and Hardy, 2009), competing discourses challenge the dominant discourse on age and serve as discursive resources to fight age inequalities. Even marginalized actors are thus not entirely deprived of power, yet, different access to resources shapes whether and how actors can use discursive positions to alter or maintain taken-for-granted age images and age inequalities. Ultimately, institutional frameworks and (related) differences in access to discursive and material resources shape actors’ perceived and pursued interests (Scott, 1987, 1995), and accordingly the forms of

institutional work they engage in, as Creed et al. (2010) demonstrated in their study on the identity work of gay ministers in a context of competing institutional logics.

Our notion of age work builds on these insights, making aware that age inequalities are as much a result of effortful maintenance or ignorance by those who profit from a specific institutional arrangement as by the complicity or resistance of marginalized actors (Spedale et al., 2014). Actors' possibilities and interests in changing institutionalized inequalities are thus not simply given but discursively produced through a combination of actors' situated knowledge, their material embedding and their access to discursive positions. Tracing how and why actors' maintain or disrupt age images and related age inequalities therefore requires paying attention to actors' complex embeddedness in unequal power relations. Through coupling institutional work with critical age diversity studies we seek to 'develop a sensitivity to problematic issues of power ... and confront them' (Munir, 2015, p. 91); an issue called for in theoretical reflections about the state-of-the-art of institutional theory (Suddaby, 2015).

Our unique framework allows tracing how and why different actors reproduce or alter age images and related age inequalities in organizations. Empirically, we build on four case studies of four German organizations known for their proactive age management.

4.3.1 Data collection

Germany provides a rich case to examine the persistence as well as the disruption of age inequalities because there have been numerous legal, socio-political and organizational attempts to activate older workers' potentials. At the time of data collection in 2008/2009, early retirement options were already being dismantled; the abolishment of the Partial Retirement Act (*Altersteilzeitgesetz*) as well as the increased State Pension Age were still debated but predominantly seen as given. Several socio-political activation measures had also been taken (Müller-Camen et al., 2011).

We draw on four in-depth case studies conducted within an research project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council on the challenges and implications of age diversity management in the UK and Germany. Case studies were chosen on the basis of purposive sampling. The choice was restricted to large organizations (>1.000 employees) as these are known to implement HR strategies and programs more formally than small and medium-sized companies. As HR practices differ between industries, we included four German organizations: chemical, steel, retail and education (schools). These four sectors were

selected, as they are known to be addressing the challenges of an ageing workforce. In Germany, the steel and the chemicals producers have to follow sector-level collective bargaining agreements concerning demographic change. Moreover, they and the retail company are members of the government initiated ‘Demographic Network’ whose members have committed themselves to eliminating age discrimination and promoting inter-generational knowledge transfer through HR policies. The German educational institution studied is also known for addressing and discussing the opportunities and challenges of demographic change for HRM policies (Schröder et al., 2014).

To study age work as the joint work of all organizational actors and to triangulate perspectives (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005), interviews were conducted with different organizational actors (see Table 2). Besides managers, we were keen to interview older employees themselves as well as employee representatives who are there to stand in for their rights. Managers and employee representatives were interviewed alone, in dyads or groups, depending on their disposability. Employees 50⁺ were interviewed collectively in dyads or groups of four to eight, each members of a specific work group or holders of the same job, in order to facilitate discussions about their experiences in relation to their jobs, managers, colleagues and the shared workplace context. The interviewed employees of the chemical and the steel firm were all men, whereas the interviewee groups of teachers and retail workers consisted of women and men. The chemical and the school employees represented highly qualified employee groups (engineers and teachers), whereas the retail and the steel workers had lower qualification levels. The group interviews of employees 50⁺ allowed us to uncover underlying perceptions of higher age and institutionalized age inequalities ‘that members already have, and which are expressed, amplified and possibly modified through the collective interaction in the group’ (Payne and Payne, 2004, p. 104). In our research context, group interviews (especially with employees) bear the advantage of revealing discussions about possibilities of collective resistance, whereas interviews with single actors might have led to a stronger focus on individual challenges of ageing. The interviews lasted between 30 minutes and two hours, with the larger part running one hour each.

Table 2. Number of interviews and interviewees by age-sensitive case study organization.

Number of interviews (and interviewees; <i>thereof women</i>)	Retail	Steel	Chemical	School	Total
– HR managers	3 (3; 2) two single interviews one group interview with two people (one person twice)	2 (3; 0) one single interview one group interview with two people	1 (1; 0) one single interview	2 (5; 4) one single interview one group interview with four people	8 (12; 6)
– Line managers	4 (7; 2) two single interviews two group interviews with two and three people	1 (1; 0) one single interview	1 (1; 0) one single interview	3 (3; 0) three single interviews	9 (12; 2)
– Employee representatives	1 (1; 0) one single interview	2 (3; 0) one single interview one group interview with two people	2 (2; 0) two single interviews	3 (6; 1) two single interviews one group interview with four people	8 (12; 1)
– Employees aged 50+	2 (4; 2) two group interviews with two people each	1 (6; 0) one group interview with six people	1 (4; 0) one group interview with four people	1 (8; 2) one interview with eight people	5 (22; 4)
Total	10 (15; 6)	6 (13; 0)	5 (8; 0)	9 (22; 7)	30 (58; 13)

Issues covered in the semi-structured interviews with HR managers, line managers and employee representatives were the strategy, structure and HR context of the organization; workforce demographics; the impact of (age) discrimination legislation; HR policies and practices in the areas of workforce planning, recruitment, training, health and safety, performance management, redundancy and retirement. In contrast, the group interviews with employees aged 50⁺ concerned their view regarding own experiences in their jobs, perceptions of age discrimination, involvement in age management practices and plans for retirement.

In order to triangulate and contextualize the findings, publically available documents such as collective bargaining agreements, studies on demographic change, company websites and internal documents such as age management strategies were used. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed and finally coded and analysed using NVivo10.

The text corpus contains 30 interview transcripts with a total number of 58 interviewees, as outlined in Table 2. Our analysis is based on the original transcripts in German language; we therefore have translated illustrating quotes in the results section.

4.3.2 Data analysis

In the analysis we followed an iterative process, oscillating between the literature, the data, an emerging structure of empirical categories and theoretical arguments, which we developed by a cyclical reading of the material. In a first step, we traced the construction of age images together with their maintenance and disruption. We detected text fragments that contained developed argumentations on age at work. Based on a condensation of the aforementioned literature on age stereotypes and discourse analyses on age, we coded the text fragments by four categories of age images that actors related to management discourses: body and mind, attitude towards change, age specific competencies, as well as commitment and motivation. We further differentiated whether actors used these age images to present older workers as an organizational resource or problem (maintaining images of higher age). We additionally coded if actors argued that age did not matter or that age specific competencies were overlooked by the organization (disrupting images of higher age).

In a second step, we asked for which purposes actors upheld or disrupted these age images, thereby identifying different forms of age work based on the abovementioned research on

institutional maintenance (e.g. age work of containment or restoration) and change (e.g. age work of disassociating moral assumptions).

Finally, we searched for different patterns of age work within the group of older employees that might result from their embeddedness in different organizational structures and power relations. We compared employees' attitude to work, early retirement, and flexible working hours. Thereby, we discovered that employees' differing attitudes and perceptions as well as fears about losing the actual job or being transferred to a lower-status position were related to job or income security – and therewith not least: to gendered job attributions. Our sample does not allow concluding on generic gender-specific differences in age work; yet it shows with a view on the male only employee groups that some forms of age work can be categorized as reflecting masculinity, as we detail in the findings and discussion.

4.4 Findings

4.4.1 Co-occurrences of age work by different actors

Within our first analytical step of reconstructing age images we found a large amount of co-occurrences. Almost all actors constructed and maintained higher age predominantly as an organizational problem by stressing older workers' declining physical abilities or their resistance to technological and organizational changes. References to instances of disrupting taken-for-granted age images instead remained rare. Sometimes speakers referred to older workers' competencies that have so far been overlooked by the organization or they argued that physical abilities depend on individual lifestyles rather than increasing age. Due to this surprising amount of co-occurrences, we subsequently further examined actor specific forms of maintaining and disrupting age images. That is we examined how actors used age images in their speech to maintain or alter age management practices related to age inequalities.

In the following, we present our findings by distinguishing between forms of age work directed at maintaining and disrupting age images. As Table 3 summarizes, actors maintain (predominantly negative) images of higher age for different purposes, namely through containment and restoration.

Table 3. Forms of maintaining and disrupting age work.

<i>Maintaining (predominantly negative) images of higher age</i>	<i>Actors invoke taken-for-granted assumptions</i>	<i>Engaged in by</i>	<i>Examples from the data</i>
Containment (reinforces and normalizes institutionalized age images)	to stabilize the institutionalized age practices despite small divergences.		
Normalization work (normalizes age images)			
Accepting the status quo through remaining silent or lowered expectations	while reflexively accounting for incriminatory circumstances and the own lacking power to change.	Predominantly employees 50 ⁺	‘In my case, I will stay until 65, if I am still as healthy as I am today. It is not that I am this hardworking (...) the reason simply is that I have bought a flat, which I have to redeem.’ (Steel, male employee 50 ⁺).
Valorizing and demonizing (praising or depreciating individual behaviour based on taken-for-granted age images)	while reflexively accounting for older employees performance behaviour.	All actor groups	‘The advantage of older employees in comparison to younger employees is simply the experience, “been there, done that” is an important aspect in my opinion, especially when it comes to investment projects’ (Chemical, male employee 50 ⁺). ‘We have one or two [older employees] here who simply want to get by unnoticed during their last years ... You repeatedly have to talk to them so that our business is not harmed but ultimately you can’t do anything about it ... In any other firm you would throw them out’ (School, male line manager 3).
Custodial work (specific strategic intent to stabilize and legitimize practices)			
Reinforcing moral foundations (reinforcing taken-for-granted age images)	to legitimize potentially discriminating age management practices.	Predominantly HR and line managers	‘This is a future challenge when you have more and more older workers who cannot fully perform their prior tasks. ... Analysis have shown that older workers are longer absent from work ... that’s why it financially is a huge effort to at least maintain employees’ current physical fitness’ (Chemical, male HR manager).
	to legitimize protective age regulations and policies.	Employee representatives	‘Our perspective as union is that too little is done for older colleagues who retire for health reasons ... This is a confrontational matter because the abolition of the easing of work with increased age is a problem. ... We think that the politicians are acting insufficiently’ (School, male trade union representative).

<i>Maintaining (predominantly negative) images of higher age</i>	<i>Actors invoke taken-for-granted assumptions</i>	<i>Engaged in by</i>	<i>Examples from the data</i>
Restoration (reinforces age images)	to restore age management practices when containment becomes untenable and a major breakdown occurs.		
Restoring moral foundations	to argue for partially restoring or redirecting disrupted practices on behalf of older employees	Employee representatives	'Against this background (the demographic changes) we have claimed that we have to discuss this within the steel industry because of the specific strain ... That's why we have started ... to intensely negotiate about health measures in the plants ... to keep the people healthy within the production process as long as we can. This is particularly important against the background of the heightened pension age of 67 years, that we still deem a wrong decision and therefore demand to take back a retirement with 67 years' (Chemical, male trade union representative).
Reversing	to argue for fully restoring disrupted practices on behalf of older employees	Employee representatives	'Even the employers' association is aware of the fact that a possibility for early retirement is needed ... We have realized in our recent negotiations that our practice ... to think in time about who are the older colleagues that need help and who has to be introduced to their tasks in time to pass on the experience has proven to be popular' (Steel, male trade union representative).

<i>Disrupting (predominantly negative) images of higher age</i>	<i>Actors contradict to taken-for-granted assumptions</i>	<i>Engaged in by</i>	<i>Examples from the data</i>
Disassociating moral foundations (disconnecting an age practice from its age image)	to promote practices which foster a principle of individualizing the responsibility to uphold performance and employability.	Predominantly HR and line managers	All in all, “generations at work” reflects that we did not want to set up a programme just for the target group of older workers ... but for all employees ... who shall be motivated to make self-responsible provisions ... You can observe diseases of civilization here which do not just relate to higher age but who already start at an earlier age’ (Chemical, male HR manager). ‘About half a year ago I had an interesting discussion with one of my older employees. He is about 56 or 57 years old. And he rightfully complained that he keeps himself in shape and has to do the heavy work because some colleagues who are 20 to 30 years younger do not keep themselves fit’ (Chemical, male line manager).
Undermining assumptions and beliefs (undermining taken-for-granted age images)	to criticize age management practices and perceptions, to argue for the appreciation of own resources and practices.	Predominantly employees 50+	‘There are people who already have health issues and impairments at 40, and there are people who never have problems’ (Retail, female employee 50+).

4.4.2 Forms of age work that maintain or change age inequalities by preserving age images

Containing age work. When containing age images, actors either actively reinforced the moral foundations of taken-for-granted age images by demonizing or valorizing them or by rather passively accepting existing practices, even when practices structurally disadvantaged them.

We noted that employees were *accepting the status quo*, as a means of *normalizing work*. They intensely talk about increased stress and strains that lead to declining mental and physical abilities. Employees often say that it becomes harder for them to support these strains the older they get. Despite these complaints, they seem to accept the current situation in a more or less resigned manner. This is most prominent in the school interviews, as shown in the following excerpt.

‘In the last ten years a huge burden has been added ... Further, it gets more difficult to keep up physically ... and that indeed decreases job satisfaction, yet I still think that I will continue to work till 65’ (School, male employee 50+).

The work of teachers has intensified over the last decades while the workforce is rapidly ageing due to recruitment freezes and low labour turnover. The teachers interviewed hardly perceive any possibility to stand against the changes of the Federal authority such as increased teaching hours and reduced personnel. Their high pension security as civil servants further binds them to their jobs leading them to accept the continuously increasing stress and strain.

A member of the works council echoes this view and highlights the consequences of lacking motivation—‘an inner certain opposition attitude towards the school authority ... a rebellious attitude, but it serves self-protection as otherwise it is not feasible (to cope)’ (School, male employee representative). He complains about lacking ‘possibilities to take work pressure of older colleagues, and therefore they are forced to claim disability for service’.

Self-protection also influences the age work of the steel employees, who fear losing their jobs when reporting injuries or illnesses and therefore remain silent, as one of them explains.

‘On the one hand the employee fears losing his job, such that he avoids communicating his bodily defects ... Fear is an issue here. Will I be fully assignable again? It would not be the first case of someone having to sign a termination agreement’ (Steel, male employee 50+).

The interviewed male steel workers predominantly accept the status quo and do not raise their voice, as they would be faced with a loss of work status if they did. They fear being relocated to jobs in departments, which one HR manager referred to as ‘welfare departments’ where the steel workers ‘actually don’t do productive, value-added work in the sense of our core business’ (Steel, HR manager 2). As a union publication underlines, health issues are a major concern in the steel industry where about half of the steel workers aged 50⁺ can no longer be fully deployed owing to stress-induced physical limitations (Feldes, 2007). However, resulting from the steel workers’ high job security, relocation equals a status, but not an income loss. To avoid status loss the male steel workers engage in normalizing work through remaining silent.

Valorizing and demonizing was another form of *normalizing age work* that we found in the accounts of all actors, particularly in the school case. Older teachers seem rather disillusioned about a potential change of disadvantageous practices, while their line managers *demonize* the teachers’ alleged lack of commitment with increasing age. They lament the inner resignation of some teachers who ‘only want to get by unnoticed in their last years’ (School, male employee 50⁺). Yet, they also *valorize* to a similar extent the volunteer work of teachers beyond retirement, which was especially important in the relatively poor social district the examined *Gesamtschule* (comparable to secondary schools) was located in. Such a commitment might also lead to an accelerated exhaustion and frustration. Older teachers themselves engage in valorizing; they stress their experience and authority gained over the years.

Custodial age work. Compared to normalization work, institutional custodial work is done with a specific strategic intent and effort to stabilize as well as legitimize practices. Above all HR and line managers engage in this form of age work. Often they refer to the master narrative of decline to justify management decisions, as the following quote relating to wage policies for line managers in the studied retail company exemplifies.

‘At the end of the day, [an employee] has to show the same performance at 62 [as a younger one], otherwise ... the employee of 60 or 62 has indeed for whatever reason problems to yield the business results which a younger could ... In line with the new function, we adapt the pay ... It is not the case that here, say, is the land of milk and honey. We want to earn green dollars’ (Retail, female HR manager 1).

The respondent links declining physical abilities of older workers to poorer performance in order to justify a reduction of salary with ageing, further backing the argumentation up by the self-evident business need to yield financial success.

An HR manager of the chemical company suggests the same, when he argues that performance decreases with higher age and that the company needs to rethink where to deploy older employees.

‘This is a challenge for the future when you have more and more older workers who cannot fully perform their tasks any more. You can either think about favourable workspaces (Schonarbeitsplatz) or workspaces where they can perform 100 per cent again, or you let them perform a lower skilled task where you would have to adapt payment. However, this is not possible at the moment’ (Chemical, male HR manager).

Interestingly, employee representatives also engage in this form of custodial work with a reference to physical decline, yet based on different interests. For instance the steel union secretary interviewed applauds the standard wage maintenance included in the collective bargaining agreement as it prescribes to retain older employees and protects them against wage reductions—provision he characterizes as ‘of course a thorn in the company’s flesh’ (Steel, male trade union secretary). The trade unionist further argues that ‘more and more work is packed into the available working time ... with increasing age it gets increasingly difficult to cope with this’. In contrast, an HR manager of the steel company laments that

‘we will note that our sick persons will get increasingly sick within the next five to ten years ... not because our working conditions have worsened but because this selection effect (owing to partial retirement options) is no longer in place. This is very dramatic’ (Steel, male HR manager 2).

Restoring age work seldom appeared in our study and was predominantly done by employee representatives to preserve employee rights. The attempts of restoration mainly revolved around the abolishment of the Partial Retirement Act by the German government in 2010. *Reversing* as a particular form of restoration appeared to be especially prominent in the steel company, where up to the time of the interviews, almost all employees still retired early. Employee representatives problematized the lack of alternative age management practices, while the Partial Retirement Act was being abolished. An employee representative advocates for the restoration of the old model as follows:

‘to think in time about who are the older colleagues that need help and whom their tasks need to be passed on ... has proven to be popular ... the employers’ association has started to personally voice their concerns to the Secretary of State for Employment to rethink the abolishment of partial retirement, at least for the steel industry with its specific conditions’ (Steel, male trade union representative).

With reference to declining abilities of older colleagues (who need help), the employee representative constructs early retirement as in line with the age-specific challenges the steel industry faces. The invoked problem-oriented age images serve to protect employee rights against the ideology of the healthy and highly productive organizational performer in the context of declining social security systems and decreasing state pension systems.

While the above quote is an example of reversing as a form of restoring practices, it also contains instances of *restoring moral foundations*. Early retirement practices, which at the time of research were not yet disrupted, provide a template for both forms of institutional work. The trade union representative states that it is ‘relatively unquestioned’ that ‘a possibility for early retirement is needed’. Before arguing that it would be best to keep the existing early retirement practice, he adds ‘there might be different opinions about how the concrete solution looks like’. Instead of reversing the disruption, the employee representative solely aims at restoring the ideological foundation of the disrupted practice. For him, the notion of well-deserved retirement is in line with age-specific competencies and declining physical abilities. He might allow different age management practices to emerge, as long as early retirement is kept as their legitimate ideological foundation.

4.4.3 Forms of age work that maintain or change age inequalities by modifying age images

As seen above, actors seldom altered age images in their speech, when justifying existing or defending new age management practices. They either disassociated taken-for-granted age images from existing practices or undermined such age images by directly opposing them or providing alternative, here more positive age images.

We found the discursive practice of *disassociating moral foundations* of age management practices and replacing them by new ones above all in the speech of managers. They echo the call for a paradigm shift, away from a problem-oriented to a resource-oriented view on higher age as formulated in respective corporate age management initiatives. This implies the

necessity ‘to establish a new philosophy, indeed working towards a longer working life time, offer longer training and development and new career models that also support and demand the employees’ engagement’, as an HR manager of the chemical company explains. The associated principle of ‘supporting and demanding’ is regularly connected to new moral foundations such as lifelong physical and mental fitness and health. Participants disrupt the narrative of physical decline through ageing by claiming that fitness and performance do not depend on age, but on individual efforts to remain fit and healthy.

This pattern of age work was most pronounced in the chemical company. Its age management scheme builds on the idea that employability is not a question of age, but requires self-responsible prevention, as the HR manager pointed out. Related age-neutral norms are backed up by incentives and sanctions, as a line manager reports for the case of an employee who did not fulfil targets such as losing weight and attending a nutrition course. ‘To me this is the right way if we talk about keeping up performance at least up to the legal retirement age’ (Chemical, Line Manager 1). Also the member of the works council interviewed engages in this form of age work, replacing the narrative of physical decline with the new principle of individualizing responsibilities, as the following excerpt shows.

‘Work adjusted to age and ageing is not only a question for the older employees, but also for the younger ... Where are my performance limits, what are my weaknesses, where do I have to readjust, that is the most central point in my opinion’ (Chemical, male employee representative).

Interestingly, one of the interviewed engineers of the chemical company points out that ‘you have to clearly say that health promotion does not exist for the high paying jobs’ (Chemical, male employee 50⁺) but is solely directed at chemical workers in the plants—even though the measures of the bargaining agreement on working life and demography would also be applicable to engineers (IG BCE, 2011). One of his colleagues adds that ‘the average fitness level is relatively high ... The reason might be that we do not have such a high proportion of physical labour here’ (Chemical, male employee 50⁺). Therefore, the engineers would love to have a gym at work but do not demand any other health measures to be installed.

The other form of disrupting age work, which we labelled *undermining assumptions and beliefs*, focuses on contradicting taken-for-granted views on higher age in order to criticize existing practices and to reframe assumptions. We found this last form of disrupting age work predominantly in the speech of older employees, interestingly most often in the case of

chemical employees who distanced themselves from the company's age management scheme and the way it is presented by the company, thereby insisting on the capabilities they and their colleagues have, as the following excerpt shows.

'Quite of a lot of people here are still driven by something exceeding their individual needs ... and if we can keep this alive ... If people have this attitude then we have really the generations at work and I think we are on a good way' (Chemical, male employee 50⁺).

Other chemical employees analogously highlight the performance and motivation older colleagues display. Despite a lack of formal procedures they strive for composing teams in such a way that knowledge transfer is possible. The engineers of the chemical company, in contrast to the teachers, do not seem to mind the heightened pension age imposed by the German government. It seems more important to them to remain inspired until the end of their work life, as one of them explains.

'This desire to be someone, this patience that goes beyond ... the (retirement) security of your own life ... If we can keep this alive and transport this to more employees, then this truly is German Chemical's Demography Scheme' (Chemical, male employee 50⁺).

Variation, high employment security, the principle of seniority pay and a high level of recognition characterize the engineers' job. Therefore, they do not seem to rely too much on age management practices but are concerned with keeping their individual motivation alive.

4.5 Discussion

This study was driven by our interest to understand why age management practices only lead to minor changes in institutionalized age inequalities. We propose the theoretical concept of 'age work' to explain how and why institutional work serves to maintain and potentially disrupt social inequalities. Organizational actors negotiate age images and use them to pursue their embedded interests, that is, either to legitimize and reinforce or to delegitimize age management practices and institutionalized understandings of age inequalities. Thereby, age work produces paradoxical effects of maintaining established age images while trying to disrupt age inequalities and vice versa. Furthermore, resistance against ageist images and practices is acted out and undermined depending on employees' material circumstances and further modified by gender roles.

4.5.1 Age work: A multi-actor, power-sensitive perspective on age inequalities

Applying the theoretical concept of age work to four German organizations that were highly committed to promoting age diversity, it was striking that all actors predominantly maintained negative images of higher age. This was even more surprising given high institutional pressures to establish more positive and more differentiated images of higher age. Regarding taken-for-granted age images, institutionalized images of physical decline seem to be more prominent and powerful than age images, which point to age-specific competencies and commitment. The narrative of decline flourishes, even amongst a rhetoric of resources.

However, and this is an important insight of our study, which particularly expands critical diversity studies on age (Ainsworth et al., 2014): maintaining negative age images does not necessarily reinforce age inequalities, whereas disrupting negative age images does not necessarily reduce them. Instead, the multi-actor perspective of our study underlines that especially HR managers and employee representatives engage in age work pursuing different interests. HR managers seek to increase productivity and to profit from legitimizing disadvantageous practices for older workers in that they refer to older workers' presumably declining physical and mental abilities. In contrast, employee representatives aim at protecting employee rights. They use the image of physical and mental decline to restore early retirement options for older workers, which had been abolished due to a general cut in social spending in Germany. Here, our analysis reveals the paradoxical effect of similarly maintaining and disrupting age as an institution, which has also been noted by Susan Ainsworth and Cynthia Hardy (2009). While our study confirms this insight, we can further point out different interests in institutional maintenance (*restoring moral foundations and reversing*) underlying such reproduction.

The data indicate that managerial actors *strategically* legitimize or delegitimize age inequalities through maintaining or disrupting taken-for-granted age images whereas older employees themselves appear as relatively passive. This rather passive, resigned behaviour points to the entanglement of institutions and power, as dominant actors often lack the motivation to induce institutional change while marginalized actors often lack the resources to alter institutionalized practices (Garud et al., 2007). The employees in our study did not perceive themselves as change agents regarding (age) management practices and age inequalities, whereas managers induced changes in (age) management practices, but only those practices that served their interests of increasing productivity. They dismantled taken-

for-granted age images to establish the new paradigm of the ever-healthy organizational performer, regardless of age, yet also blind to differences in resources and abilities. Here, our multi-actor perspective e.g. problematizes HR and line managers adaption of hegemonic management discourses of performance, which often remain unquestioned in neoinstitutionalist studies (Hwang and Colyvas, 2011; Munir, 2015).

Our power- and context-sensitive reading of actors' age work responds to calls for merging institutional theory and critical perspectives (Suddaby, 2015) with the aim to 'develop a strong foundation for dealing with power' (Munir, 2015, p. 91). Whereas most institutional theory papers on power are of conceptual nature (Lawrence, 2008; Lawrence et al., 2014; Munir, 2015), this study demonstrates how to empirically merge critical perspectives with institutional work. It goes beyond the mere description of processes of institutional maintenance and disruption. Instead of praising managers' disruption of taken-for-granted age images and condemning employee representatives for maintaining them, we show that these actors strategically use positively and/or negatively connoted age images in order to argue for or against a dismantling of social security systems and a tendency to individualize social responsibilities.

Our study also shows that the reactions of older employees to the introduction of new age management practices significantly differ depending on job or income security and gender, as we will discuss subsequently. The persistence of age inequalities thus is revealed as the result of embedded actors' co-construction shaped by their differing interests and resources in changing institutionalized understanding of higher age and related age inequalities.

4.5.2 Intersectional issues: The influence of job and income security and gender on employees' age work

Differences in ascribing meaning to age and ageing, and in turn in supporting or dismissing particular practices, can according to our study be attributed to differences in gendered job and income security expectations. Table 4 displays the respective differences in age work of older employees by gender and job or income security.

It shows that while all employees seem to normalize existing ageist practices, they do so for very different reasons. Fear played a significant role for the steel and retail workers and drove them to accept existing ageist management practices or to expect nothing more than basic work simplification measures. Also, both employee groups engaged in valorizing their

age-specific competencies. Yet, the male steel workers often did not report their health issues because they feared losing their current organizational position e.g. by being relocated to a less prominent job with income reductions. Here, fear of loss of status, which is connected to notions of masculinity since ‘men’s acquisition of power requires ... that men suppress their needs and refuse to admit or acknowledge their pain’ (Courtenay, 2000, p. 1389) plays a decisive role, as the comparison with the gender-mixed retail staff underlines. The retail staff had much more precarious work contracts and had to fear severe income reductions and job loss. In contrast to the steel sector, unions are relatively weak in the retail sector. That is perhaps why they also more insistently engaged in disrupting negative age images by undermining assumptions about the physical decline of older workers and by pointing out other neglected not age-related experiences. While the female retail workers rather accepted the relocation and hoped for more appreciation of their skills, one of the male retail workers fought to get his previous position back after the relocation.

Table 4. Age work of older employees by gender and job security.

Gender composition	Men only	Steel workers	Chemical engineers	
		Normalizing existing age images through <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – accepting the status quo because of fear of loss of status – valorizing competencies of older steel workers 	Normalizing existing age images through <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – valorizing competencies of older engineers Disrupting negative age images through <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – undermining assumptions about decreasing motivation of older engineers 	
Gender mixed		Retail staff	School teachers	
		Normalizing existing age images through <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – accepting the status quo because of fear of job loss – valorizing competencies of older retail workers Disrupting negative age images through <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – undermining assumptions about physical decline by age and about competencies of older retail workers 	Normalizing existing age images through <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – accepting the status quo because of inner resignation – valorizing competencies of older teachers, yet also demonizing their decreasing commitment 	
	Low	Job security		High

In sharp contrast, teachers did not fear to criticize increased stress and strain in the education sector. Nonetheless, this gender-mixed group also engaged in normalizing age work, yet for other reasons. Teachers seemed to accept the status quo because of an inner resignation and the conviction that the school authority would ignore their critique. The high job security of the teachers, who were all civil servants, provided them with a safe base for critique and options to call in sick. They valorized competencies of older teachers, yet could also freely engage in demonizing age by describing and legitimizing their decreasing commitment.

Fear was completely absent in the interviews with the again exclusively male group of engineers of the chemical company. Being in the company for a long time, they talked about the principle of seniority, which continuously increased their income and provided a feeling of security. With regard to age management practices, they criticized the current organizational practices as ignoring the specifics of a highly motivated workforce committed to making the best of their particular project. Interestingly, they did not seem to mind a heightened pension age, as long as they could maintain their high self-motivation. Their privileged position as to income and job security combined with an individualistic perspective on health and fitness can be read as an expression of a privileged masculinity (Courtenay, 2000; Crawshaw, 2007), that shaped their age work of valorizing own competencies and let them undermine assumptions about an decreasing motivation of older engineers.

The results underline that even marginalized actors unconsciously reproduce taken-for-granted age images, while their ability to change such images is at the same time limited by organizational positions and power inequalities. Here, agency can be traced as a multidimensional concept emerging from ‘the interplay of habit, imagination and judgement’ (Battilana and D’Aunno, 2009, p. 46). In the organizations studied, the perception and judgement of early retirement or other age management practices is significantly shaped by actors’ perceptions of job and income security, which are mediated by gender norms. The employees’ institutional work reflects that their interests, or ‘micro-motives are fairly mundane, aimed at interpretation, alignment, and muddling through’ (Powell and Colyvas, 2008, p. 277) and are rather individually than collectively pursued.

Our results connect to and expand studies on the effect of higher and lower job and pension security on attitudes towards and possibilities of ageing (Craciun et al., 2015), underlining similarities and differences between actors and across sectors and providing an intersectional

reading of the results. We thereby also contribute to intersectional perspectives on age and identity (Riach et al., 2014; Coupland, 2007; Spedale et al., 2014), showing that notions of masculinity apparent in fear of status loss and an individualistic perspective on health shape actors' age work at the intersection of age, gender and job status.

4.5.3 Limitations and avenues for future research

Our analysis is subject to limitations. In the examination of German case studies we solely focused on one national context. A comparative study between two or more countries would allow a better understanding of national particularities, as the comparative case study of Matt Flynn et al. (2013) as well as the cross-national study on age stereotyping of Edward Shiu et al. (2015) prove. Furthermore, our categorized forms of age work refer primarily to higher age, whereas analysing age work on younger age or other dimensions such as career stages would bear different results. For example, retirement practices are less relevant for younger than for older workers; and the respective age work practices we found for employee representatives are specific for older workers due to the focus of our interviews.

Additionally, observing team meetings or everyday organizational practices—ideally in a longitudinal analysis—would allow for conclusions about the extent of deinstitutionalization taking place in the organizations studied. Here lies a promising contribution to research on institutional work, which seldom analyses the 'connections between institutional work and institutional outcome' (Lawrence, Leca and Zilber, 2013, p. 1029).

4.6 Conclusion

In line with recent claims of discourse-based research on age (Spedale et al., 2014), our analysis shows that it is important to examine how constructions of age are connected to organizational practices and how they maintain or disrupt age inequalities. It underlines that neither advocating a resource-oriented view on age nor criticizing the reproduction of taken-for-granted age images can be the only solution, as this runs the risk of ignoring the complexity of context-dependant power relations shaping actors' interests and age work. Particularly managers promoted a healthy lifestyle independent of age, where employees were entirely rendered responsible for maintaining their health; thereby dismissing differences in resources and intersectional perspectives, which have been proven to be important in shaping

attitudes towards ageing and possibilities of remaining healthy in older age (Craciun et al., 2015; Riach et al., 2014). Our study particularly highlights the effect of job security as well as gender roles on perceptions of age and health management practices. Surprisingly, employee representatives focused on restoring older employee rights through ageist discourses of declining abilities while fighting for a broader notion of active ageing.

We claim that in order to tackle age inequalities in organizations all actors, individual and collective ones, have to take differences in access to material and symbolic resources into account. Otherwise, society's poor—and here especially older women and ethnic minorities—will continue to be marginalized, struggling to achieve the ideal of an ever healthy performer, instead of being encouraged to accept and integrate changing needs, abilities and resources over the life course (Boudiny, 2013). Those fighting against age inequalities, like employee representatives, socio-political actors and HR managers who stand in for the rights for older employees, should thus critically address the dismantling of social security systems and the related tendency of individualizing risks and responsibilities. Without such a strategy, the deconstruction of age images will predominantly serve the corporate interests in reinforcing the norm of the ever-healthy organizational performer.

Chapter 5

Critical–Political–Reflexive: Dismantling the Reproduction of Dominance in Organizational Learning Processes

5.1 Introduction

Power-sensitive organizational learning research views learning and knowing from a social-constructivist perspective as the result of social interaction (Chiva and Alegre, 2005). Consequently, researchers claim that a situated understanding of learning needs to ‘demonstrate how learning processes are inextricably implicated in the social reproduction of wider institutional structures’ (Contu and Willmott, 2003, p. 294). Revisiting studies on power and politics in organizational learning, this paper highlights that a lot has been done to propel a situated, power-sensitive understanding of learning, and the research field predominantly developed in two directions. Some researchers have detailed how micro-politics (Lawrence et al., 2005), emotions (Vince, 2001; Vince and Saleem, 2004) and organizational power conditions (Nicolini et al., 2004; Vince and Saleem, 2004) influence learning processes in organizations. Others have suggested that social divisions manifest in micro-conflicts in group learning processes (Contu and Willmott, 2003; Cunliffe, 2008) or problematized how macro-level discourses limit individual learning in organizations by aligning employees’ and managers’ learning aspirations to an individualized logic of presentable skills and knowledge (Antonacopoulou and Chiva, 2007; Ferdinand, 2004).

This paper addresses the need for a stronger theoretical and empirical engagement of power-sensitive organizational learning research with societal power relations and issues of persisting dominance. I seek to more deeply connect the two research streams, focusing on how structures of dominance are often automatically reproduced in micro-level learning processes. Based on Pierre Bourdieu’s (1977) theory of practice, I build a theoretical foundation to understand why the reproduction of unequal power relations and dominance

structures is an inherent part of learning processes in organizations. As a next step, I address the consequences that arise from such a theoretical framing and define a conceptual triad of being critical, being reflexive and being political as necessary elements to identify and dismantle dominance structures in learning processes. Alisha M. B. Heinemann's (2014) case study on advanced training in Germany is used to illustrate the triad's benefits for organizational learning research. By explicating that learning in and through organizations should foster social equality (being political) and question taken-for-granted discourses about migrants' learning behaviours across levels of analysis (being critical), Heinemann creates a counter-narrative. Instead of ascribing the low participation of German female interviewees with so-called migration backgrounds¹⁵ to their mentality and foreignness, she shows in a self-reflexive manner (being reflexive) how a multi-level combination of historical othering discourses and practices demotivates these women and decreases their probability of participation. Her counter-narrative also sheds new light on the practices of advanced training providers and underlines the importance of questioning taken-for-granted societal discourses to improve our everyday practices of learning in and through organizations.

As outlined in the discussion section, this paper contributes to power-sensitive organizational learning research in several ways. It provides a profound theoretical understanding of the connections between structure, agency and power in reproducing systems of dominance through learning processes. Furthermore, it refines notions of interest-driven micro-politics and emotions shaping learning in organizations by linking them to societal power relations and dominance structures. Finally, each of the triad's elements responds to an identified research gap: being critical broadens the notion of context proposing historization in multi-level analyses of learning; being reflexive expands the understanding of reflexivity connecting it to societal inequalities, thereby portraying it as an unevenly distributed capacity; and being political demands more transparency of researchers' ideological underpinnings to make ethically informed judgements about the nature of the organizational learning we are observing.

¹⁵ The German Federal Statistical Office defines that 'the population group with a migration background consists of all persons who have immigrated into the territory of today's Federal Republic of Germany after 1949, and of all foreigners born in Germany and all persons born in Germany who have at least one parent who immigrated into the country or was born as a foreigner in Germany' (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2017).

5.2 Power in organizational learning research

In social-constructivist organizational learning research (Chiva and Alegre, 2005), knowledge is often argued to be hardly distinguishable from learning (Clegg et al., 2005) and is also referred to as knowing (Ramsey, 2014). Even though the social-constructivist perspective encompasses a variety of theoretical approaches, these approaches (more or less) view learning as a collective, embodied and embedded process that is practice-based (Nicolini et al., 2003), mirrors ‘a way of being in the social world’ (Gherardi, 1999, p. 103), constitutes individual and collective identities (Contu and Willmott, 2003) and ‘is intimately tied to how we feel’ (Reynolds and Vince, 2004a, p. 447). Research that views organizational learning as embedded in power relations and shaped by power dynamics consequently relates to the social-constructivist perspective of organizational learning. Whereas organizational learning studies often regard power as hindering learning processes (Hong and Fiona, 2009), this research stresses that power also *enables* learning (Contu and Willmott, 2003) and that conflict and contradiction ultimately drive organizational flexibility and agility (Antonacopoulou and Chiva, 2007). The power-sensitive organizational learning literature reflects this double perspective on power as both enabling and hindering learning processes, but with a different focus on levels of analysis, as I now suggest.

5.2.1 How micro-politics, emotions and power conditions influence organizational learning

Influential actors may induce, alter or hinder organizational learning, depending on whether it supports their goals and interests. They therefore strategically apply micro-politics, that is, particular forms of power (Lawrence et al., 2005). Integrating questions of power into the framework of organizational learning established by Mary M. Crossan et al. (1999), Thomas B. Lawrence et al. (2005) have explored what particular forms of power best support interest-driven actors in their effort to institutionalize innovations at different stages of the learning process. They conclude that episodic power, which is discrete, strategic, political acts initiated by self-interested actors, is most likely to propel the institutionalization of innovations at the stage of interpreting and integrating. Hereby, actors may exploit discursive ambiguity to reshape how individuals interpret innovations (influence) or use their hierarchical position to facilitate the adoption of new practices in their team (force). At the stage of intuition and institutionalization, Lawrence et al. (2005) promote systemic forms of power that work

through routine, taken-for-granted organizational practices. Individuals' experiences and perceptions of innovations may be altered in newly established training opportunities (discipline), or resistance to an innovation may decrease in the long run by 'simply' implementing new routines and practices because they may finally be taken-for-granted (domination).

Actors' micro-politics in learning processes are further subject to emotions such as fear, anger or joy (Vince, 2001, 2004; Vince and Saleem, 2004). Individual and collective emotions as well as attempts to avoid them may increase or reduce actors' interests in pursuing individual learning or fostering organizational learning. Studying a UK local authority's response to change processes, Russ Vince and Tahir Saleem (2004) show that an organizational climate in which individuals are afraid of failure, externalize responsibility and blame others leads to an inability to self-reflect and manifests in a lack of vertical and horizontal communication. They argue that missing spaces of collective reflection and communication hinder questioning established practices to induce organizational learning processes. In a similar vein, Davide Nicolini et al. (2004) reflect on the practical challenge of establishing stable and self-sustainable modes of reflection in organizations in their study of middle managers of the British National Health Service. They discover that emotional containment and analysis of organizational power structures within spaces of collective reflection motivated participants to question established practices and opt for change. Michael Reynolds and Russ Vince (2004a), therefore, promote approaches of action-based learning. However, Nicolini et al. (2004) also suggest that for insights generated in collective reflection processes to be effective, micro-politics need to be connected to organizational power conditions, that is, key decision makers able to enforce the institutionalization of innovations. Whereas their practical challenge leads to 'an approach that is situated overtly in the context of current organizational power relations' (Reynolds and Vince, 2004b, p. 9), the following studies pay particular attention to the effect of societal power relations, macro-discourses and ideologies on learning in organizations.

5.2.2 How societal power relations and macro-discourses affect learning in organizations

Actors may be excluded from learning possibilities because of their gender, race, class or other socially constructed differences that organize social space (Contu and Willmott, 2003). Researchers have found that social divisions related to gender, race or class structure learning

spaces, enable or limit access to material and symbolic resources and may manifest in micro-struggles over hegemony within organizations and their communities-of-practice (cf. Contu and Willmott, 2003; Hong and Fiona, 2009; Vince, 2004). Accordingly, they claim that learning involves redefining assumptions and boundaries of action and interaction in an environment of unequal power relations that define legitimate and illegitimate behaviour, opinions and emotions (Vince and Saleem, 2004). Researchers' predominantly theoretical claims about the relationship between societal power relations and organizational learning have led to calls for further theoretical exploration and empirical examination in organizational learning studies on power (Fenwick, 2008).

Further arguing that learning 'emerges out of the possible connections and interdependencies explored across multiple levels of analysis' (Antonacopoulou and Chiva, 2007, p. 289), researchers interested in societal power relations have promoted multi-level approaches to study the effect of power and power relations on learning processes (Contu and Willmott, 2003; Cunliffe, 2008). In this regard, macro-level discourses have been conceptually and empirically explored for their powerful effect on micro-level learning efforts and affinities (Antonacopoulou, 2006; Ferdinand, 2004; Willmott, 1997). Managers' learning aspirations are modified by the identity they seek to maintain, thereby reflecting external expectations like 'the learning idiosyncrasies of their employing organization and the wider educational modes common in their industry' (Antonacopoulou, 2006, p. 466). Restructuring formal training opportunities along the lines of efficiency and competitiveness may limit employees' learning choices because they are forced to reflect against the background of a system of objectified, demonstrable skills (Ferdinand, 2004).

Whereas studies focusing on the organizational level have praised the potential of collective spaces of reflection for organizational learning (Nicolini et al., 2004; Reynolds and Vince, 2004a), multi-level studies have stressed that choice and collective reflection depend on unequal access to material and symbolic resources (Ferdinand, 2004; Snell and Chak, 1998). Consequently, praise of collective reflection and choice should be accompanied by a reflection of their embedding in a broader societal context to avoid, for example, 'an uncritical acceptance of, and complicity with, neo-liberal market capitalist democratic ideology' (Ferdinand, 2004, p. 448). Ideology-critical research (Sieben, 2007) has framed managers' behaviour and actions as conditioned by the positioning of managers within capitalist relations of production (Snell and Chak, 1998; Willmott, 1997). In similar vein, Ann L. Cunliffe (2008, p. 135) has advocated a critical stance towards power relations in learning

processes, which implies ‘critiquing ideologies, normalized practices and their consequences; highlighting systemic control structures that reproduce themselves in our discourses and practices. Researchers thus have proposed that a critical approach to learning in organizations should trace instances of resistance to ‘explore the potential for changes that challenge the practices and ideologies through which established exploitation, oppression and subjection become institutionalized’ (Willmott, 1997, p. 171). Such a stance requires questioning the legitimacy of power differences, and Willmott (1997) has consequently invited researchers to make judgements about the nature of learning in organizations by highlighting who dominates and who is marginalized through learning processes in organizations.

5.2.3 Summary and addressed research gap

In my review, I have discussed the complex and profound insights gained on the effect of power dynamics and power relations on learning in organizations. Dividing the research field with respect to its levels of analysis, I outlined that one stream of research has focused on power dynamics and power conditions at the organizational level (cf. Lawrence et al., 2005; Nicolini et al., 2004; Vince and Saleem, 2004), whereas another stream of research has prioritized the connections between macro-level discourses and micro-level learning efforts (cf. Antonacopoulou, 2006; Ferdinand, 2004), also stressing the importance of integrating societal power relations into power-sensitive organizational learning research (cf. Contu and Willmott, 2003; Cunliffe, 2008). In this paper, I seek to more strongly connect and expand the two research streams by systematically exploring how issues of persisting dominance related to societal power relations influence learning in organizations. I suggest that a reflexion on dominance structures, which are often subtly perpetuated through organizational learning, is particularly important for organizational learning research that seeks to alter unequal power relations. Therefore, I now lay a theoretical foundation to explain the connection between societal power relations, persisting dominance and individual agency in learning processes based on Bourdieu’s (1977) theory of practice. This approach enables me to refine the notion of interest-driven actors executing particular micro-politics (Lawrence et al., 2005) with regard to maintaining social identities of race, class or gender. Additionally, I respond to calls to reveal who profits and who is disadvantaged by particular learning understandings and arrangements (Willmott, 1997) by connecting macro-level discourses to longstanding structures of domination and group hierarchization.

5.3 Societal power relations, symbolic power and learning in organizations

Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice emerged from his astonishment that

‘the established order, with its relations of domination, its rights and prerogatives, privileges and injustices, ultimately perpetuates itself so easily ... and that the most intolerable conditions of existence can so often be perceived as acceptable and even natural’ (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 1).

To explain the persistence of social inequalities, he draws on the concept of symbolic power, thereby linking the powerful effect of discourses in constituting reality to the social positions that enable certain actors to define reality and maintain dominance (Crossley, 2005).

5.3.1 Symbolic power and the reproduction of social inequalities

Symbolic power refers to ‘the form material power relations assume when they are perceived through social categories that represent them as legitimate’ (Cronin, 1996, p. 65). Thereby, ‘large-scale social inequalities are established not at the level of direct institutional discrimination but through the subtle inculcation of power relation upon the bodies and dispositions of individuals’ (McNay, 1999, p. 99). The reproduction of social inequalities through symbolic power depends on doxa, as individuals’ unquestioned, automatic acceptance of constructed social divisions (Bourdieu, 1984) and misrecognition, as the process of masking and normalizing assumptions, beliefs and practices that legitimize these divisions (Bourdieu, 2001).

In Bourdieu's framework, the acceptance and normalization of social divisions explains itself through the concept of habitus. Individuals constantly (re)create the social world, ‘though under the constraints of history embodied in the habitus’ (Cronin, 1996, p. 67). Accordingly, ‘[t]he most successful ideological effects are the ones that have no need of words, but only of laissez-faire and complicitous silence’ (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 133) because they are inscribed into habitus. Individuals develop their habitus, which is their ‘durable and transposable schemes of perception, appreciation and action’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992b: 126f), in social fields characterized by hierarchical relative positions. Actors struggle to improve their relative positions within a field by defining its guiding logics (economic logic, scientific logic, etc.), its valuation and distribution of specific forms of capital (money, social networks, degrees, etc.) and its valued modes of group distinction (taste, behaviour,

etc.) (Bourdieu, 1993). Their past and present field positions influence their possibilities, perceptions and strategies of action, privileging those actors in a given field that have accumulated most of the valued capital under unequal conditions of accessing such capital. An important form of capital in this regard is symbolic capital, which represents social prestige (in the form of economic, cultural or social capital) based on a dialectic of knowledge and recognition (Bourdieu, 2011) and facilitates the enforcement of the dominant group's habitus on the field.

Societal inequalities are further legitimized through language and a 'misperception of social space—which characterizes both the dominant and the dominated but to the advantage of the latter' (Weininger, 2005: 102). Misperception refers 'to the fact of recognizing a violence which is wielded precisely inasmuch as one does not perceive it as such' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992a, p. 168). For example, inequality in education is disguised in society through the principle of meritocracy. Degrees and grades (institutionalized cultural capital) seem to manifest the success of the brightest students, thereby masking the privileging influence of an incorporation of group specific, valued forms of cultural capital from an early age (Bourdieu, 1977).

The result of the described dynamics is a naturalization of unequal power relations, which Bourdieu (1990, p. 133) termed symbolic power or symbolic violence interchangeably (Crossley, 2005), operating through actors' complicity in their own marginalization. Postcolonial scholars made aware that in (post-)colonial relationships, physical and symbolic violence may matter equally to maintain systems of domination (von Holdt, 2013), and this still holds true if we compare production conditions in the West and other parts of the world as well as amongst social classes in the West.

5.3.2 Symbolic power, agency and learning in organizations

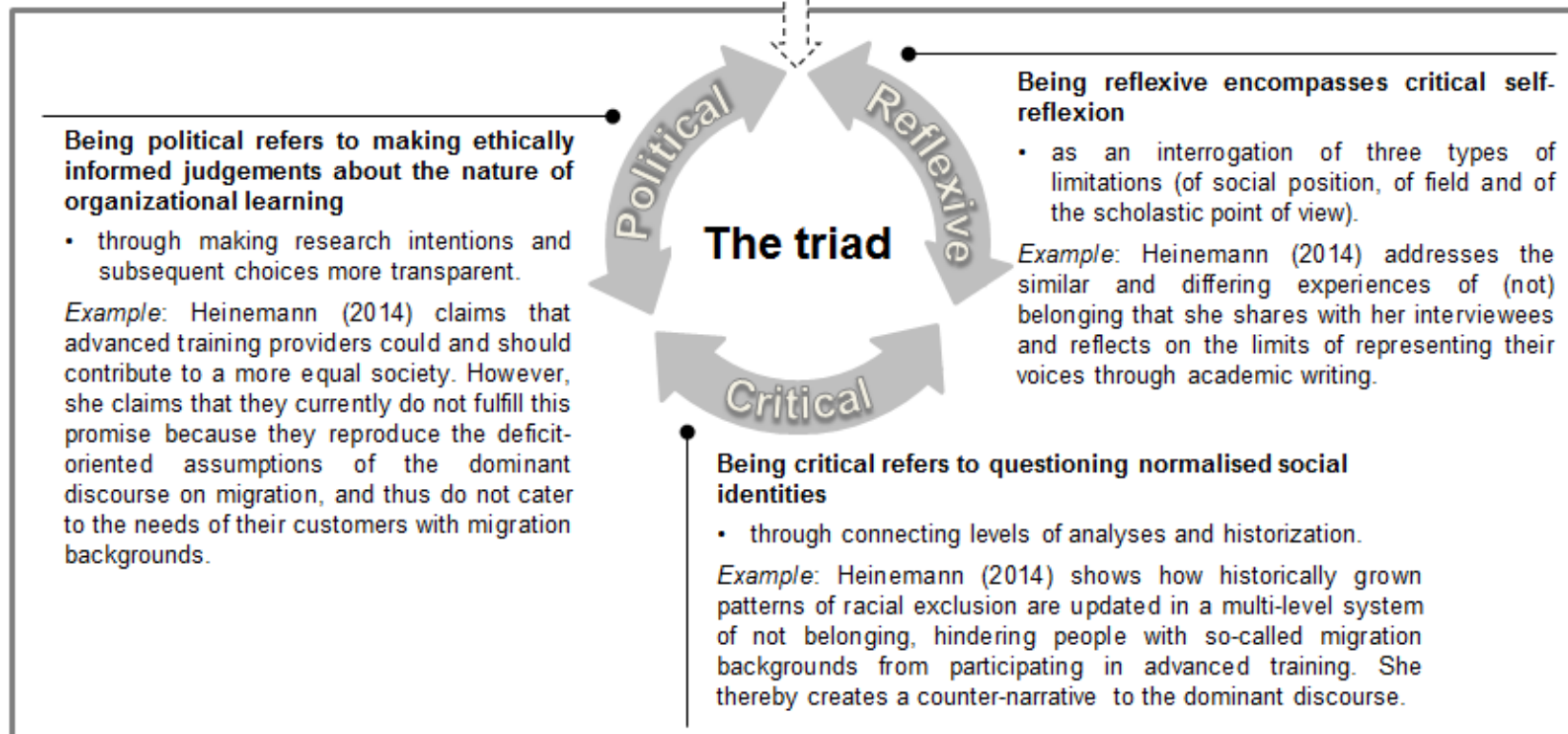
Learning in organizations occurs in the described context of normalizing unequal power relations. The upper part of Figure 2 thus portrays individual and organizational learning as an outcome of interplay between habitus and field in an environment characterized by symbolic power.

Figure 2. The triad: Addressing questions of persisting dominance in organizational learning research.

Symbolic violence and capital structure embedded in fields normalise societal power relations in learning processes.



Research requires a specific toolkit to dismantle the subtle reproduction of dominance in learning processes.



From a Bourdieusian perspective, organizational learning refers to the institutionalization of new practices in organizations and may affect the relative position of an organization within a field as well as the relative positions and guiding logics of an ‘organization-as-field’ (Emirbayer and Jonson, 2008, p. 28). The effect of new organizational practices on societal power relations depends on an organization’s particular ‘inequality regime’ (Acker, 2006), that is, its set of routines, hierarchies, or control mechanisms constituting and legitimizing hierarchical positioning along the lines of race, class, gender, disability, age or sexual orientation. Micro-politics affect these inequality regimes through single, strategic acts of persuasion and interpretation or by establishing new routines and rules (Lawrence et al., 2005). Thereby, actors’ ability to apply particular micro-politics to enable or hinder learning depends on their symbolic capital, as recognition and visibility have been proven to be unequally distributed along the lines of gender (Acker, 1990), race (Stead, 2013), class (Gray and Kish-Gephart, 2013) or heteronormativity (Priola et al., 2014). An organization is more likely to institutionalize practices that reflect the mode of distinction of its dominant group and maintain this group’s power position, not least because its members already occupy powerful positions, are infused with a lot of symbolic capital and thus have access to a broader range of micro-politics. In such a field, individual learning as the incorporation of new practices and knowledge is facilitated for members of dominant groups because new practices predominantly relate to their habitus (Bourdieu, 1984).

The incorporated schemes of perception and expression are the basis for ‘the *intentionless intention* of regulated improvisations’ (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 79). Their practical knowledge allows actors to master the game and even anticipate important steps and develop strategies to influence the field within certain limits (Wacquant, 1992). In Bourdieu’s eyes, individuals are not mere cultural dopes that simply reproduce the very same power relations that marginalize them; they also have the agency to change these structures since both ‘the habitus and social structure are shaped by the history of past struggles for material and symbolic power’ (Cronin, 1996, p. 66). Awareness of such struggles and related challenging discourses as well as an individual’s embeddedness in different fields may incite efforts to change the relative positions within a field or its guiding logics (McNay, 1999), and so does reflexivity. Reflexive knowledge represents the second epistemological type in Bourdieu’s thinking, which complements the practical sense as a non-reflexive form of literacy (Schirato and Webb, 2003). Fields, like the scientific field, are characterized by an institutionalization of reflexive disposition and thus tend to encourage reflexive knowledge (Wacquant, 1992). At the same

time, Bourdieu regards reflexivity as subject to limitations and criticizes the scientific field ‘partly because of the tendency of scholars/academics to abstract issues and treat them as if they had no consequences or practical dimension’ (Schirato and Webb, 2003, p. 266).

In this section, learning processes in organizations have been conceptualized as being subject to the subtle reproduction of societal power relations through habitus-field dynamics. A particular research approach is required to dismantle structures of persisting dominance in learning processes, which I now present in the form of a conceptual triad. The two dotted arrows between the two rectangles in Figure 1 visualize my argument that a Bourdieusian theoretical founding of power-sensitive organizational learning research (upper rectangle in Figure 1) has specific implications for studying the effect of power on learning processes (lower rectangle in Figure 1).

5.4 The triad: A toolkit for addressing questions of dominance in organizational learning research

Based on a Bourdieusian (1977) framework, the proposed triad defines three elements for studying how the naturalization of social inequalities affects learning in organizations. It further emphasizes that Bourdieu’s theory of practice profits from being coupled with critical research perspectives (postcolonial theory, feminist studies etc.) in order to deconstruct the construction and hierarchies of social divisions. The triad consists of being critical, being reflexive and being political, as illustrated by the circle at the bottom of Figure 2. Being critical discusses the embedding of research objects in societal power relations, whereas being reflexive and being political reflect on researchers’ embedding in these relations. The elements do not represent subsequent steps but a dynamic process of going back and forth between them, as symbolized by the change arrows in the circle of Figure 2. The benefit of the triad is illustrated using Heinemann’s (2014) research on advanced training participation as follows. The study is particularly important to me as a researcher and practitioner in the field of diversity management and gender equality because it reveals the multi-level mechanisms that lead to exclusion and feelings of not belonging in micro-level learning processes, and it motivates a critical reflexion of dominance structures in research and practice.

In her multi-level, qualitative study, Heinemann (2014) interviewed eleven German women with so-called migration backgrounds to trace and reveal their experiences with and motivations to participate in advanced training programmes. A theoretical sampling aimed at maximum variance ensured that all key issues influencing participation were accounted for (Heinemann, 2014, p. 126ff.), and consequently, the interviewed women were differently positioned in terms of citizenship status, educational background, family status or racialized features such as skin colour (Heinemann, 2014, p. 141ff.). Using an interdisciplinary theoretical framing that couples a Bourdieusian understanding of embedded agency with insights from postcolonial and critical migration studies on persisting patterns of othering and dominance, Heinemann (2014) tells a story about the low participation rate of these women in advanced training that contrasts the German public discourse, which ascribes their low participation rate to migrants' mentality of devaluing learning and education and thus seeing no benefit in advanced training. Throughout the 328 pages of her book, Heinemann inverts this picture. Using a grounded theory approach informed by her theoretical framing to generate data-based theoretical concepts (Heinemann, 2014, p. 121ff.), Heinemann (2014, p. 139) detects four key issues hindering the women's participation, which are outlined in more detail below: discourses and feelings of (not) belonging, capital resulting from varying citizenship status, accessibility of cultural capital such as language competencies and knowledge about the rules of the field of advanced training, and gender roles or the possibility of future utilization of the acquired knowledge. The study beautifully subverts taken-for-granted discourses and assumptions about the participation of people with migratory backgrounds in advanced training and thereby provides practitioners with altered points of intervention to create a more inclusive field of advanced training. Since Heinemann's study is entirely written in German, I translated and paraphrased its content in the following paragraphs.

5.4.1 The element of being critical

Power-sensitive studies on organizational learning agree that a critical perspective of learning implies questioning taken-for-granted assumptions, beliefs and practices (Cunliffe, 2008; Willmott, 1997). This is even more important when addressing the subtle mechanisms of persisting dominance institutionalized in organizations-as-fields (organizational learning) and incorporated in individuals' habitus (individual learning). Bourdieu (1992, p. 235), therefore,

claims that '[t]he construction of scientific object requires first and foremost a break with common sense'. As I now argue, such a break with common sense in organizational learning research requires questioning social identities through multi-level analysis and historicization. In Figure 2, the element of being critical is therefore defined with reference to these three requirements:

Being critical refers to questioning normalized social identities and related assumptions, beliefs, and practices, which legitimize and stabilize systems of domination by connecting levels of analysis and historicizing these identities and practices.

Being critical as questioning social identities. The unequal distribution of material and symbolic resources along the lines of gender, race or class is often legitimized and masked with reference to social identities (Cronin, 1996). Powerful societal groups use their symbolic capital to define marginalized identities and to legitimize social inequalities (symbolic power). Marginalized actors in turn are permanently ascribed these identities, which they negotiate in their processes of identity formation and (partially) integrate into their habitus (Bourdieu, 1977). Because of incorporated modes of domination, these actors often perform the way the oppressive system expects them to, yet sometimes for different reasons than the dominant discourses may suggest.

As researchers, we need to question these social identities and related assumptions, beliefs and practices when seeking to dismantle dominance structures in learning processes. Therefore, ideology-critical research perspectives interested in understanding dynamics of continuing exclusion and marginalization are of particular use (Sieben, 2007). Heinemann's (2014) study provides a fruitful example in this regard. Based on postcolonial research, Heinemann stresses that colonial patterns are still applied in Germany to racially mark, hierarchize and marginalize particular societal groups, and at the same time the aftereffects of the colonial imagination are collectively denied in an act of consensual silence (Ha, 2009). So-called 'legends of legitimization', based on powerful images and systems of representation, which function in a binary logic of privileging the West over the rest (Hall, 1992), normalize the hierarchization of people as to their ascribed or de facto country of origin. Heinemann (2014) questions such a legend at the intersection of education and migration discourses, problematizing that the German discourse on migration and education homogenizes people of different origins, migration history, citizenship status or cultural capital into one social identity of 'people with migration backgrounds', thereby referring to

one-fifth of the German population (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2017). Invoking colonial patterns, people with migration backgrounds are categorized as uneducated and lazy, simultaneously constructing the image of a developed and civilized West (Hall, 1992). They are then argued to have a low participation rate in advanced training because of its members' particular mentality and their shared perception that education is not that important. Structural factors that shape unequal participation of this diverse group are neglected. Questioning the social identity of people with migration backgrounds and related assumptions about their learning behaviour motivates Heinemann (2014, p. 20) to render the multiple experiences of females with *so-called*, as she critically remarks, migration backgrounds with advanced training programmes visible. Her multi-level research approach allows her to tell a different story about their participation in advanced training than the taken-for-granted legends of legitimization indicate.

Being critical through connecting levels of analysis. Bourdieu (1977) stresses that multi-level analyses are required to fulfil the promise in his theory of providing an understanding of the interrelation between structure and agency. Basing her study on a Bourdieusian framework, Heinemann (2014, p. 277ff.) connects four analytical levels to explore her interviewees' (de)motivation to participate in advanced training: dominant, societal discourses, political and juridical conditions, organizational structures and practices and individual resources. Her approach enables her to create a counter-narrative: Multi-level practices of denied recognition influence the habitus of people who are categorized as having migration backgrounds and reduce their participation in advanced training. Macro-level discourses on migration and integration constantly construct people with migration backgrounds as different and not belonging to the German nation—as not having the right mentality to participate in advanced training. A precarious citizenship status and limited work permits further demotivated the interviewed women in their efforts to continue their studies. Individual discriminatory acts of training providers and intermediaries signalling that advanced training is for Germans only or organizational structures such as monolingual training programmes additionally drove many of the women away from advanced training opportunities. Lacking knowledge about the field of advanced training (cultural capital) or family tasks also reduced the women's participation rate. The described interlocking mechanisms manifest on the individual level in interviewees' perceptions that advanced training is solely for those who belong, hindering their participation in advanced training programmes. Heinemann (2014) refers to this phenomenon as 'the habitus of not belonging'.

Whereas all of the interviewed females with so-called migration backgrounds describe feelings of not belonging, they react differently depending on their social or cultural capital (Heinemann, 2014, p. 145ff.). Some continue their advanced training because their job provides them with a wide network of supporters, and this social capital may compensate for the exclusion from the German (national) identity. Other interviewees gave up their efforts to pursue advanced training because of the discrimination they faced in job centres or advanced training facilities. Instead of valuing their previous job experiences, advanced training providers and intermediaries used their symbolic capital to question the sufficiency of their German language competencies and refused the women access to advanced training. Actors' symbolic capital draws from historically grown legends of legitimization and thus the latter need to be reconstructed in their process of becoming.

Being critical through historicizing practices. Bourdieu (2004, p. 114) writes that '[t]he "unconscious" is never anything other than the forgetting of history which history itself produces by incorporating the objective structures it produces in the second nature of habitus'. Reflecting on strategies to address this phenomenon, he urges researchers to 'reconstruct the history of the historical labour of dehistoricization' (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 82) that is to trace 'the collective work, oftentimes accomplished through competition and struggle, that proved necessary to make such and such issues to be known and recognized (...) as *legitimate problems*, problems that are avowable, publishable, public, official. (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 238)

Heinemann's (2014) study illustrates the benefit of a historically informed perspective by drawing on postcolonial and critical migration studies, which are 'explicitly committed to developing a radical critique of colonialism/imperialism and neocolonialism' (Prasad, 2003, p. 7)—tracing its continuities and effects to the present (Castro Varela, 2010). For example, she names the colonial hierarchization of migration countries in German alien acts as reproducing (post)colonial modes of exclusion and othering. A multi-layered system of alien acts hierarchizes countries of origin, thereby privileging the West over the rest and academic over non-academic immigrants (Schwarz, 2017). Heinemann (2014, p. 178ff.) calls the type of capital resulting from such a system of hierarchization 'civil capital', which also shaped her interviewees' motivation to participate in advanced training programmes. A precarious residence status, which depends on country of origin, reduced their motivation to pursue advanced training.

Reconstructing and historicizing assumptions, beliefs and practices across levels of analysis makes researchers aware of the subtle workings of systems of domination and enables them to produce counter-narratives to dominant discourses. Nonetheless, researchers themselves are embedded in societal power relations and an environment characterized by symbolic power, which may prevent them from questioning taken-for-granted social identities and practices. Therefore, it is important to reflect on one's own positing in unequal power relations and related consequences for the research process in multiple regards. This is addressed in the next element of being reflexive.

5.4.2 The element of being reflexive

Researchers' position within fields influences their perception, thoughts and motivation. Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J. D. Wacquant (1992b) therefore advocate a reflexive sociology, whereby researchers pay attention to how their relative position in fields, a field's logics and their internalized modes of group distinction shape their habitus and in turn inform their particular perspective on the research object. Otherwise,

'it [science] leaves the crucial operations of scientific construction ... to the social world as it is, to the established order, and thus it fulfills, if only by default, a quintessentially conservative function of ratification of the doxa' (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 246).

To counter the doxic (automatic) reproduction of dominant logics, researchers need to develop a reflexive relation to their habitus. However, Bourdieu has discussed three limitations to reflexivity (Wacquant, 1992): first, our positioning as to social divisions; second, our embeddedness in the academic field; and third, the tendency of the scholastic point of view to abstract issues from their practical embedding. His goal is 'to transform reflexivity as an aspect of the scholastic point of view (something to be debated) into a (more general) practice' (Schirato and Webb, 2003, p. 549). Based on Bourdieu's reflexions, I claim that a commitment to challenging privilege and questioning domination in organizational learning research (Contu and Willmott, 2003; Cunliffe, 2008; Ferdinand, 2004) requires a critical *and* a reflexive stance. Such a stance implies that researchers become aware of their own embedding in unequal societal power structures in Bourdieu's triple understanding of reflexivity, as the definition in Figure 2 highlights:

Being reflexive encompasses researchers' reflexion about the effect of their social position and situated knowledge, their embeddedness in the academic field and the scholastic point of view on the research object and process.

Heinemann (2014, p. 110ff.) addresses her situated knowledge and embedded agency in relation to her research object, stating that it is a shared belief in interpretative research that meaning and reality are created in interaction between the researchers and researched. She discusses her perspective and coding as a process of meaning making that she as a researcher imposes on the research object. Furthermore, she reveals that as an academic, able-bodied female who has a German passport but is racially discriminated against in Germany, she shares experiences with some of her interviewees. Such closeness may have helped to build trust in the interview situation but may also have led her to overlook aspects because she felt 'like a fish in the water' (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 235). She demands that researchers openly approach their research object at the risk of unsettling their taken-for-granted patterns of perception and ultimately alienating themselves (Heinemann, 2014, p. 115). Her calls for openness contain some challenges because our sometimes privileged position as academics may not allow us to perceive reality from a marginalized perspective. Here, it becomes clear that reflexivity is 'a capacity of the agent that is unevenly realized' (McNay, 1999, p. 111). Whether we as researchers are able to see and hear the voices and practices of actors within a particular field depends on our habitus, that is, our pre-structured 'schemes of recognition' (Butler, 2004, p. 2). Individuals may experience an insurmountable lack of recognition and thus not be recognized by researchers when they do not fit into any of the existing schemes of recognition. This experience is characteristic for postcolonial researcher Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's (1988) notion of the subaltern, as subjects who lack access to means of articulation and representation. Heinemann's case highlights that her interviewees 'are subaltern because they are spoken for, they are authored and already talked about. Hence their silence is made possible if not expected' (Ibrahim, 2011, p. 620). They are represented by legends of legitimization as not willing to participate in advanced training because of a wrong mentality. In a postcolonial manner, Heinemann (2014, p. 91ff.) counters this silence with an (empowering) act of listening and careful representation, thereby responding to organizational learning researcher Cunliffe's (2008, p. 138) understanding of self-reflexivity as 'our responsibility for creating ethical dialogue'. Such ethical considerations are in line with Jane Kenway and Julie McLeod (2004, p. 527), who warn that 'reflexivity is frequently deployed in a relatively weak and mono-logical sense to denote the researchers reflecting on the effect

of their presence on the conduct and interpretation of research’. They highlight the importance of Bourdieu’s third limitation of reflexivity, the interrogation of the scholastic point of view as to its implications for social practice. Consciously dealing with the (potential) effects of our research on learning practices and related societal inequalities shall now be discussed in the next element of being political.

5.4.3 The element of being political

Bourdieu claims that researchers need to make their process of knowledge production transparent to reveal ‘the socially constructed, historically situated nature of the actor’s “facts,” thus the partiality of their truth claims’ (Foley, 2002, p. 476). This is particularly important since research may affect the academic field and its power relations as well as the field of the research object and its inequalities. Reflecting about our own situated knowledge is a first step to address our embeddedness within relations of dominance. The next step is to make our research intentions and our subsequent theoretical and methodological choices more transparent because then we can be held accountable for our research, fulfil the promise of creating ethically responsible dialogue in power-sensitive research on organizational learning (Cunliffe, 2008) and make ethically informed judgements about the nature of organizational learning from our particular perspective (Willmott, 1997). The definition of being political in Figure 2 unites the responsibility for creating ethical dialogue and the necessity of being transparent about our ideological underpinnings as researchers as it affects social practice:

Being political refers to the ethically informed decision of making our research intentions and aims as well as subsequent choices as to interpretative schemes, research methods or representation of findings transparent because we may affect social practice and fields’ relative positions.

Tara Fenwick (2008) underlines the urgency of making our research intentions, aims and ultimately our ideological underpinnings visible when studying organizational learning processes, as different perspectives produce different narratives:

‘Purposes for studying learning also might be stated explicitly, for these vary considerably in ways that shape and are shaped by the researcher’s philosophical orientation: whether to increase organizational productivity and employee performance, to assist individual career and knowledge development, to improve workers’ conditions and equity, to foster corporate social

responsibility, to engender economic democracy in workplaces and so on' (Fenwick, 2008, p. 240).

In her study on advanced training participation, Heinemann (2014, p. 13) explicates her research intentions. Following Bettina Lösch and Andreas Thimmel (2010), she categorizes her particular perspective as critical social theory because it is concerned with unequal power relations and issues of dominance and aims to increase democratic structures while decreasing inequalities. She further claims that research following such a tradition can never be neutral but is always a part of political practice, which actually holds true for any research since a seemingly neutral standpoint also implicates a positioning within complex power relations, and even silence may stabilize unequal power relations (Simpson and Lewis, 2005). Heinemann (2014, p. 117ff.) adds that under the current conditions of a migration society, every topic touching upon migration is highly political, rendering a distinction between theory and practice entirely unrealistic.

Heinemann's (2014, p. 283) practical implications reflect how her perspective of a critical social theory shapes her study. She argues that government-financed advanced training programmes especially have a societal responsibility to provide free access to education and advanced training for all societal groups. She regards the possibilities of action for advanced training providers as limited, yet names multi-lingual training programmes and awareness trainings for training providers as possible points of intervention. Furthermore, she advocates structural changes in the education and employment sector, also touching upon migration legislation. Her choice of postcolonial and critical migration studies as theoretical lenses, through which she looks at a research object, is furthermore political (Heinemann, 2014, p. 49ff.). Like feminist studies, these theories can be said to destabilize the authority of a singular perspective by tracing the socio-historic relations of its production and opting for social change (McNay, 1999). The decision to make as much of the interviewees' voices heard as possible in her research is further a political act for Heinemann (2014, p. 91ff.), since she is conscious about the unequal access to means of representation for racially marginalized persons (Spivak, 1988).

The act of being political by making our research intentions and subsequent choices regarding interpretative schemes or evaluation criteria (more) transparent creates an embeddedness-aware position from which researchers can judge the nature of organizational learning with respect to unequal power relations. Transparency further enables others to hold

us accountable for our judgement and facilitates ethnically responsible dialogue. Ultimately, the question of whether or not a particular form of organizational learning is progressive or regressive may never be fully answered, yet a critical, reflexive and political approach motivates us to make informed (preliminary) statements on the matter if we take the goal of challenging unequal power relations seriously (Contu and Willmott, 2003; Ferdinand, 2004; Vince, 2001).

5.5 Discussion

This study was driven by the need for a stronger engagement of power-sensitive organizational learning research with societal power relations and related questions of persisting dominance. Therefore, I laid a theoretical foundation to understand why structures of dominance are often automatically replicated in micro-level learning processes and why reflexivity as an often called-for solution must be carefully handled. Structures of dominance inscribe themselves over time into fields and individuals' patterns of perception, thought and action, thereby influencing learning processes of both marginalized and dominant actors, to the advantage of the latter (Bourdieu, 1977). Their practical knowledge enables individuals to 'play the game' (Gherardi, 2015, p. 46), yet they often automatically reproduce unequal power relations. Reflexive knowledge is thus a necessary condition to question taken-for-granted practices and foster organizational learning, yet it is an unequally distributed capacity subject to various limitations (Wacquant, 1992). Such discussions of ontological and epistemological underpinnings represent an underexposed aspect in current studies on power in organizational learning (Fenwick, 2008). This paper highlights the benefit of providing a pronounced epistemological and ontological standpoint as to the relation between (dominance) structures, agency and power. The now discussed contributions to power-sensitive organizational learning research bear witness to this claim.

5.5.1 Interest-driven micro-politics stabilizing dominance through learning processes

This paper's Bourdieusian ontological and epistemological standpoint allows specifying how interest-driven micro-politics in organizations (Lawrence et al., 2005) shaped by individual and collective emotions (Vince, 2001; Vince and Saleem, 2004) and facilitated through

organizational power conditions (Nicolini et al., 2004) are subject to societal power relations, which foster or hinder learning in organizations through these channels. Researchers primarily studied how micro-politics are facilitated through organizational power relations (Nicolini et al., 2004; Vince and Saleem, 2004) and rather conceptually addressed that societal power relations lead to micro-struggles in group learning processes (Contu and Willmott, 2003; Cunliffe, 2008). This paper emphasizes that historically grown power relations and the workings of symbolic power grant specific actors more influence (symbolic capital) and access to various forms of capital within most fields than other actors and, therefore, more possibilities to influence organizational learning processes. Symbolic power structures actors' legitimization and capability to draw on particular forms of power to shape learning processes. Because of the relational nature of field positions, micro-politics also depend on the symbolic capital and position of the counterpart within organizational and societal power relations. Heinemann's (2014) study underlined how discriminatory structures and acts resonate with marginalized actors' habitus of not belonging and produce feelings of sadness, resignation or anger, which is a result of exclusion and marginalization of particular societal groups over time. Such dynamics may lead to a low participation rate of marginalized actors in advanced training programmes. Dominant actors may be able to draw on higher symbolic capital in relation to marginalized actors, and acts of exclusion may have a greater impact because they are based on a historically grown repertoire of othering. Such connections between macro- and micro-levels of analysis should be fruitfully integrated in future studies on power in organizational learning processes.

5.5.2 Dismantling dominance structures through a broader notion of context, reflexivity and practice-based responsibility

Power-sensitive organizational learning research claims *that* we need to question taken-for-granted practices, assumptions and beliefs. This paper discusses *how* to question such practices when they are perceived as a product of interplay between habitus and field characterized by symbolic power and symbolic capital. The conceptual triad of being critical, being reflexive and being political addresses this question and thereby contributes to studies on power and politics in organizational learning research. Each of the triad's elements expands currently underexplored aspects in this stream of research. *Being critical* highlights that we need to question taken-for-granted social identities when seeking to address social inequalities and that we need a multi-level, historically informed approach to do so. Thereby,

this element expands multi-level approaches in power-sensitive organizational learning research, which focused on a general critique as to the limiting influence of macro-level discourses on micro-level learning aspirations (Antonacopoulou, 2006; Ferdinand, 2004). It provides a broader notion of context, demanding a historization of taken-for-granted identities and practices and advocating interdisciplinary approaches. Its Bourdieusian framework thereby responds to calls for context-sensitive research, which provides ‘theoretical developments in characterizing the context’ (Argote and Miron-Spektor, 2011, p. 1127).

The powerful effect of social identities on individual behaviour is a result of their construction, stabilization and modification over time. For postcolonial scholars, symbolic power and symbolic capital are the result of historically grown colonial power relations pervading the present (Loomba, 2005) and shaping processes of learning in organizations (Heinemann, 2014). This paper’s linking of postcolonial and critical migration studies to Bourdieu’s theory of practice highlights the advantage of fusing a theory of the subtle reproduction of dominance with a historically informed deconstruction of taken-for-granted social identities and practices. Such an interdisciplinary approach enabled Heinemann (2014) to produce a counter-narrative to the dominant discourse on migration and education by establishing a different chain of explanation about why females with so-called migration backgrounds have a low participation rate in advanced training programmes.

The element of *being reflexive* proposes a triple understanding of reflexion that is aware of researchers’ embeddedness in unequal power relations. In power-sensitive organizational learning research, reflexion has been advocated in the form of collective reflexion in a practice-based setting (Nicolini et al., 2004), and thereby has also been warned to be subject to the workings of ideologies (Ferdinand, 2004). Or, it was discussed as researchers becoming aware of their social positioning and opting to create ethically responsible dialogue (Cunliffe, 2008). Based on the notion of reflexive sociology (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992b), this paper presents a triple understanding of reflexivity as necessary to address the research subject’s and object’s embedding in unequal power relations: our embeddedness in social divisions of race, class or gender; our relative position within the academic field; and our scholastic point of view, which tends to lose connection to its practical context. The last point especially connects this study to practice-based approaches to reflexivity (Nicolini et al., 2004; Reynolds and Vince, 2004b), yet stresses that researchers should reflect on their impact for practice and understand reflexivity as an unevenly distributed capacity as to lines of

gender, race or class, which infuses them with particular symbolic capital. The third element of *being political* relates to those power-sensitive studies on organizational learning, which advocate the creation of ethically responsible dialogue (Cunliffe, 2008; Willmott, 1997). It therefore demands more transparency as to research intentions and ideological underpinnings in organizational learning research to develop a position from which to judge the nature of organizational learning because we can be held accountable for our judgement.

5.5.3 Avenues for future research

My review of research on power and organizational learning exposed some under-researched aspects. Institutionalized power relations beyond the organizational level were seldom empirically studied (for exceptions see Antonacopoulou, 2006; Ferdinand, 2004), and if so, a discussion of how the *relative positions* of organizations within fields affects their integration of field-level logics and valuations of capital still need to be integrated. When accounting for power relations, studies primarily focused on institutionalized power relations and seldom discussed how their incorporation in individual's habitus shape learning in organizations (for exceptions see Antonacopoulou, 2006; Ferdinand, 2004). Ethnographic research approaches informed by Bourdieu's sensitivity to reflexivity may be an appropriate way to address these challenges (cf. Foley, 2002; Maton, 2003).

Whereas power-sensitive studies point to the importance of studying power relations related to gender, race or class (Contu and Willmott, 2003; Vince, 2001), they still need to more fully conceptually embrace and empirically explore the role of these social divisions in shaping learning in organizations. Here lies another avenue for future research, which is connected to another challenge: deploying an intersectional perspective on identity formation and power relations (Atewologun, 2014; Atewologun et al., 2015) in studies on learning processes across levels of analysis. An intersectional perspective on shifting relations of privilege and disadvantage may lead to an understanding of shifting possibilities of applying micro-politics to influence learning and may also bring us empirically closer to understanding the complexities of power relations in learning processes.

5.5.4 Implications for practitioners

Having worked in the field of diversity management and gender equality for some years, I am aware that our perspective as practitioners is often focused on altering our immediate

surrounding structures and practices because we believe that we cannot alter broader societal discourses. While this may be true to some extent, the proposed conceptual triad and the illustrating case study (Heinemann, 2014) emphasize the necessity of integrating a multi-level perspective in our everyday practices to foster more inclusive and equality-driven forms of organizational learning. Otherwise, we may develop practices that do not cater to the needs of those we want to engage in learning and knowing. Taken-for-granted assumptions about marginalized societal groups may result in us overlooking the structural and emotional boundaries preventing individuals from participating in training programmes or learning experiences. Therefore, we need to critically revisit our practices in light of persisting structures of dominance and listen to marginalized voices to create welcoming and accessible learning spaces.

5.6 Conclusion

This study focused on how societal power relations and related persisting dominance influence learning in organizations. A comprehensive theoretical framework was developed from which a conceptual triad of being critical, being reflexive and being political was derived, defining necessary elements to dismantle the subtle workings of symbolic power and dominance in learning processes and to create counter-narratives to dominant discourses, subtly marginalizing particular societal groups. Produced through a historically informed, multi-level, reflexive research perspective, such counter-narratives may come up with different practical implications on and beyond the organizational level, as Heinemann's (2014) study underlined. The triad of being critical, being reflexive and being political provides fruitful guidelines for those researchers who seek to intervene in societal discourses, to counter social inequalities and to judge whether we are dealing with progressive or regressive forms of organizational learning.

Chapter 6

Concepts of Power in Boundary Spanning Research: A Review and Research Agenda

6.1 Introduction

Why are some boundary spanners more successful than others in driving organizational innovation and building sustainable inter-organizational collaboration? A considerable volume of boundary spanning literature explains their success by their ability to skilfully navigate and combine various boundary spanning activities, such as networking, brokering diverging interests or transferring information between teams and organizations (e.g. Ancona and Caldwell, 1992; Johnson and Duxbury, 2010; Ryan and O'Malley, 2016). However, drawing on particular boundary spanning activities may be insufficient to answer the question; rather, power-sensitive boundary spanning research requires that scholars also account for power (Hawkins et al., 2016; Lindgren et al., 2008).

This stream of research has shown that boundary spanners frequently require a position of legitimate power or require expert knowledge to convince others to implement new practices (e.g. Ibarra, 1993; Jemison, 1984). In multinational corporations, boundary spanners must furthermore empower themselves and others by skilfully navigating cultural repertoires to enable cooperation (Kane and Levina, 2017; Yagi and Kleinberg, 2011). In doing so, they must tackle power relations of gender, race or class which have been proven to hinder knowledge sharing in organizations (Qureshi et al., 2017). Despite these manifold insights on the effect of power on boundary spanning, there has been as yet no meta-analytic study of this body of research.

In this paper, I review power-sensitive boundary spanning research and illustrate its contributions to understanding key boundary spanning concepts (e.g. boundaries, innovation). To do so, I develop an analytical framework which combines previous categorizations of power concepts (Clegg et al., 2006; Göhler, 2009) in a novel and counter-intuitive manner.

Based on this framework, I am able to contrast research insights on power in boundary spanning studies and highlight avenues for future research.

The paper is organized as follows: In the next section, I explain how I collected and analysed research articles on power in boundary spanning and how they motivated my theoretical framework. In the following section, I detail the six power concepts of my framework and discuss their applications in boundary spanning research and contributions to understanding boundary spanning processes. Finally, I present avenues for future research.

6.2 Methodology

6.2.1 Organizing the review and motivations of the analytical framework

My review traces how power has been perceived in boundary spanning research since the emergence of the field in the 1970s. These perceptions are shaped by wider scientific discussions on power (Clegg et al., 2006; Göhler, 2009) and reflect the sometimes conflicting research perspectives and paradigms (Clegg and Hardy, 1996; Mumby and Stohl, 1991). It is therefore important to develop an analytical framework for clustering power-sensitive boundary spanning studies which synthesizes power concepts and research perspectives.

Scholars have intensely debated the best means to analytically differentiate concepts of power (e.g. Fleming and Spicer, 2014; Haugaard, 2003; Lukes, 2004). Therefore, particular research perspectives, such as critical or functionalist, have significantly shaped how researchers perceive and normatively evaluate power (Clegg and Hardy, 1996). A common distinction, which has also influenced Organization and Management Studies (OMS), is between ‘power over’ and ‘power to’ (Göhler, 2009). Broadly speaking, whereas power-over perspectives highlight an actor’s relative position in structural power relations, power-to approaches focus on agency (Pitkin, 1972). With explicit reference to normative criteria, socio-critical scholars have also regarded ‘power over’ as a synonym for domination, whereas ‘power to’ has been associated with empowerment and emancipation (Pansardi, 2012).

By contrast, other researchers have distinguished between episodic, direct uses of power and systemic forms of power embedded in institutional structures (Lawrence, 2008; Lawrence et al., 2001). These categorizations have been refined into four manifestations of forms of power of varying subtlety: coercion, manipulation, domination and subjectification (Fleming and Spicer, 2007, 2014), yet they do not differentiate between research perspectives.

Haugaard (2012) therefore combines them with socio-critical perspectives on power, arguing that all the dimensions can be associated with critical perspectives on domination and emancipation, as both presuppose the same process. Despite the compelling nature of his line of reasoning, I do not entirely support it, especially when it comes to discourse-oriented perspectives on power.

Discourse-oriented, poststructuralist approaches to power have influenced OMS since the late 1980s (Mumby and Stohl, 1991). Also referred to as ‘power through’ (Spencer and Doull, 2015), scholars of these approaches highlight the generative power of discourses in constituting reality and claim that power permeates society (Foucault, 1975, 1982). As governmentality studies, researchers have been particularly interested in how individuals become subjects through power technologies, which combine self-governance and being governed by others (Foucault, 1988). Poststructuralist research scholars refrain from normative evaluations of particular forms of power as good or bad (Gunn, 2006). Instead, they highlight that actors can only press for other forms of being governed (Foucault, 2007). From my perspective, this contradicts the notion of emancipating oneself from dominating structures and therefore also Haugaard’s (2012) argument that all forms of power can be associated with socio-critical research perspectives on domination and emancipation.

Based on the above discussion of power concepts, my analytical framework consists of two important distinctions, as portrayed in Table 5. First, it differentiates between the particular aspect of power a researcher’s power concept focuses on (see first column in Table 1): structure (power over), agency (power to/with) or discourse (power through). It further includes research perspectives (see second column brackets in Table 1) and their normative underpinnings regarding the maintenance or alteration of the existing organizational or social order (Deetz, 2003; Sieben, 2007). The resulting six power concepts (see ‘power as ...’ in second column in Table 5) are detailed in the next sections.

My analytical framework irritates common differentiations between critical and functionalist research perspectives on power by demonstrating that although they may depart from the same concept of power, they nonetheless normatively interpret their observations differently. For example, ‘power as resource’ and ‘power as domination’ both focus on structural aspects of power in the sense of ‘power over’, yet ‘power as resource’ adopts a managerial, functionalist perspective on using power bases to foster innovation, whereas ‘power as domination’ critiques the reproduction of unequal, societal power relations in

boundary spanning processes. As outlined in the final section, the framework facilitates the transfer of research insights across seemingly incompatible research perspectives.

6.2.2 Scope of the review

I collected the 82 journal articles and 13 books and book chapters listed in Table 5 through an online literature search, combining protocol-driven methodology and snowballing techniques (Brown, 2015). First, I used various online databases such as Web of Science or Google Scholar to identify the relevant papers in OMS. These papers had to fulfil two criteria: explicitly name the terms ‘boundary spanning’ or ‘boundary spanner’ and mention power at least once. I did not count the mention of power in the articles when referring to words such as ‘manpower’ or ‘powerful research agenda’.

Next, I checked references in the articles to further relevant papers. Additional articles were also included in the analysis when they matched the above mentioned criteria. Articles in journals outside of OMS were added when referred to by other scholars (e.g. Gasson’s 2006 article in the *European Journal of Information Systems*) or when the authors themselves had previously published on similar topics in OMS journals (e.g. Williams’s 2011 article in the *Journal of Integrated Care*).

The process of data collection revealed that only 21 research articles had power as their primary research topic (underlined in Table 1). My knowledge of different power concepts, as detailed in the next section, cautioned me into maintaining a low-threshold selection process regarding mentions of power. A rare mention of power may be rooted in a particular understanding of the concept. For instance, agency-oriented approaches regard power as an outcome of collective action. Therefore, they often portray empowering boundary spanning practices without explicitly theorizing power. Excluding these studies would have disproportionately diminished the agency-oriented perspective on power in comparison to structure- and discourse-focused perspectives.

Table 5. Perspectives on power in boundary spanning research over time.*

	Power as ... (research perspective)	1970–1979	1980–1989	1990–1999	2000–2009	2010–2019
Power over (structure-oriented)	... resource (functionalist)	<u>Pettigrew</u> (1972), Keller & Holland (1975), Powell (1975), <u>Kochan</u> (1975), <u>Zeitz</u> (1976), Keller et al. (1976), Aldrich & Herker (1977), Whetten (1978), <u>Spekman</u> (1979)	<u>Provan</u> (1980), <u>Hambrick</u> (1981), Tushman & Scanlan (1981), Jemison (1984), Jackson & King (1983), <u>Astley & Sachdeva</u> (1984), At-Tawijri & Montanari (1987)	Friedman & Poldony (1992), <u>Finkelstein</u> (1992), <u>Ibarra</u> (1993), <u>Bacharach et al.</u> (1995), Boyle & Dwyer (1995), Galang & Ferris (1997), Russ et al. (1998), Hallenbeck Jr. et al. (1999), Rao & Sivakumar (1999)	Cross et al. (2000), Hislop et al. (2000), Williams (2002), Perrone et al. (2003), Golden & Veiga (2005), <u>Muthusamy & White</u> (2006), Schildt & Laamanen (2006), Stock (2006), Fleming & Waguespack (2007), <u>Ireland & Webb</u> (2007), Pappas & Woolridge (2007), Luo (2007), Aldrich (2008), Piercy (2009)	Marrone (2010), Weerts & Sandmann (2010), Williams (2012), Hult (2012), Reiche (2011), Zhang et al. (2011), Singh et al. (2011), Blois & Ryan (2012), <u>Currie et al.</u> (2012), <u>Medvetz</u> (2012), Williams (2013), Yoo (2013), Barner-Rasmussen (2014), Cross et al. (2013), Kroeger & Bachmann (2013), Langan-Fox et al. (2013), Korschun (2015), McNulty & Stewart (2014), Huang et al. (2016), Liu (2018), Zhang (2018)
	... domination (ideology-critical)				<u>Grimshaw et al.</u> (2005)	

* Underlined research articles have power as (one of) their primary research topic(s).

	Power as ...	1970–1979	1980–1989	1990–1999	2000–2009	2010–2019
Power to (agency-oriented)	... empowerment (interpretive)				Sapsed & Salter (2004), Levina & Vaast (2005), Gasson (2006), Fleischmann (2006), Kellog et al. (2006), Rothenberg (2007), Montgomery & Oliver (2007), Levina & Vaast (2008), <u>Santos & Eisenhardt</u> (2005), Ernst & Yip (2009), Spee & Jarzabkowski (2009)	Mishra (2010), Yagi & Kleinberg (2011), Study & Wright (2011), Hsiao et al. (2012), <u>Nicholls & Huybrechs</u> (2016), Smith (2016), Kane & Levina (2017)
	... emancipation (ideology-critical)					Abbott et al. (2013), <u>Ravishankar et al.</u> (2013), Levina & Vaast (2013), Kislov et al. (2017), <u>Søderberg & Romani</u> (2017), Qureshi et al. (2017), Tøth & Søderberg (2018), Reinecke et al. (2018), Soundararajan et al. (2018)
Power through (discourse-oriented)	... objectification (poststructuralist)			Boland & Tenkasi (1995)	Carlile (2004), <u>Thomas et al.</u> (2007)	Barrett & Oborn (2010), Huvila (2011), <u>Hawkins et al.</u> (2016)
	... governmentality (poststructuralist)					<u>Sage et al.</u> (2010)

* Underlined research articles have power as (one of) their primary research topic(s).

Furthermore, I included articles in my analysis which do not entirely fulfil my selection criteria. For instance, the article by Andrew M. Pettigrew (1972) does not explicitly mention the term boundary spanner, yet I included it in my analysis because it is one of the founding references of boundary spanning research. Equally, the study by M. N. Ravishankar et al. (2013) does not explicitly mention boundary spanning; however, it is cited by other power-sensitive boundary spanning studies and is amongst the few studies to provide a critical research perspective on power. In some edited volumes on boundary spanning, only particular chapters provide a power-sensitive perspective on boundary spanning, in which case I solely mentioned these particular chapters in the review. In cases where power was mentioned in several chapters but one in particular seemed to provide an important perspective on the topic, I referenced this particular chapter, for example Damien Grimshaw et al. (2005) in Mick Marchington et al. (2005). My selection process is thus shaped by the aim of this review, which is to portray the nuances of the ongoing academic discussion on power in the boundary spanning literature and how these have contributed to understanding the key concepts in boundary spanning research. Table 6 summarizes the lessons learnt from each perspective on power in boundary spanning research, which I detail in the following sections.

Table 6. Concepts of power and their contribution to understanding boundary spanning processes and outcomes.

Structure-oriented perspective (power over)	
<p>Power is a structural and individual resource which can be leveraged to overcome given boundaries and drive organizational innovation. Power is primarily exercised in the form of force/command or persuasion/consent. Boundary spanners' agency is relational, depending on their structural position and skills.</p>	
Power-as-resource	Power-as-domination
<p><i>Major learning:</i> Boundary spanning activities need to be coupled with power bases (e.g. expert knowledge, management position) to drive innovation. Boundary spanners can increase their power of influence by gaining access to new power bases, combining power bases (also by teaming up with others) or redefining the importance of power bases in a field or organization.</p> <p><i>Perspective on boundaries:</i> Boundary spanners use power bases to bridge relatively static boundaries on the individual, organizational or field level – or they uphold them to protect vital information.</p>	<p><i>Major learning:</i> Boundary spanning processes and boundary spanners are entangled in societal power relations. Related social boundaries of gender, race or class connected hamper boundary spanning activities of knowledge sharing and learning in organizations. Often, these obstacles to learning and collaboration remain invisible.</p> <p><i>Perspective on boundaries:</i> Social boundaries are sticky because they are historically-grown and often taken for granted. Dominant groups seek to maintain these boundaries in boundary spanning processes.</p>
Agency-oriented perspective (power to)	
<p>Power emerges in (inter-)action and is a synonym to individual and collective agency. Actors create spaces of collaboration to achieve common ends and empower others to collaborate. Power is not a possession but exists only in its actualization.</p>	
Power-as-empowerment	Power-as-emancipation
<p><i>Major learning:</i> Boundary spanners need to empower themselves and others to enable collaboration. Jointly created spaces of collaboration serve to improve team performance, product quality and service; as does empowerment through boundary spanning efforts. Boundary spanning success is often a common endeavour.</p> <p><i>Perspective on boundaries:</i> Individual, organizational and demographic boundaries (e.g. nation states) are perceived as constantly negotiated in the context of ongoing politics and power as actualization.</p>	<p><i>Major learning:</i> Less powerful actors often stabilize collaboration by skilfully navigating historically-grown societal and global power relations. Postcolonial research can help to detect these contributions as well as subtle acts of resistance to boundary spanning activities.</p> <p><i>Perspective on boundaries:</i> Even though social boundaries and global relations have a long history of domination, they can be altered to a certain degree. Thereby, boundary spanning activities may produce ambiguous outcomes from maintaining and altering these boundaries.</p>

Discourse-oriented perspective (power through)	
Discourses (re)constitute the objects they talk about and thus have two powerful effects: objectification and subjectification. Power cannot be located in the position of a powerful actor but rather permeates societies and organizations.	
Power-as-objectification	Power-as-governmentality
<p><i>Major learning:</i> Boundary objects also play agentic roles in boundary spanning processes. Discourses have reality-constituting effects, also on boundary objects. Over time, these objects become associated with certain possibilities for learning and action. They thereby enable and hinder learning and knowledge sharing between actors.</p> <p><i>Perspective on boundaries:</i> Boundaries, in particular language boundaries, are (re)constituted through a web of power-knowledge-discourse. Discourses distinguish boundary objects and processes based on binary logics of legitimate and illegitimate or scientific and common knowledge, and thereby (re)constitute these boundary objects and processes, which in turn enables or hinders learning.</p>	<p><i>Major learning:</i> Boundary objects and boundary spanners are entangled in technologies of governing the self and others. Logics of flexibility and transparency may appear free of power but have various objectifying and subjectifying power effects. They may subtly drive boundary spanners and other actors into self-discipline and self-surveillance.</p> <p><i>Perspective on boundaries:</i> Boundaries are constantly reified and altered by binary logics based on what is deemed legitimate or rational in a particular context. Boundaries are not external to the individual but constitute the very same individual, which renders it harder to detect the powerful effects of these logics.</p>

6.3 Power over: Structure-oriented power concepts in boundary spanning

Power concepts have varied over the decades in boundary spanning research. Table 5 illustrates how structure-oriented power-over concepts have dominated the research field from the 1970s–1990s, understanding power as a positional (or personal) attribute which actors possess and which helps them influence others' practices and behaviour (Pitkin, 1972).

Power-over approaches build on 'the classic Weberian view of power' (Haugaard, 2012, p. 35),¹⁶ which is based on authority and command, highlighting how actors may be in a powerful position to limit others' scope of action (Dahl, 1957) even when done with good intentions (Göhler, 2009). Although command 'remains the litmus test of legitimate power' (Courpasson et al., 2015, p. 9), other forms of power must be mobilized for an actor to secure his or her position of legitimate power. Such forms of power have been referred to as 'soft power', which involves social and political skills such as persuasion, agenda setting or sense making (Courpasson et al., 2015; Tourish and Robson, 2006).

There are thus two main methods by which actors can exercise their power of influence in the sense of 'power over': force and persuasion/consent. Depending on their research perspectives, boundary spanning researchers have been interested in different aspects of these methods for shaping boundary spanning processes. Scholars with a functionalist research perspective have examined how boundary spanners use various structural (and individual) power bases to foster innovation and collaboration in and between organizations (e.g. Ibarra, 1993; Spekman, 1979). Thereby, they have focused on the individual and organizational level of analysis and applied a managerial perspective interested in optimizing performance and driving innovation. Following feminist, philosophical research on power, I label such approaches *power as resource* (Allen, 2016).

By contrast, ideology-critical approaches to 'power over' have shown how unequal societal power structures of gender, race or class hamper learning and knowledge sharing in organizations (e.g. Grimshaw et al., 2005; Soundararajan et al., 2018). In a critical research tradition (Pansardi, 2012; Sieben, 2007), scholars of these approaches are interested in how

¹⁶ German philosopher Max Weber developed his theory of authority during the industrialization of the early 20th century when large, bureaucratic organizations were increasing in numbers (Houghton, 2010). He argued that in this context, traditional authority based on a sovereign position was being replaced by legal authority based on formal structures and rules, often accompanied by the charismatic authority of a visionary entrepreneur (Weber, 1968).

powerful societal groups or “the state” maintain dominance and problematize the (re)production of unequal power structures through boundary spanning processes. Such approaches are referred to as *power as domination* in the context of this paper. Often drawing on the concept of hegemony (Gramsci, 1992), they highlight that dominance is obtained ‘by consent rather than force ...; and it is attained through the myriad ways in which the institutions of civil society operate to shape, directly or indirectly, the cognitive and affective structures whereby men [and women] perceive and evaluate problematic social reality’ (Femia, 1975, p. 31).

6.3.1 Power as resource: Using power bases to cross boundaries and foster innovation

Scholars with a resource-oriented perspective on power view the boundary spanner as a powerful ‘gatekeeper’ (Pettigrew, 1972) or ‘influence agent’ (Spekman, 1979) in an organizational environment characterized by uncertainty and contingency. They are primarily interested in how single boundary spanners use structural and personal power bases to reduce this uncertainty and drive innovation (e.g. Barner-Rasmussen et al., 2014; Ibarra, 1993; Spekman, 1979). Therefore, they draw on the theory of power bases proposed by social psychologists John R. P. French and Bertram Raven (1959), which represents a classic power-over approach (Fleming and Spicer, 2014). Managers as boundary spanners may, for example, use their influential position in the organizational hierarchy (*legitimate power*) to force others to adopt new organizational practices (*coercive power*). Their powerful organizational position may be particularly beneficial when a quick settlement of negotiations between two organizations is desired (Jackson and King, 1983); however, these representational roles may be less effective than informational boundary spanning roles or an expert status (*expert power*) when seeking to establish ongoing cooperation and information exchange between partners (Spekman, 1979; Tushman and Scanlan, 1981).

Research on strategic alliances stresses that exercising coercive power over an organizational partner may even have detrimental effects for the alliance (Muthusamy and White, 2006). Scholars therefore conceptualize trust as a complementary mechanism to coercive power through which ‘a firm seeks to promote behaviors in a partner’ (Ireland and Webb, 2007, p. 487). For example, when a buyer perceives that a supplier’s boundary spanner has considerable autonomy in decision making, their trust increases, which ultimately

stabilizes the collaboration (Perrone et al., 2003). The above examples show that the applied power base influences future interactions (Spekman, 1979).

In line with functionalist research perspectives (Sieben, 2007), resource-oriented boundary spanning scholars have primarily used quantitative methods to test their predefined hypothesis on the influence of particular power bases on innovation. Thereby, (coercive) power as command resulting from position power has frequently been studied, even with respect to it emanating from an actor's position in the actual, informal patterns of interaction that define a social network (Astley and Sachdeva, 1984; Ibarra, 1993). However soft power, based on skills of sensemaking or navigating cultural repertoires, has less frequently been examined (e.g. Barner-Rasmussen et al., 2014), potentially because it may be harder to quantify and measure. Researchers have also discussed the complexity of analytically differentiating various power bases, thereby considering and discarding a reduction of differentiations to noncoercive and coercive power bases (e.g. Spekman, 1979).

Which boundaries? Power-as-resource studies regard power bases as a central mechanism to overcome boundaries and drive innovation. They are either interested in how boundary spanners use power bases to bridge boundaries and drive organizational innovation (e.g. Barner-Rasmussen et al., 2014) or how they use them to uphold boundaries and protect vital organizational information (e.g. Pettigrew, 1972). Thereby, researchers have viewed boundaries as relatively stable and given. This is best exemplified by the study of Terry McNulty and Abigail Stewart (2014), who use the metaphor of the organizational silo (Diamond et al., 2002) to highlight how actors often experience organizations as fragmented and constrained. They emphasize that boundary spanners draw on power bases to build bridges between these silos and drive others to 'transcend the silo-mentality' (McNulty and Stewart, 2014, p. 530).

Resource-focused research has mainly focused on individual, organizational and field-level boundaries. Many scholars (e.g. Ibarra, 1993; Spekman, 1979) have accounted for vertical boundaries of organizational hierarchy as expressed in ranks, authority or seniority (Yip et al., 2009). Further studies have included horizontal boundaries, which cross functions and expertise (Lee et al., 2014). For example, power bases related to the horizontal division of labour have been found to be better predictors of technical innovation than those related to the organization's formal hierarchy (Ibarra, 1993). Researchers have also included stakeholder boundaries in their analyses, including relations with an organization's partners or

communities (Yip et al., 2009). This highlights how organizations often draw on noncoercive power to build trust and bridge these boundaries (e.g. Ireland and Webb, 2007; Muthusamy and White, 2006).

How are boundaries crossed? From a power-over perspective, agency springs from both, ‘bases of power, which is a personal or positional attribute, and the enactment of power ... defined as the ability to affect outcomes’ (Ibarra, 1993, p. 472). Consequently, access to *and* use of power bases are key to understanding how boundary spanners cross individual, organizational and field level boundaries. As already outlined, researchers have studied a variety of power bases which boundary spanners use to bridge boundaries, some emphasizing that boundary spanning may be facilitated by combining power bases. For example, boundary spanners ‘who possess *both* cultural and language skills ... perform a significantly larger number of functions than those who possess cultural skills only’ (Barner-Rasmussen et al., 2014, p. 899).

Most resource-oriented research has focused on single boundary spanners; yet access to and use of power bases can also be a common endeavour. For example, one negotiator may build trust with the other party whereas another may focus on the best outcome and prevent the over-adoption of the other party’s perspective (Friedman and Podolny, 1992).

Furthermore, boundary spanners’ ability to bridge boundaries by using power bases is highly context-specific. The importance of particular power bases varies by context (Schwab et al., 1985; Williams, 2002) and their effect increases with the uniqueness and importance of the skill for the organization (Barner-Rasmussen et al., 2014). In addition, in a specific field, boundary spanning activities are shaped by the power position of the organization’s targeted actor, defined by access to information, hierarchical field position or predictability (Marrone, 2010; Schwab et al., 1985). Organizations may also diminish the boundary spanner’s power of influence through the job rotation or routinization of boundary spanning activities to ensure their compliance with the organization’s values and goals (Aldrich and Herker, 1977; Russ et al., 1998).

In addition to the access to and use of power bases, some researchers have highlighted a third aspect related to bridging boundaries and driving innovation: the (re)definition of power bases in a particular field. Boundary spanners can strengthen their influence through acquiring and redistributing field-specific, valued forms of capital, such as social networks, expert knowledge or money (Kislov et al., 2017; Levina and Vaast, 2013). The same applies to entire

organizations and their relative power in interorganizational collaboration. For instance, so-called ‘boundary organizations’, which mediate the relationships among fields (e.g. think tanks), may greatly influence the conversion rates of different forms of capital between these fields (Medvetz, 2012). It has thus been claimed that an organization’s field power can be determined based on its possession of and influence on field-specific forms of capital.

What have we learned? Resource-focused boundary spanning studies have shown that boundary spanning activities must be coupled with power bases to drive innovation. They have primarily focused on single boundary spanners to show that they require access to various power bases, which must also be relevant to a particular field or organization, in order to influence others and implement new ideas. Soft power, such as negotiation skills or trust building, has rarely been studied in comparison with coercive power (e.g. legitimate power), perhaps because of the quantitative, statistical nature of power-as-resource approaches. Some researchers have emphasized that a boundary spanner’s power of influence can be increased by combining power bases (as a single boundary spanner or by collaboration with others) or by redefining the relative importance of particular power bases in a given field.

6.3.2 Power as domination: Societal power relations hamper learning and knowledge sharing

Domination-critical approaches have, so far, been rare in power-sensitive boundary spanning research. Similar to power-as-resource studies, they view power from a structure-oriented perspective but focus on the structural patterns that shape societies and the global economy. These studies address how unequal power relations in societies or global relations of dominance and exploitation influence boundary spanning practices (e.g. Grimshaw et al., 2005; Soundararajan et al., 2018). Researchers have demonstrated that social boundaries may exacerbate boundary spanning efforts aimed at fostering learning and knowledge sharing in organizations. For example, gender and caste barriers have been shown to hinder knowledge sharing in rural communities in India (Qureshi et al., 2017), e.g. male community members limiting female members’ participation in the process of knowledge acquisition. In a critical research tradition, scholars of these approaches view organizations as political sites characterized by opposition and struggle (Fleming and Spicer, 2007), often politicizing unequal power relations and adopting an explicit socio-critical stance in favour of historically marginalized groups (Sieben, 2007).

When studying relations of domination in boundary spanning processes, some scholars have shed light on global relations of domination from a Marxist capital–labour perspective (e.g. Grimshaw et al., 2005), criticizing research on interorganizational networks for overrating the positive effect of networks on efficiency by overlooking the complex social, legal, economic and political relations these networks are embedded in. Instead, they highlight the influence of ‘the contradictory capitalist employment relationship’ (Grimshaw et al., 2005, p. 60) on boundary spanning, which shapes dynamics of cooperation and conflict, and thereby network forms. For instance, sourcing agents in the Indian knitwear garment export industry not only work to sustain collaboration between powerful Western buyers and largely dependent Indian suppliers, but they also seek to improve working conditions (Soundararajan et al., 2018). When attempting to establish a basis for negotiating working conditions, they must also negotiate a colonial legacy manifested in the scepticism of Indian suppliers towards European efforts to improve working conditions. Grimshaw et al. (2005) therefore argue that researchers must account for the effects of global partnerships and networks on the relational power between employers (capital) and workers (labour) as well as on new inequalities among workers.

Which boundaries? Domination-focused approaches display a rather static notion of power and power relations, which in turn views boundaries as relatively stable and given. The stickiness of the boundaries is explicable by the nature of the studied boundaries: social boundaries and related historically grown power relations. Domination-oriented studies assert that dominant, powerful groups draw symbolic boundaries of binary opposition between themselves and others (Lamont and Molnár, 2002). Over time, these distinctions become taken-for-granted and manifest in social boundaries and unequal power relations of race, class, gender, age, etc. In turn, social boundaries and power relations may aggravate or even thwart boundary spanning goals of collaboration, knowledge sharing and innovation (e.g. Qureshi et al., 2017; Soundararajan et al., 2018).

Power-as-domination perspectives on boundary spanning further address geographic boundaries of location, distance and region (Lee et al., 2014), scholars stressing that the reification of such boundaries is linked to global inequalities resulting from capitalist labour relations (e.g. Grimshaw et al., 2005; Soundararajan et al., 2018) which are often entangled with postcolonial relations of exploitation, exclusion and stereotypization (e.g. Reinecke et al., 2018; Soundararajan et al., 2018). They argue that negotiated boundaries of language,

culture or status are embedded in historically grown processes of dehumanization and degradation of the colonized other (e.g. Abbott et al., 2013; Soundararajan et al., 2018). By contrast, power-as-resource scholars omit postcolonial power relations in their analysis of cross-cultural boundary spanning (e.g. Au and Fukuda, 2002; Golden and Veiga, 2005)..

How are boundaries crossed? Power-as-domination scholars promote a view of binary opposition and differing interests between the dominant and the dominated; the oppressor and the oppressed; or, in boundary spanning terms: between resourceful European buyers and largely dependent Indian suppliers (Soundararajan et al., 2018). They accordingly claim that dominant social groups constantly need to reify social boundaries to secure their power position; that is, their superior access to material and symbolic resources. Therefore, they exclude others from relevant boundary spanning knowledge (e.g. Qureshi et al., 2017), or simply define their way of thinking and managing as the universal norm in cross-cultural boundary spanning processes. This becomes apparent when European clients subtly enforce their management style as the norm and ascribe the non-conformist behaviour of Indian vendors to their alleged laziness (Søderberg and Romani, 2017). Even though advocates of power-as-domination approaches regard resistance as possible and important, they are aware that changing historically grown power relations and stereotypical images are complicated and tedious (Grimshaw et al., 2005). Rather than providing methods to overcome boundaries, they focus on revealing, problematizing and scandalizing the persistence of historically grown power relations in and through boundary spanning processes.

What have we learned? Domination-focused studies sensitize boundary spanning researchers to the fact that historically-grown power relations of gender, race, class, etc. hamper learning and knowledge sharing in and between organizations. They thereby broaden the notion of the influence of context in boundary spanning practices and problematize the workings of hegemony as the fabrication of consent through the various taken-for-granted practices and identities which underlie boundary spanning activities. By demonstrating how colonial power relations are embedded into seemingly universal management norms (e.g. Søderberg and Romani, 2017; Soundararajan et al., 2018), they also evaluate boundary spanning practices from the perspective of marginalized groups, instead of or in addition to the managerial perspective.

6.4 Agency-oriented power concepts in boundary spanning

Since the 2000s, structure-oriented perspectives on power have been complemented by power-to approaches in boundary spanning research, which focus on agency and stress an actor's ability to influence practices, behaviour and identities (Pitkin, 1972). German-Jewish philosopher Hannah Arendt is one of the most prominent representatives of power-to conceptualizations of power.¹⁷ In contrast to structure-oriented power concepts, she stresses that

‘power cannot be stored up and kept in reserve for emergencies like the instruments of violence, but exists only in its actualization. ... Power is always ... a power potential and not an unchangeable, measurable, and reliable entity like force or strength’ (Arendt, 1958, p. 200).

It is therefore unsurprising that the emergence of agency-oriented power-to concepts has coincided with a broadening of research perspectives in boundary spanning studies, from functionalist to interpretive approaches (see Table 5). Scholars have claimed that ‘simple’ input–output relationships underlying the notion of the hierarchical, bureaucratic organization are no longer applicable in the context of the postmodern organization (e.g. Kellogg et al., 2006; Williams, 2002). Accordingly, cooperation and knowledge sharing have become important aspects studied in relation to power in boundary spanning processes using qualitative methods and by developing research categories from the data in an interpretive research tradition (Sieben, 2007).

The concept of ‘power to’ closely links power to collective action, asserting that power ‘emerges out of the kinds of actions that we engage in with others when we strive to achieve common ends’ (Allen, 2002, p. 138).¹⁸ Thereby, ‘power to’ is often used synonymously with empowerment (Pansardi, 2012). Depending on the particular research perspective, a qualitative difference exists between understandings of empowerment. Socio-critical scholars problematize the limited understanding of empowerment in management contexts. Here, empowerment means redefining the role of workers ‘in order to enable the organization to

¹⁷ Hannah Arendt developed her understanding of power against the backdrop of the horrors of Nazi Germany. For her, power and violence are antidotes: ‘Where power reigns there is persuasion, not violence. And when violence reigns, it destroys power’ (Bernstein, 2011, p. 6).

¹⁸ Perspectives on power, which highlight the values of dialogue and cooperation, have also been labelled as ‘power with’ (Berger, 2005). Management theorist Mary Parker Follett was an early advocate of power-with approaches in the 1920s. Similar to some feminist theorists, she portrays such power as ‘a consensual and intrinsically legitimate instance of power’ (Pansardi, 2012, p. 75), and claims that ‘[c]oercive power is the curse of the universe; coactive power, the enrichment and advancement of every human soul’ (Follett, 1996, p. 119). Her words hint at the intimate connection between agency-focused power concepts and empowerment.

achieve new goals and to adapt to a changing environment' (Inglis, 1997, p. 5). Boundary spanning research in this tradition focuses on how boundary spanners empower themselves and others to enable or improve collaboration and performance (e.g. Nicholls and Huybrechts, 2016; Yagi and Kleinberg, 2011). These interpretive approaches frequently adopt a managerial perspective and seek to maintain or improve the existing organizational order, and are referred to in this paper as *power as empowerment*.

By contrast, empowerment can be understood from a socio-critical perspective as a necessary condition for emancipation which also requires 'liberation from ideologies, power relationships, limiting paradigms and constraining epistemologies' (Abel and Sementelli, 2002, p. 260). Emancipation-oriented power concepts often highlight resistance against oppression and control, thereby resonating with critical research perspectives (Sieben, 2007).¹⁹ In this vein, few boundary spanning researchers have examined subtle acts of resistance against and emancipation from historically grown power structures in everyday boundary spanning practices (e.g. Ravishankar et al., 2013). In this paper, such approaches are referred to as *power as emancipation*.

6.4.1 Power as empowerment: Enabling oneself and others to collaborate

Empowerment-focused boundary spanning researchers have highlighted that the empowerment of *all* actors may be an important precondition for collaboration. They have accordingly traced how boundary spanners empower themselves and others to collaborate (e.g. Nicholls and Huybrechts, 2016; Yagi and Kleinberg, 2011). For example, boundary spanners who embrace their home country's identity tend to empower home country collaborators by teaching missing competencies or connecting them to important stakeholders (Kane and Levina, 2017), thereby also enabling their own boundary spanning activity by skilfully navigating identities and cultural repertoires (Yagi and Kleinberg, 2011). Empowerment-oriented studies have evaluated the outcome of empowerment efforts from a managerial perspective in terms of improving outcome and performance. In the context of internal marketing as boundary spanning activity, Sita Mishra (2010, p. 189) claims that '[a]s companies empower staff to build stronger customer relationships, internal marketing underpins the drive for greater involvement, commitment, and understanding'.

¹⁹ Such resistance has been diversely studied in OMS, ranging from more visible workers' struggles to more subtle acts of disidentification or mimicry (for an overview from a feminist perspective see Thomas and Davies, 2005).

Empowerment-interested studies share their managerial perspective with resource-focused research but also stress the value of *enabling* others to collaborate, in contrast to ‘getting others to want what you want’ (Nye, 1990, p. 167).

Empowerment-focused boundary spanning scholars have further traced how actors jointly create spaces of collaboration and knowledge sharing; their approach reflecting power as emerging in interaction (Arendt, 1958; Berger, 2005). In addition, they have demonstrated that common efforts to build spaces of collaboration may be particularly important when establishing collaboration under conditions of rapid change and uncertainty (Kellogg et al., 2006). In such contexts, different communities of practice enact a coordination structure to facilitate learning and adaptability. As a precondition for power as acting together, actors must agree on the general procedures of exchange, while locally and temporally coordinating their actions and addressing their differences in norms and interests only when required.

Which boundaries? Empowerment-oriented power scholars regard politics as ongoing, controversial (public) argument (Arendt, 1958) and stress the value of negotiation and dialogue (Berger, 2005). Consequently, boundary spanning researchers in this tradition view boundaries as constantly negotiated and fluid. When boundary spanners empower themselves and others to collaborate, they must negotiate various types of boundaries and related differences in interests, meanings and norms. Thereby, empowerment-based studies have focused on individual, organizational and demographic boundaries in a globalized world and how such boundaries are constantly altered and maintained in teams and organizations to expand knowledge sharing and collaboration (e.g. Hsiao et al., 2012; Levina and Vaast, 2008). These intersecting boundaries have predominantly been approached with interpretive research paradigms, which develop their categorizations in situ, often drawing on ‘practice-based analysis to understand boundary-spanning behaviours from a particular field of practice’ (Hsiao et al., 2012, p. 464f.).

How are boundaries crossed? In this stream of research, boundary spanning has an individual and a collective component. Networking, collaboration and knowledge sharing are as much the result of individual efforts to foster dialogue and persuade others (e.g. Yagi and Kleinberg, 2011) as they are of common processes of meaning making, platform building and collaborating (e.g. Kellogg et al., 2006). Consequently, empowerment-focused studies have shed light on the contribution of a web of actors to boundary spanning activities and outcomes. Sturdy and Wright (2011) stress that researchers should consider the contribution

of *all* actors to creating, maintaining and expanding collaboration. Consequently, they also highlight the ‘receiving’ end of boundary spanning activities, portraying consultancy clients as active and powerful in a process of management knowledge co-production.

In contrast to resource-oriented boundary spanning research, boundaries and power dynamics are not viewed as disturbing but as a normal part of human interaction. From this perspective, boundaries are not overcome but are constantly altered and/or maintained. For example, actors first must establish a common platform and agree upon its rules to then discuss their differing interests and norms within it. They may not necessarily reconcile their differences but may instead ‘juxtapose their diverse efforts into a provisional and emerging collage of loosely coupled contributions’ (Kellogg et al., 2006, p. 38).

Some researchers have also cautioned that empowerment-oriented studies may overlook important power aspects when solely focusing on power embedded in observable practices and interaction. These scholars deem it necessary to account for preconditions for action, which power theorist Hannah Arendt regards as an important aspect of ‘power to’ (Allen, 2002). For instance, boundary spanners may be unable to act when concepts and tasks are highly complex (Smith, 2016) and may therefore be invisible from a research perspective which studies empowerment by observing practices.

What have we learned? Empowerment-based boundary spanning research sensitizes scholars to the preconditions of collaboration and knowledge sharing, which can be acts of empowering the self and others or of building and maintaining shared boundary spanning platforms. Such scholars highlight the contribution of all actors, in addition to examining empowerment practices of single boundary spanners and beginning to point to silence and passivity as influential boundary spanning processes.

6.4.2 Power as emancipation: Altering societal power relations to foster knowledge sharing

There are two approaches to power in boundary spanning research which apply a socio-critical perspective: ‘power as domination’ and ‘power as emancipation’. Both approaches are rare and posit that social boundaries may aggravate or even thwart boundary spanning goals of collaboration and knowledge sharing. Thereby, power-as-emancipation approaches focus on how boundary spanners and other actors *change* social boundaries and related power relations.

Scholars have demonstrated how boundary spanning activities alter the social norms underlying social boundaries and thus lead to increased knowledge sharing within communities and organizations. For example, rural Indian regions where NGO moderators intentionally created an inclusive group and encouraged dialogue across gender- and caste-barriers were more successful in knowledge sharing than ones without such dialogue (Qureshi et al., 2017). The gender-specific role expertise with regards to the implementation of new harvesting practices or with regards to the market implications of decisions can thus be harnessed. Research has also shown that boundary spanners such as middle managers can use their position power to alleviate status differences in cross-cultural boundary spanning (Levina and Vaast, 2008), drawing on their gatekeeper position and prestige to establish a constructive interaction style or distribute economic capital to provide possibilities for face-to-face interaction.

Which boundaries? Emancipation-oriented studies focus on altering social boundaries, the scholars regarding these boundaries as historically grown and deeply embedded in societies, organizations and individuals. Ravishankar et al. (2013, p. 387) therefore state that '[f]rom the perspective of vendor organizations in India, however, the IT offshoring phenomenon is more than just a business relationship with Western firms. It is also embedded within the context of the longstanding imbalances of power in the relationship between the West and the East'.

Emancipation-oriented scholars have proposed concepts which address boundaries on multiple levels. For instance, Pamela Abbott et al. (2013) introduce the concept of creolization in international collaboration which, amongst other aspects, is centred on cultural hybridization and identity multiplicity. The concept cuts across four levels and related boundaries: individual, organizational, national and global. The authors emphasize the benefits of hybridization while warning that it 'may not always be successful and produce positive synergies, and there are times when differences and conflicts fail to be resolved' (Abbott et al., 2013, p. 125). They thereby highlight an important insight offered by emancipation-based power perspectives on boundary spanning: ambiguity.

How are boundaries crossed? Emancipation-oriented boundary spanning research on power claims that boundaries related to social inequalities constantly need to be reified and often serve to maintain hegemony (Abbott et al., 2013). Similar to domination-oriented approaches, they perceive social boundaries as sticky, yet they more prominently highlight the importance of resistance and micro-practices in gradually changing these boundaries. When

seeking to alter these deeply embedded power relations, boundary spanners often face ambiguity, as their practices may simultaneously alter and maintain social boundaries. In particular, cross-cultural boundary spanning studies have emphasized these ambiguous boundary spanning outcomes and introduced theoretical concepts which address this dilemma (e.g. Abbott et al., 2013; Ravishankar et al., 2013).

Much like power-as-empowerment approaches, these studies have shed light on the contribution of all actors to boundary spanning processes, particularly relatively powerless actors in cross-cultural collaboration (e.g. Ravishankar et al., 2013; Soundararajan et al., 2018). Researchers, in addition to studying these actors' efforts to stabilize collaboration in a global environment characterized by historically grown power imbalances, have also portrayed their acts of resistance. In an ideology-critical fashion, they have applied postcolonial perspectives to allow for a counter-hegemonic reading and reinterpretation of the assumed adaptation practices of less powerful actors in international collaboration. For example, Ravishankar et al. (2013, p. 397) categorize the behaviours of Indian vendors as forms of mimicry, whereby they 'underplayed their Indian identity, staged deliberate shows of un-Indianness, and tried to sound and act like Americans'. At the same time, the vendors were aware of their mimicry and the unequal power relations underlying their global interactions. Therefore, their behaviour is 'as an important reminder of the unequal relations which govern postcolonial encounters' (Ravishankar et al., 2013, p. 398). Postcolonial writer Homi K. Bhabha (1984, p. 129) stresses that mimicry poses a threat to 'the narcissistic demand of colonial authority' because it represents a 'process by which the look of surveillance returns as displacing gaze of the disciplined, where the observer becomes the observed and "partial" representation rearticulates the whole notion of identity and alienates it from essence'.

Emancipation-oriented scholars have also reflected on how to judge the nature of the observed boundary spanning practices and whether or not these practices actually diminish social boundaries. Natalia Levina and Emmanuelle Vaast (2013) distinguish *transactive* boundary spanning, which maintains institutional relations, from *transformative* boundary spanning which alters them. Anne-Marie Søderberg and Laurence Romani (2017) apply the transactive–transformative distinction in the context of a global partnership. Their study shows how a counter-hegemonic reading which is aware of unequal power relations can provide a different interpretation of boundary spanning practices. The strategy of connecting vendors and clients through regular visits to the Indian offshore sites by the Western

headquarters can thus be reinterpreted as a form of postcolonial control. Boundary spanning practices reflect the European client's need 'to maintain its advantageous power position and retain its vendor in a predominantly transactional relationship by pressing competition and forms of control' (Søderberg and Romani, 2017, p. 270f.). They conclude that despite seemingly collaborative boundary spanning practices, this particular partnership has not changed the vendor's alleged inferior status.

What have we learned? Emancipation-oriented scholars have shed light on the influence and efforts of historically marginalized groups in (cross-cultural) boundary spanning processes, thereby highlighting that acts of resistance are often subtle and that researchers must learn to detect and read these acts in their sociohistorical context. Otherwise, contributions to stabilizing collaboration and obstacles to knowledge sharing may be overlooked, in the process missing important starting points for improving boundary spanning processes in multinational companies.

6.5 Discourse-oriented power concepts in boundary spanning

Since the mid-1990s, a small group of poststructuralist boundary spanning researchers have taken an interest in the entanglement of power, discourse and knowledge (s. Table 5). Poststructuralist power concepts, sometimes referred to as 'power through' (Spencer and Doull, 2015), have drawn heavily from the writings of French sociologist Michel Foucault. From a Foucauldian perspective, 'power cannot be considered a possession or capacity of groups and individuals' (Geciene, 2002, p. 119). By contrast, he stresses that power pervades societies (Foucault, 1980), is both repressive *and* productive (Foucault, 1975), and is embedded in its structures, cultures and technologies, which are predominantly taken-for-granted, normalized and inscribed in the body (Clegg and Hardy, 1996).²⁰

Poststructuralist perspectives in boundary spanning claim that 'no boundary object [and no actor involved in boundary spanning processes] can be said to be free from power effects and therefore it is necessary to explore the *nature* of these – often hidden – power effects'

²⁰ In particular, Foucault's (1990) notion of biopower highlights the productive aspect of power. It is a form of power which controls, monitors and optimizes entire populations through statistical normal distribution (Lilja and Vinthagen, 2014). By contrast, disciplinary power focuses on the individual body. The assembly line is a classic example of this form of power and its effect of producing docile bodies (Deetz, 2003). Here, workers are trained to keep up with the line's pace, and their bodily movements are routinized and optimized, reducing the necessity for direct control.

(Thomas et al., 2007, p. 30). From a Foucauldian perspective, boundary spanning processes are said to have two power effects: objectification and subjectification (Foucault, 1982). Power is inextricably linked to the production of truth through various reality-constituting discourses, which distinguish, categorize and thereby generate the objects they talk about (Alvesson and Deetz, 1996). In this article, perspectives examining the reality-constituting, objectifying power effects of discourses on boundary spanning are labelled as *power as objectification*. In this vein, scholars have studied boundary objects as the product of various discourses, enabling and limiting learning and knowledge sharing in organizations (e.g. Hawkins et al., 2016; Huvila, 2011; Thomas et al., 2007).

The concept of ‘governmentality’ links objectifying to subjectifying power effects. Foucault (1997) developed it ‘to address the specificity of contemporary neo-liberal forms of governance – premised on the active consent and subjugation of subjects, rather than their oppression, domination or external control’ (Clegg et al., 2002, p. 317). Governmentality studies seek to capture how ‘particular ways or styles of ordering, defining and regulating human being have come into being’ (Barrett, 2008, p. 520). Often including a historical perspective, researchers of the Foucauldian tradition study the various techniques of power through which individuals become subjects (Knights and Willmott, 1989). In this paper, I refer to such approaches to power as *power as governmentality*. Thus far, subjectifying power effects have not been (intensely) studied; though some researchers have begun to conceptualize boundary spanning practices as modern power techniques which constitute boundary spanners’ subjectivities through a combination of government of the self and others (e.g. Sage et al., 2010).

6.5.1 Power as objectification: Discourse-constituted boundary objects shape collaboration

Boundary spanning researchers have primarily used discourse-based, poststructuralist approaches to study the productive and restrictive power of boundary objects in shaping learning in organizations (e.g. Boland and Tenkasi, 1995; Hawkins et al., 2016). Boundary objects have been defined as ‘abstract or physical artifacts that reside in the interfaces between organizations or groups of people’ (Huvila, 2011, p. 2528). These objects ‘are plastic enough to adapt to local needs ... yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites’ (Star and Griesemer, 1989, p. 393). Huvila (2011) traces the various, sometimes conflicting discursive fields, in which boundary objects and boundary spanners are embedded,

and how antagonistic discourses are presentable and presented within the logic of a particular boundary object, such as an archaeological report. The characteristics of particular boundary objects thereby contribute to constituting what can be said and how.

Some researchers have expressed the hope that particular boundary objects may help to smoothen conflicting boundary conditions (Carlile, 2002, 2004; Kellogg et al., 2006). In fact, boundary objects, such as mind maps, have been shown to force actors with differing expertise to reflect on their own and others' understanding of a topic, allowing for the representation of ambiguous meaning and enabling conversation 'without enforcing commonly shared meanings' (Boland and Tenkasi, 1995, p. 362). More static boundary objects may produce converse outcomes. For example, highly standardized and prescriptive project management tools order and constitute reality in a particular way, may lead to a loss of reflexivity and embodied rationality in everyday practice and thus trigger employee resistance to managerial power (Sage et al., 2010).

Which boundaries? Power-as-objectification studies stress that boundaries are not simply given but (re)constructed through a complex web of power–knowledge–discourse. Discourses distinguish boundary objects and processes based on binary logics of legitimate and illegitimate or scientific and common knowledge, thereby (re)constituting these boundary objects and processes. Boundary objects, such as archaeological reports, may require a relatively homogenous structure and presentation style which actors must follow to argue the archaeological value of an archaeological site, which in turn influences the use of a particular land (Huvila, 2011). Highly formalized boundary objects may signal neutrality and objectivity, whereas they may actually represent a particular discourse (and related set of interests) that functions as the means of (re)presenting and constituting an archaeological site.

Researchers' interest in knowledge–power–discourse has been accompanied by an interest in language- and discourse-based boundaries. Paul R. Carlile (2002, 2004) distinguishes three types of such boundaries. The 'syntactic boundary' addresses the mere transfer of knowledge between two or more actors, which builds on shared, common repertoires of knowledge. Such knowledge sharing may become difficult to handle when meaning and discourses change. In this case, 'semantic boundaries' are considered, which means that knowledge must be translated or even negotiated to fit others' different frames of perception and interests. When a semantic response fails to help create a shared meaning, researchers must then consider 'pragmatic boundaries'. This type of boundary accounts for differing interests and knowledge

in combination with the potential costs they generate for the actors involved. It ‘also recognizes the role that shared artifacts and methods play in providing the capacity to negotiate interests and transform knowledge’ (Carlile, 2004, p. 559) and thereby highlights the powerful, agentic role of boundary objects in shaping knowledge sharing and collaboration.

How are boundaries crossed? Power-as-objectification approaches have expanded the notion of agency in boundary spanning studies to boundary objects, in contrast to structure- and agency-oriented approaches which mainly focus on individual and collective human actors. From a discourse perspective, boundary objects are not fixed entities but are instead generated and enriched with meaning through various competing discourses. In turn, their particular characteristics enable and limit processes of learning in and between organizations. Boundary objects thus ‘play agential roles in co-generating, bridging and disrupting understandings’ (Hawkins et al., 2016, p. 304) and ultimately generate reality. Over time, boundary objects become associated with certain (limited) possibilities for action and learning, which may shift when power relations in sociomaterial networks alter (Hawkins et al., 2016). Here, researchers are less interested in how boundaries are crossed or negotiated but rather in how boundaries are constituted through various competing discourses, which in turn limit or enable (inter-)action.

Similar to domination-based perspectives, power-as-objectification studies grant actors limited agency. However, this limited agency does not apply primarily to less powerful groups but rather to all actors, because they are all deeply entangled in webs of power–knowledge–discourse (Foucault, 1975). Some scholars have coupled a macro-perspective on discourses with an emancipation-oriented perspective on unequal power relations and interests to conceptually strengthen agency (e.g. Huvila, 2011; Sage et al., 2010; Thomas et al., 2007). In this vein, Isto Huvila (2011) draws on the discourse theory of postmodern, Marxist theorists Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (2001) to study boundary objects. From this perspective, creating and reshaping boundary objects is never a neutral act but is, rather, interpreted as an attempt to dominate a discursive field. Actors with greater access to symbolic and material resources seek to fix and stabilize the meaning of a boundary object (semantic boundaries). Along similar lines, Daniel J. Sage et al. (2010) combine Actor–Network–Theory with Foucauldian perspectives on power to account for actors’ unequal resource access; that is, their unequal agency in shifting boundaries.

In particular, actors in positions of formal authority have been shown to transform interactive and democratic boundary objects into instruments of control and formal coordination to regain power and control (e.g. Barrett and Oborn, 2010; Boland and Tenkasi, 1995; Thomas et al., 2007). Such transformations may inhibit knowledge sharing between cross-cultural teams, even resulting in reified cultural boundaries and stereotyping (Barrett and Oborn, 2010). However, even in a state where the meaning of a boundary object appears unambiguous, alternative discourses may nonetheless be reactivated to inspire resistance and question existing boundaries.

What have we learned? Power-as-objectification perspectives broaden the notion of agency to boundary objects. The characteristics of these objects enable a particular (re)presentation of competing discourses and related interests, and therefore have powerful effects on meaning making, knowledge sharing and collaboration. At the same time, boundary objects are constantly (re)constituted by sometimes competing discourses. By altering particular discourses, boundary spanners (and other actors) may influence the meaning of boundary objects and thus their power effects in boundary spanning processes.

6.5.2 Power as governmentality: Power technologies constitute the boundary spanner

Power-as-governmentality approaches to power differ from agency-oriented perspectives in one important regard: they focus on ‘*governmentality*, the ways governing is conceptualized, rather than *governing*, the practices of rule’ (McKinlay et al., 2012, p. 9). In a similar vein to power-as-domination studies, these researchers are interested in why marginalized groups accept their subordination. However, they approach this question from a different angle: they seek to understand how subordinates are *produced* through a combination of various power techniques (Foucault, 1982).

Power-as-governmentality approaches in boundary spanning research have the potential to shed light on the effects of power on the boundary spanner as subject. Boundary spanning practices and research co-create their object of interest (power as objectification) by, for instance, labelling specific persons as a ‘gatekeeper’ (Pettigrew, 1972). How individuals respond to such discursive distinctions and categorizations can be understood by examining subjectifying power effects. So far, poststructuralist boundary spanning research has only

touched upon issues of governmentality when studying the objectifying power effects of boundary objects (e.g. Sage et al., 2010).

Sage et al. (2010) highlight the intersection of technologies of governing the self and the other (Foucault, 1988) by drawing on the notion of the audit society, where monitoring and performance appraisal have become central principles of social organization. The authors emphasize the parallels between the control culture of the audit society and project management: ‘In both instances individuals are afforded some flexibility over the practices to achieve targets, yet they are subject to continuous self-disciplining, monitoring and control technologies’ (Sage et al., 2010, p. 635). From a power-as-governmentality perspective, they highlight how neoliberal forms of governing individuals and populations operate through freedom, transparency and self-regulation (Lemke, 2002). In addition, they study how a project file is interpreted and used in project management practice, conceptualizing it as a means of governing others and the self through transparency. The authors assume that boundary objects are permeated with power and conclude that the combination of a standardized tool with local adaptability and flexibility has been proven to offer ‘a potent mix of non-coherence and invisibility through which power effects were distributed to actors’ (Sage et al., 2010, p. 637).

Here, project management is read against the background of the governing logic of the ‘audit society’ (Power, 1997), in which accounting techniques and values become organizing principles in society as a whole and produce new subjectivities. Prominent examples include performance indicators and benchmarking, which increasingly shape universities and influence academics’ behaviour (Shore, 2008). Although a boundary object, such as a project file, may be largely ignored in everyday practice, supervisors and managers can nonetheless use it as a control and punishment mechanism when a project goes wrong (Sage et al., 2010). In turn, individuals may modify their behaviour and performance, potentially resulting in them becoming self-disciplined subjects.

Which boundaries? Scholars of governmentality perspectives on power in boundary spanning research have a similar perception of boundaries as power-as-objectification approaches. They regard them as being constantly reified (and altered) by the binary logics of that which is deemed legitimate or rational in a particular context. They further accentuate that all actors involved in boundary spanning processes are embedded in various, sometimes competing discourses and governing logics. These discourses and logics are not external to

the individual but constitute the very same individual, which renders it harder to detect their powerful effects.

In addition, governing logics in postmodern societies operate through the promotion of freedom and transparency (Lemke, 2002) and seemingly pose no boundaries to practices and behaviour. The workings of power in postmodern societies are therefore rendered invisible, because they appear to be contrary to power in the sense of strict rules and restrictions.

How are boundaries crossed? Power-as-governmentality scholars are not interested in how boundaries are crossed. Instead, they focus on governing logics and reveal how these logics of transparency and freedom constitute, discipline and govern the boundary spanner, and thus subtly enable and set boundaries to an actor's agency. Specific power technologies 'allow people to be known, to know themselves, and the social world to be acted upon' (McKinlay et al., 2012, p. 9). Thus, boundary spanners cannot simply reframe meanings; they can only do so within discursive limits. The illusion of operating under conditions of freedom and transparency further renders the working of power and its effect on agency invisible. It suggests a considerable amount of individual agency while simultaneously driving subjects to self-regulate and self-discipline.

Whereas proponents of emancipation-oriented power concepts proclaim a state of emancipation from oppressing structure, scholars of governmentality studies in boundary spanning research state instead that the boundary spanner can aim only at not being governed so much or in such a way (Foucault, 2007). Their assumption that no external position to power exists has particular consequences for their understanding of agency. Actors involved in boundary spanning processes can only aim to alter the logics of government but not the very fact of their being governed.

What have we learned? A research perspective which highlights the subjectifying power effects of boundary spanning practices has yet to be developed. It has the potential to highlight how boundary spanners are constituted through a variety of power technologies and how logics of transparency and freedom embedded in a neoliberal boundary spanning environment result in self-monitoring and self-discipline. Governmentality-focused studies may thus provide insights into the subtle workings of power, much like emancipation-oriented research, yet without localizing this power within single actors but instead in the ways in which societies are governed.

6.6 Suggestions for future research

Overall, power-sensitive boundary spanning research has provided strong evidence that power enables, broadens and limits boundary spanning practices and outcomes. Based on the sections which outline the lessons learnt for each power concept, I now proceed to discussing potential avenues for future research.

6.6.1 Who is powerful and influential? The contribution of all actors to boundary spanning

Since the emergence of power-sensitive boundary spanning studies in the 1970s, resource-oriented, functionalist perspectives on power have been the most prominent research stream. These studies have provided rich insights into how boundary spanners use structural and personal power bases to influence decision making and drive innovation (e.g. Barner-Rasmussen et al., 2014; Ibarra, 1993; Spekman, 1979), primarily focusing on the power bases of single boundary spanners. Few scholars have highlighted the benefits of combining power bases and amplifying the power of influence in boundary spanning processes through collaboration with others (e.g. Friedman and Podolny, 1992), and some have emphasized that the power bases of the targeted actors also shape boundary spanning processes (e.g. Marrone, 2010; Schwab et al., 1985). However, even in those cases where the use of power bases has been studied as a common endeavour, the seemingly ‘receiving’ end of boundary spanning activities has been left underexplored (for exceptions see Hislop et al., 2000);

Resource-oriented boundary spanning studies could thus profit from integrating an empowerment-oriented perspective on power. In the tradition of power-to approaches, these studies view power as emerging in interaction and account for the (powerful) influence of *all* actors on boundary spanning practices of networking, bridging and collaboration (e.g. Söderberg and Romani, 2017; Sturdy and Wright, 2011).

Including the power bases of all actors involved in boundary spanning processes would more closely align resource-oriented boundary spanning studies to an important aspect of their power concept: the relational nature of power bases. Researchers could study how the access to and use of power bases of all actors affects boundary spanning outcomes. For example, Donald Hislop et al. (2000) highlight how other actors may be able to hinder a management’s change efforts by blocking hierarchical decisions, utilizing an established

decision-making culture of negotiated consensus to do so. These actors use political power as a power resource to counter managers' position power. Accounting for the power bases of all involved actors potentially requires a greater research effort than studying single actors, but it might further our understanding of why some boundary spanners are more successful than others in a particular context and network of actors.

6.6.2 How to detect the subtle power of influence? Counter-hegemonic reading from a critical perspective

Since the 2000s, empowerment-focused perspectives on power have added a further important contribution to understanding the efficacy of boundary spanning practices. Researchers have outlined that boundary spanners enable cross-cultural collaboration through empowering themselves and others (e.g. Yagi and Kleinberg, 2011), further highlighting the powerful contribution of all actors to boundary spanning outcomes by showing how such actors jointly create and maintain spaces of collaboration (e.g. Hsiao et al., 2012; Kellogg et al., 2006). Thereby, researchers have primarily applied qualitative methods to study practices and meaning making. Some scholars have cautioned that a focus on observable practices may result in overlooking how silence and passivity (potentially) shape collaboration and knowledge sharing (Smith, 2016).

Emancipation-oriented studies could offer a significant contribution to understanding the complex power dynamics of silence and passivity in boundary spanning processes. Including societal power relations into their analysis, these studies demonstrate that actors may not be allowed or may be afraid to speak and act in a collaborative space because of gender, race or class barriers (e.g. Qureshi et al., 2017). Researchers have therefore developed strategies to reveal acts of resistance and subtle influences in boundary spanning processes (e.g. Ravishankar et al., 2013; Söderberg and Romani, 2017). In the context of cross-cultural boundary spanning, for example, and as mentioned earlier, researchers have detected that Indian vendors seemingly adapted European management and communication styles (Ravishankar et al., 2013). Instead of interpreting their behaviour solely as adaption to European management norms, a postcolonial, counter-hegemonic reading of the practices reveals a different picture. The deliberated staging of European management styles and the downplay of Indian-ness did not happen unconsciously; instead, the Indian vendors were acutely aware of their mimicking behaviour. In postcolonial studies, such behaviour has been

labelled as mimicry, a form of subversion of colonial authority (Bhabha, 1984) or, in this case, a subversion of Western, European dominance.

The few emancipation-oriented boundary spanning studies have highlighted that historically-grown power relations influence boundary spanning and may result in ambiguous outcomes regarding collaboration or identity formation. To study these ambiguities, they have drawn on postcolonial studies, which provide a rich conceptual repertoire to address the ambiguities produced by complex, historically grown power asymmetries in a globalized world (see Prasad, 2003). In this vein, Abbott et al. (2013) argue that concepts such as creolization, mimicry and hybridity may help boundary spanning researchers gain a deeper understanding of the complex influences which shape boundary spanning outcomes.

6.6.3 Beyond position power in organizations: Expanding the notion of power bases

Resource-oriented boundary spanning studies have primarily used quantitative, statistical methods to measure the influence of particular power bases on boundary spanning outcomes (e.g. Ibarra, 1993; Spekman, 1979). Thereby, forms of soft power, such as negotiation and meaning making skills, have remained underexplored (for exceptions see Barner-Rasmussen et al., 2014), in comparison to position power or expert power, which may be more easily quantifiable. These studies could thus profit from combining quantitative and qualitative methods to trace the use and influence of soft power in boundary spanning processes.

Resource-oriented power concepts have further focused on power bases embedded at the field, organizational and individual level. Thereby, they have seldom examined the societal and global level of analysis and related power bases. So far, aspects of demographic diversity have rarely been included when discussing access to and use of power bases to drive innovation. Even when they have been, age in the sense of seniority, status or cultural differences has been accounted for (e.g. Ibarra, 1993; Levina and Vaast, 2005, 2008) whereas gender, race and class have largely been overlooked. Linking critical diversity studies (e.g. Ahmed and Swan, 2006; Zanoni et al., 2010) to boundary spanning research could therefore be a fruitful starting point for integrating diversity-related power bases. These studies assert that gender, race, class, disability, sexual orientation or age influence the visibility and influence of actors in organizations (e.g. Cox and Nkomo, 1990; Lewis and Simpson, 2012). Transferred to boundary spanning research, this means that social identities and related

unequal power relations shape whether and how actors can use power bases to influence decision making. A Black person as boundary spanner may have to invest more resources to be accepted as a person of authority in a white organization (legitimate power). Equally, in the IT sector, a female boundary spanner may face more difficulty than her male colleague in proving her competency to mediate between specialists (expert power).

Related to the integration of new power bases are discussions on how the relative importance of power resources is constructed within fields (e.g. Levina and Vaast, 2013; Medvetz, 2012). Such studies combine a resource-oriented with a social-constructivist perspective on power, going beyond a static notion of given power bases. It could be interesting to trace how boundary spanners work to (re)define the value of particular power bases in a field or how they increase their own symbolic power as female, Black and/or disabled boundary spanners in organizations to improve boundary spanning outcomes.

6.6.4 Who acts? Accounting for hidden objectifying and subjectifying power effects

Most power-sensitive boundary spanning studies focus on human actors and their power of influence over boundary spanning practices. Several poststructuralist researchers have expanded the notion of agency in boundary spanning research and included an analysis of the powerful, agentic role of boundary objects in limiting and enabling learning in organizations (e.g. Boland and Tenkasi, 1995; Hawkins et al., 2016; Huvila, 2011). They claim that discourses have objectifying power effects because they create the boundary objects they talk about, such as project management files (Sage et al., 2010) or checklists (Hawkins et al., 2016), and instil them with meaning, which in turns limits collaboration, learning and knowledge sharing.

Some researchers have also attempted to strengthen the limited notion of agency which results from poststructuralist perspectives on power in boundary spanning processes. Accordingly, they have combined these approaches with critical research perspectives (e.g. Hawkins et al., 2016; Huvila, 2011; Sage et al., 2010). In this vein, Hawkins et al. (2016, p. 306) stress that ‘[t]he mediated possibilities for action generated by a boundary object are enabled and foreclosed through the shifting power relations that give networks of practices, subjects, and learning their form’. Tracing the generative power of discourses and linking it to the shifting materiality of networks and resources may bring power-sensitive boundary

spanning researchers closer to solving the puzzle of what makes boundary spanning a success or a failure.

In addition to objectifying power effects, discourses may also have subjectifying power effects. Governmentality studies on power in boundary spanning have begun to point to such effects (Sage et al., 2010), emphasizing that boundary spanners may reflect and regulate their activities based on particular boundary spanning tools. Tracing these hidden subjectifying power effects is important to counter the illusion of an absence of (coercive) power, especially in an environment characterized by governing logics and power technologies which operate through freedom and transparency. Overall, governmentality-based research still needs to be developed in power-sensitive boundary spanning studies and promises to reveal the power dynamics embedded in logics of freedom and transparency.

6.7 Conclusion

Power influences boundary spanning processes and outcomes in multiple ways. This review emphasizes that the applied power concept shapes researchers' answers to the question of why some boundary spanners are more successful than others. Most researchers have stressed that single boundary spanners leverage their position as manager or expert to drive innovation (*power as resource*), whereas others have contended that boundary spanning success is in fact a common endeavour characterized by mutual empowerment and building platforms for collaboration (*power as empowerment*). Some researchers have highlighted that such endeavours may fail or require more effort to succeed because historically-grown power relations of race, class, gender, etc. hamper knowledge sharing and learning in boundary spanning contexts (*power as domination*). Consequently, they have proposed critical research perspectives to detect and understand these change efforts (*power as emancipation*). A small group of poststructuralist researchers have further pointed to the agentic role of boundary objects in enabling and restricting boundary spanning outcomes (*power as objectification*), claiming that even in an environment characterized by transparency and freedom, power still prevails and influences how boundary spanners regulate themselves and their actions (*power as governmentality*).

Examining power-sensitive boundary spanning research through the lens of particular power concepts has revealed overlooked issues, such as the influence of soft power and

demographic diversity as power bases in boundary spanning, strengthening a relational view on power bases, or accounting for hidden acts of influence as well as passivity on boundary spanning outcomes. My suggestions for future research demonstrate how researchers can profit from shifting and combining power concepts to gain a more comprehensive understanding of power in boundary spanning processes.

Chapter 7

Deconstructing the ‘Research Miracle’: Power Structures and Self-Positioning

What is my responsibility to the people whose lives I am studying? What do I owe them for giving me the opportunity to get inside their lives? ... How can the work benefit the well-being of others?

Amy Allen

For me, research is always a journey with an unclear ending. I approach a research topic with a hypothesis in mind which is often shaken up by the studied practices and identity work. This brief description might suggest that I let the data guide me and that I miraculously emerge with novel insights at the end. As a feminist and poststructuralist researcher, I believe that we as researchers (re)create the research objects and realities we study and write about. Research is always the product of the sociohistoric context that we are embedded in and not a neutral process. It is therefore important to make this context and the conditions under which knowledge is produced visible.

In this Chapter, I question how the ‘research miracle’ comes into being and sketch the field logics and power structures which have shaped my research processes and have led to the way that this dissertation ‘presents itself’. My process of reflecting on my knowledge production and (re)constitution of realities is structured according to the triad I have proposed for researchers seeking to dismantle the workings of dominance structures in their research processes: being critical, being reflexive, and being political (Collien, 2018).

7.1 Being critical: How have I dealt with homogenizing social identities?

In ‘*Critical–Reflexive–Political*’, I define the core of being critical as questioning taken-for-granted, normalized social identities (Collien, 2018). My research is therefore characterized by an attempt to deconstruct homogenizing social identities, especially by revealing their

process of (re)construction, as shown for age as a social identity in '*Age Work in Organizations*' (Collien et al., 2016). Highlighting these processes of identity construction contributes to deconstructing generalized social identities. Identity categories, such as the older worker, are thus presented as a commonly (re)produced mechanism of social stratification.

Despite my best efforts to deconstruct and/or expand homogenizing social identities, I sometimes had to reinforce these very same categories in order to name existing and persisting social inequalities of race, class, gender, disability and so forth. Postcolonial researcher Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1990) proposes 'strategic essentialism' as a method of dealing with the paradox of wanting to deconstruct identities while strategically having to reproduce them. She outlines how we temporarily have to draw on and reproduce existing categorizations of women, Black or disabled people to point to social inequalities. She further stresses that this should not undermine our general aim of deconstructing these categories, and thereby reducing the power of particular social categories to legitimize the unequal distribution of resources and oppression. Strategic essentialism thus identifies a political strategy which aims to deconstruct identities while temporarily reproducing essentialist notions, as they are inherently unavoidable.

'I think it's absolutely on target to take a stand against the discourses of essentialism, universalism, as it comes in terms of the universal – of classical German philosophy or the universal as the white upper class male ... etc. But *strategically* we can not' (Spivak, 1990, p. 11).

I have frequently attempted to use self-designations, such as Black people, when outlining these inequalities. Black is therefore written with a capital letter to signal that it is not used as an adjective and a characteristic of a person based on specific biological features, such as darker skin (Schearer and Haruna, 2013). Instead, Black is used as a political term of self-representation to refer to shared experiences of racist exclusion, stereotypization and violence.

Strategic essentialism is one way of dealing with the contradictions which critical diversity researchers face in the scientific field. Queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz (1999) presents disidentification as another strategy to address homogenizing social identities. The strategy also tries to induce change from within as it 'neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it' (Muñoz, 1999, p. 11). Disidentification recognizes the inescapability of identity categories such as race or gender, and therefore aims at 'expanding and

problematizing identity and identification, not abandoning any socially prescribed identity component' (Muñoz, 1999, p. 29). Strategic essentialism and disidentification share a strategic, critical stance towards identities. However, disidentification has a stronger focus on reworking the meaning of social identities than strategic essentialism, as its discourse is more deconstruction-centred (Voelz, 2010).

The strategy of disidentification is also present in this dissertation. In '*Critical-Reflexive-Political*', I highlight the benefit of reading social identities in their historical context to show that these identities are not naturally given but socially constructed (Collien, 2018). By citing the case study of Alicia M. B. Heinemann (2014) on advanced training participation of German women with so-called migration backgrounds, I further seek to expand the category of 'women with a migration background' based on Muñoz's (1999) strategy of disidentification. The presence of these women and their stories surpass the limited, stereotypical images of 'migrant women'. (Re)Presenting and echoing their perspectives through counter-hegemonic reading (see Chapter 3.3) problematizes and expands generalizing identities.

Heinemann (2014) refers to the interviewed women as 'German women with so-called migration backgrounds'. By adding 'so-called', she signals her attempt to distance herself from the generalizing label of a migration background. When describing her interview sample, she states that these women are ascribed a migration background but that their positioning in terms of experiences with exclusion, integration and racism are diverse. In addition, some of these women have actually migrated to Germany themselves, whereas others already grew up there, yet their parents were immigrants. Heinemann further explains that she refers to her interviewees as German women because their lives are all centred in Germany. Finally, she ultimately uses the term 'German women with so-called migration backgrounds' to name her interviewees and to underline that this identity category is the result of a process of social construction. I adopt Heinemann's strategy of labelling her interview sample in this dissertation because her strategy aligns with my own aim of deconstructing identities while naming inequalities, and I wanted to adequately represent her sample.

At times, my attempts to deconstruct or broaden social identities have been undermined in the review process. For instance, I have tried to use gender neutral pronouns, such as 'they' instead of 'he' or 'she', when discussing actors whose gender I did not know. More than once, journal editors and reviewers have expressed irritation and asked me to correct this 'mistake'.

For the review process, I have thus attempted to avoid pronouns in cases when making general claims about actors or when I had no information of the actors' chosen gender identity. This strategy allowed me to dismantle the automatic association of actor with a male subject – as criticized by feminist researchers (Walker, 1990). My research published in international journals thereby contributes to reducing the importance of gendered categorizations as a mechanism of social stratification but it does not actively contribute to raising awareness of diverse gender identities.

In this dissertation I have added 'they' as a third, non-binary pronoun to signal that more than two genders exist. For instance, I have extended Spedale's quote on the fluidity of privilege, stating that there is no clarity as to whether a particular actor is 'a "winner" or a "loser" and as to whether he [or she or they] benefits [or benefit] from privilege more than he [or she or they] suffers [or suffer] from discrimination' (Spedale, 2018, p. 49). This solution does reduce the readability of the text, but the aim of pointing towards the multiplicity of gender identities and thereby irritating the norm is more important to me than ensuring smooth reading at all times.

Finally, I have added the full names of each author at the beginning of a new chapter to create visibility for different gender identities. Of course, a name is not automatically an indicator of a person's gender identity, but it may be, and the presentation of names associated as female, male, gender neutral or as non-Western serves as a reminder of the diversity of authorship. I have also researched the authors' self-chosen gender pronouns online to strengthen self-designation.

All of these strategies are attempts to deal with the paradox of simultaneous identity deconstruction, expansion and maintenance. They are far from perfect but nonetheless important reminders of the diverse 'reality' behind homogenizing and often stigmatizing social identities, as well as important tools of empowerment and resistance.

7.2 Being reflexive: Where do I stand and how has this shaped the research process?

In '*Critical-Reflexive-Political*', I claim that scholars need to reflect on their position in terms of social power relations, the logics of the scientific field and the scholastic perspective

as three elements of being reflexive. Feminist family studies scholar Linda Thompson (1992, p. 13) emphasizes the influence of researchers' positioning in multiple contexts and power relations on the research process: 'The author reproduces discourses rather than creates new knowledge. Every author's reading of a "text," therefore, is different and shaped by their sociohistorical location.' My societal positioning as a white, (gender-)queer, able-bodied person in her thirties with ambivalent experiences as to class background (growing up on a farm before relocating to a more academic environment at age 11) have thus shaped my research interests and approaches as well as my interpretation and presentation of research insights. I now turn to exemplify how my positioning has influenced my research process. Furthermore, I point out how the logics of the scientific field, and in particular the review processes of international journals, have shaped my research output.

The bodies of the researchers matter in the research process, and their presence is particularly relevant when conducting interviews or engaging in participant observation (Del Busso, 2007). The interviews in the article on '*Age Work in Organizations*' (Collien et al., 2016) were conducted by one of my co-authors, together with a colleague of his. The fact that a white, middle-aged, male professor and a white, younger female research assistant were asking questions may have shaped how interviewees presented themselves and their perspectives on and vulnerabilities related to age and ageing. Gender dynamics may have also mattered in this context. Unfortunately, observing such dynamics was not a part of the original interview plan and it would have impossible to reliably reconstruct them in retrospect. Nonetheless, my co-authors and I detected gender differences in the actors' age work. Even though we took an emic research approach, having no predefined idea of gender-specific age work, my co-author Barbara Sieben and I were aware of potential gender dynamics because of our strong interest in topics of gender, diversity and equality in organizations. Other researchers may have overlooked the gender-specific differences in age work, yet might have found other interesting coherences. Thus, our bodies and (related) research interests also mattered for the analysis.

As a researcher interested in racism-critical and postcolonial studies, I would have been further interested in studying intersections between race, class and gender in actors' age work. Our study reveals that income and job status are relevant for actors' age work. This could be read as an indicator of class difference in the interview sample. However, it would have been fascinating to dig deeper and potentially reveal a class-specific articulation of ageing. Such an

articulation is potentially rooted in the material experiences of interviewees, such as class-specific declining physical abilities because of demanding physical work. Frequently, a lower class correlates with race and migration experience, and it would have been potentially fruitful to examine these intersections.

Our binary portrayal and information of the interviewees' gender has left me wondering how people's gender expression may have affected their age work. As a gender-queer, rather butch person, I would have loved to study how masculine femininity affects age work. Do masculine-presenting women also fear status loss, like the male steel workers? Do they highlight physical strength despite declining physical abilities to reinforce their gender expression? Which aspects of masculine-specific age work can be found in their identity work, and which are rejected or altered?²¹

In '*Critical-Reflexive-Political*', I draw on Heinemann's (2014) case study on the advanced training participation of German women with so-called migration backgrounds to illustrate my theoretical claims. Heinemann's position as a woman of Colour in Germany may have facilitated access to and helped her gain the trust of the interviewed women to share instances of exclusion and discrimination on the basis of race, gender and citizenship. I have profited from her research, because I would probably not have gained such profound access to their stories as a white woman. Representing Heinemann's study and using it to back my theoretical claims is ambivalent: On the one hand, I amplify the voices of these women through re-presenting their stories in a different context. On the other hand, I build on and harvest the ideas of researchers and people with experiences of racism as a white person to advance my scientific career. Ultimately, there may be no absolute moral judgement as to whether my strategies are right or wrong. However, it is important to make ambivalences transparent so that we can be held accountable as researchers; also, as our actions may have further consequences. Representing the stories of marginalized people in scientific journals can potentially do more harm than good when managers use their testimonials of resistance to advance control mechanisms, as critical diversity researcher Patrizia Zanoni (Zanoni and Van Laer, 2015) highlights:

'Aware of my own privileged position, while writing, I ask myself whether my work could possibly be used to damage individuals in subordinated positions, for instance through the

²¹ Some age diversity researchers (e.g. King, 2016; Riach et al., 2014) have started to trace the experiences of older gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender employees in organizations, critiquing that these groups are often overlooked or expected to adapt to heteronormative notions of age and ageing.

managerial reappropriation of the identified mechanisms of domination and exploitation ...'
(Zanoni and Van Laer, 2015, p. 346).

She concludes by reflecting about the unlikelihood of her research influencing managers at all.

'Then I console myself thinking that managers surely do not read scientific journals (especially the ones I write in), and that no visibility of my work in the "real" world out there should be assumed' (Zanoni and Van Laer, 2015, p. 346).

My research is located at the margins of OMS and primarily resonates with scholars who label themselves as (ideology-)critical. The potential harm that could be caused by representing marginalized voices and their acts of resistance in mainstream journals may therefore not be marginal.

The logics of the scientific field have also shaped my research outcome. In this vein, Thompson (1992, p. 10) writes that '[f]eminists also encourage researchers to be open about the problems and compromises involved in doing research ... All of this makes researchers humble about their conclusions and the limitations of social science ...'. I accordingly want to elaborate on how the logics of the scientific field have shaped my research.

'*Critical-Reflexive-Political*', when I first submitted it to *Management Learning*, was originally an empirical case study on the identity work of German public servants who experience racism at work. The editor and the reviewers considered this case study to be interesting but criticized it for not providing sufficient novel theoretical contributions. One of the reviewers recommended that I turned the manuscript into a theoretical paper on the triad of being critical, reflexive and political, which by then had only formed a minor part of the paper. The reviewer further advised me to use my case study to illustrate my theoretical claims. I was grateful to the reviewers for this proposition, but I also discovered that my case study did not provide sufficient empirical evidence to back all its claims. For this reason, I finally drew on Heinemann's (2014) case study, which proved to be a perfect fit to reinforce the importance of my theoretical framework.

Consequently, the voices of my original interviewees remained unheard because I was unable to extract a significant, novel theoretical contribution from their interviews and thereby address a research gap. Critical diversity researchers have pointed out that the notion of a research gap propels the illusion that knowledge is something which constantly evolves and for which gaps must be filled (Zanoni and Van Laer, 2015). It sometimes frustrates me

that the quest for new theoretical insights reigns over making the voices of marginalized societal groups and their experiences heard. Even though researchers may not significantly advance theoretical insights, a context-sensitive presentation of such experiences may, for instance, help practitioners to advance their practices.

A slight gap between theory and practice thus characterizes the field of OMS as well as other research fields. In particular, international, peer-reviewed journals demand that researchers outline their theoretical contribution to ever growing, complex research fields. These fields follow their own institutional (and discursive) logics (Townley, 1997), and often drift away from the everyday challenges of (diversity) management practice. The transfer between theory and practice may thus not be directly identifiable, even though sections on 'practical implications' and new communication formats of research insights seek to bridge this gap. My research is also characterized by the requirements of publishing in international journals, where reviewers strongly voice demands for novel theoretical contributions. Over the course of developing particular papers, the practical relevance has sometimes taken a backseat. In Chapter 3, regarding the overriding theoretical contributions of my dissertation, I thus attempt to explain my research insights so they can also be understood by and appeal to (diversity) practitioners. This is important to me because, besides being a researcher in OMS, in my other life, I am also a diversity manager at a large university. I have been working in the field of gender equality and diversity management for years, and my practical work is enriched by my theoretical reflections as a researcher and vice versa.

Despite my best efforts, it remains a challenge to transfer theoretical insights to everyday diversity (management) practice, as other critical diversity researchers have already acknowledged (Zanoni and van Laer, 2015). This phenomenon is also well known from the field of gender studies, which has its roots in the (predominantly white and bourgeois) women's movements of the 1970s and 1980s and was at first closely connected to gender equality efforts and policies. Yet, over the years, gender theory researchers have increasingly addressed theoretical issues apart from the practice of gender mainstreaming or feminist movements (Hark, 2005). For example, theoretical puzzles related to materiality and gender (e.g. Barad, 2007) are predominantly discussed in the academic space of gender studies, as it is hard to connect them to the 'lowland' of everyday practice, where unconscious bias and even misogyny must frequently be confronted. My experiences as a diversity manager show that colleagues and students frequently need convincing that gender mainstreaming is a

legitimate policy to tackle persisting gender inequalities, or that diversity is actually beneficial for universities and does not downgrade student performance.

As outlined, my research is embedded in multiple taken-for-granted practices and field logics and further influenced by my position in societal power relations. I think that rendering these influences is important to remain humble as researcher and to enable others to hold me accountable for my research decisions and insights.

7.3 Being political: What do I believe and how have I interpreted what I saw?

The third element of being political highlights that researchers should make their ideological underpinnings and political worldview transparent, so that they can be held accountable for their judgement of organizational practices, identity work and behaviour (Collien, 2018). In this section, I therefore sketch some of my political convictions which have influenced the interpretation of my findings.

I am a critical diversity scholar, a diversity (management) practitioner and a social justice activist by heart. These multiple identities have, amongst other aspects, shaped this dissertation. My underlying quest for social justice implies that my main focus lies in reducing social inequalities, which are (re)produced and altered in and through organizations. My research aligns with Thompson's (1992, p. 14) notion of nonoppressive research that 'empowers, rather than exploits ... Rather than research that serves the career interests of the researcher or social control, nonoppressive research serves the interests of the researched or the disadvantaged'. As outlined in the previous section, I am ambivalent regarding whether my research supports and empowers marginalized societal groups. However, my research amplifies marginalized voices within the scientific mainstream and argues for why it is beneficial to account for historically-grown power relations in research and practice (see Chapter 3.3 on counter-hegemonic reading). Furthermore, I provide tools to encourage the dismantling of persisting dominance in organizations. In that sense, I regard my research as emancipation-oriented and ideology-critical.

Aware that ideology-critical, emancipatory perspectives are important, yet wanting to remain as open towards new perspectives as possible, I have structured the research process

accordingly. For instance, my co-authors and I introduce an ideology-critical reading of the findings at the end of our paper on *'Age Work in Organizations'* and explicate our perspective. Constrasting the presentation and interpretation of our findings, especially when read in their sociohistoric context, allows readers to clearly see our political judgements and decide for themselves whether or not they want to follow our interpretation. However, we as researchers also remained careful with our interpretation, rhetorically highlighting that there may be other possibilities of interpreting the findings: 'Their privileged position as to income and job security combined with an individualistic perspective on health and fitness *can be read* as an expression of a privileged masculinity ...' (Collien et al., 2016, p. 792; emphasis added).

It is important to make our research interpretations and ideological underpinnings transparent. Yet, even when doing so, this may not comply with the rules of the scientific field, as the following anecdote highlights. During the review process of my paper on *'Concepts of Power in Boundary Spanning Research'*, one reviewer commented on my suggested avenues for future research as follows:

'In these sections, the points you are making are always correct, yet, I doubt they are relevant to your audience. To put it simply, my impression is that you favour a critical perspective in your approach to research, and therefore, you tend to present avenues for development that are sensitive to context, power differential etc. In other words, what YOU find interesting is not necessarily relevant to your audience, and those in each of the perspectives you review. ... If you have a critical perspective ... then of course you are interested in large socio-cultural /economical context, because your ontology sees them as relevant. But do people who use/ study power as resource see that too? Or are interested in this too?' (Anonymous Reviewer)

I feel ambivalent about the reviewer's remark, because developing a contribution according to the logic of a particular sub-stream of research may be more interesting for this particular audience, but developing it from an emancipation-oriented, ideology-critical perspective may be more important for my aim of nonoppressive research (Thompson, 1992). In this case, I prioritized the interests of the assumed readers to get published. However, I also wondered: Who are these readers? Moreover, do we not limit our research insights because we seek to cater to a particular (imagined) audience? Do we not want to attract potential other readers and render the mainstream more ideology-critical? Whom do we imagine when we think about scientists? And: Do we – as critical diversity scholars – ultimately cater to the assumed interests and needs of a white, scientific malestream?

Chapter 8

Concluding Remarks

I'm a feminist so I believe in inhabiting contradictions. I believe in making contradictions productive, not in having to choose one side or the other side.

Angela Davis

Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

In this dissertation, I have shed light on the construction of difference and the related reproduction of social inequalities and dominance in and through organizations. All three papers of my cumulative dissertation thus focus on how societal power relations and power dynamics are maintained and altered in and through organizations. In particular, I seek to understand why social inequalities persist, despite various efforts to reduce and diminish them. My research thereby stands firmly in the tradition of CDS, which share a non-essentialist perspective on differences and seek to alter historically-grown inequalities of gender, race, class, disability, sexual orientation, age, religion etc. (Ahmed and Swan, 2006; Zanoni et al., 2010).

In my research, I show that social inequalities are even maintained by those actors in organizations who are disadvantaged by homogenizing social identities and discriminatory practices. However, I also caution scholars to more closely examine the maintenance of social inequalities, because otherwise we may overlook acts of resistance and change as well as the differing motives and interests behind the reproduction of unequal power relations. Therefore, I propose various research tools to dismantle the taken-for-granted workings of historically-grown structures of dominance (summarized in Chapter 3). We as critical diversity researchers also need to *learn* to detect dominance, because we are embedded in the very same power relations and dominance structures we seek to dismantle.

To reveal the complex motives behind compliance, I point to the value of multi-level analyses and social comparison information (see Chapter 3.1 and 3.2). It therefore becomes evident, for instance, how social status and gender contribute to triggering passivity instead of

resulting in resistance to disadvantageous management practices. In the tradition of CDS, I stress that social inequalities are historically-grown and that stigmatizing social identities often bear historical continuities related to colonialism or patriarchal logics. It is therefore of the utmost importance to read identities and organizational practices in their sociohistoric context. I propose ‘counter-hegemonic reading’ as a strategy to dismantle the subtle workings of dominance and power and to reveal actors’ acts of resistance and change (see Chapter 3.3 and 5.4.1). Furthermore, I develop an analytical framework to navigate concepts of power (Chapter 6), which addresses the need for a more refined understanding of power in CDS (Ahonen et al., 2013). This is particularly important because studying power dynamics and power relations is central to this research field. Again, examining power from different perspectives helps researchers reveal hidden acts of resistance. Ultimately, I propose a triad of being critical, being reflexive *and* being political for researchers interested in dismantling the workings of power and dominance in and through organizations. Not only must we show that taken-for-granted social identities are constructed (being critical) and reflect on how multifaceted contexts affect us as researchers (being reflexive), but we also need to reveal our political agenda and our ideological beliefs (being political) to enable an ethical dialogue about research insights and interpretations.

My motivation to develop tools to gain a deeper understanding of how and why social inequalities and relations of dominance are reproduced in and through organizations seems ever more important set against recent global developments: the Corona crisis and the worldwide protests in reaction to a white police officer killing the Black-American George Floyd. The varying vulnerabilities of societal groups have particularly become visible in the former. It has also become evident that our societies and organizations cater to the needs of particular societal groups (e.g. white men without care responsibilities) instead of promoting a diversity-sensitive approach which accounts for different access to material and symbolic resources. At the beginning of the Corona crisis, people with care responsibilities, especially (migrant) women, were hit particularly hard by the aggravated requirements of juggling work and their care for children or other care-dependent persons. At the same time, they formed a large percentage of the essential workers in hospitals and kindergartens who kept our society running. It took some time for politicians and decision makers in organizations to recognize their needs, and some groups, such as sex workers, are still stigmatized and remain excluded from the political agenda. More than ever, the need for a diversity-sensitive perspective on organizations and living conditions has become evident. My research stands in a tradition

which demands that society and organizations recognize and restructure themselves according to the needs of their most vulnerable, instead of catering to those who already possess much and occupy influential positions.

The debate on the systematic racism embedded in societies in the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd further stresses the need for dismantling persistent structures of dominance in CDS. The demand of ‘defund the police’ perfectly shows how taken-for-granted societal structures can and should be questioned. Black lives matter activists argue that it is absurd to think we can solve social problems such as drug use or robbery primarily through law enforcement. Thus, they call for reducing police funding in favour of increasing prevention-oriented public safety concepts, which focus on strengthening social work and community support structures to tackle social problems at their source. These recent developments show that ideology-critical diversity research, which questions normalized behaviour, identities and practices, is required more than ever to promote equality and social justice in organizations and societies.

I hope that my research inspires other Critical Diversity scholars to step into the arena, let themselves be seen and voice their perspectives on the complex dynamics of dominance occurring in organizations on a daily basis. Taking a political stance towards oppression, exploitation and domination in organizations is vital, as we live in a world characterized by various forms of organizations and organizing. With different degrees of influence and from different positions, we all partake in influencing how these organizations structure our lives and the lives of others.

Justice now!

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Appendix

A List of submitted research articles

The listed research papers have all been submitted to double-blind, peer-reviewed journals. The case study on ‘*Age Work in Organizations*’ and the theoretical paper entitled ‘*Critical–Reflexive–Political*’ have already been published, whereas the review on ‘*Concepts of Power in Boundary Spanning Research*’ has been revised twice, required a minor revision the second time and is currently under review in the *International Journal of Management Reviews*.

Research articles published and/or written in single authorship:

- Collien, I. (2018). ‘Critical–Reflexive–Political: Dismantling the Reproduction of Dominance in Organisational Learning Processes’. *Management Learning*, **49**, 131–149.
- Collien, I. ‘Power Concepts in Boundary Spanning Research: A Review and Research Agenda’. *International Journal of Management Reviews* (2nd revision, resubmitted on June 13, 2020).

Research articles published in co-authorship:

- Collien, I., Sieben, B., & Müller-Camen, M. (2016). ‘Age Work in Organizations: Maintaining and Disrupting Institutionalized Understandings of Higher Age’. *British Journal of Management*, **27**, 778–795.

B Summary of ‘*Age Work in Organizations*’

The empirical research paper on ‘*Age Work in Organizations: Maintaining and Disrupting Institutionalized Understandings of Higher Age*’ was published in 2016 in the *British Journal of Management* (Collien et al., 2016). It combines CDS on age (e.g. Riach, 2007; Spedale et al., 2014) with the neoinstitutionalist theory of institutional work (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006) to explain the persistence of age inequalities in organizations. Thereby, my co-authors and I produce a counterintuitive finding: The reproduction of age stereotypes may reduce age inequalities on the level of organizational practices, whereas a deconstruction of age stereotypes may be used to maintain disadvantageous practices.

B.1 English summary of ‘*Age Work in Organizations*’

Age diversity studies provide manifold explanations for the persistence of age inequalities. Research on age stereotypes explains age discrimination at the workplace through ageist

behaviour, yet seldom accounts for the broader context (Shiu et al., 2015). Discourse-based age research predominantly focuses on identity work and acts of resistance (Riach, 2007; Riach et al., 2014) but less frequently on related management practices (Spedale et al., 2014). Therefore, age diversity researchers (Thomas et al., 2014) have called for a context-sensitive perspective on age and ageing in organizations which combines the micro-level of everyday (inter)actions with the macro-level of societal cultural norms and power structures.

In our study, my co-authors and I respond to this call by developing the concept of ‘age work’, understood as the institutional work of organizational actors to pursue their particular interests and to (de)legitimize age inequalities. Our innovative approach shows how actors’ material embedding in working conditions and labour relations shapes their age work. We combine critical discourse-based research on age (e.g. Riach, 2007; Spedale et al., 2014) with the concept of institutional work (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006) to examine how and why different actors reproduce or alter age images and related age inequalities. Thereby, we respond to calls for new approaches in age diversity research (Shore et al., 2009; Yang and Konrad, 2011) and to calls in institutional theory for ‘developing a strong foundation for dealing with power’ (Munir, 2015, p. 2) through merging it with critical perspectives (Suddaby, 2015).

We apply our novel theoretical approach to a multi-actor, cross-sector case study of four German organizations known for their age management and uncover a counterintuitive insight: in contrast to assumptions of critical diversity research on age (e.g. Ainsworth et al., 2014; Posthuma and Campion, 2009), maintaining stereotypical images of higher age does not necessarily reproduce age inequalities. Instead, it can serve to defend older workers’ employee rights, whereas disrupting (negative) age images can be used to dismantle these rights. For example, trade union representatives strategically pointed to the declining physical abilities of older workers to argue for the preservation of part-time retirement options, which they deemed highly valuable in the context of a decreasing social welfare system. Managers, by contrast, deconstructed age images to advance the idea of ever-healthy workers who are entirely self-responsible for their health, even when faced with detrimental working conditions.

Our intersectional reading of the specific forms of age work further portrays them as shaped by differences in income and job security (Craciun et al., 2015) as well as gender roles (Courtenay, 2000). For instance, the older male steel workers avoided revealing their health

problems because they feared being dislocated to a lower status job with equal pay. Contrastingly, the predominantly female retail employees hid their potential declining job performance because being relocated meant a lower income in the new position, as protective collective bargaining agreements, as in the steel industry, were lacking.

The article highlights that a discourse- and deconstruction-oriented perspective on diversity categories (such as age) should be connected to a practice- and context-sensitive perspective on (management) practices to understand the perpetuation of (age) inequalities (Spedale et al., 2014; Thomas et al., 2014). It shows how fruitful the connection between CMS (here: CDS) and neoinstitutionalist theory can be in terms of advancing our understanding of the reproduction of social inequalities, and thereby responds to the respective calls in neoinstitutionalist research, especially in the research field of institutional work (Munir, 2015; Suddaby, 2015).

B.2 German summary of ‘Age Work in Organizations’

Das Fortbestehen von Altersungleichheiten wird in der Forschungsliteratur unterschiedlich erklärt. Studien zu Altersstereotypen begründen Altersungleichheiten beispielsweise über altersdiskriminierende Einstellungen und Verhaltensweisen. Älteren Beschäftigten wird in Organisationen häufig unterstellt, dass sie weniger körperlich leistungsfähig oder technologisch abgehängt seien, während sie gleichzeitig als erfahrener als jüngere Mitarbeitende wahrgenommen werden (Posthuma and Campion, 2009; Rabl, 2010). Diskursorientierte Altersforschung widmet sich aus gesamtgesellschaftlicher Perspektive verstärkt der Identitätsarbeit und dem Widerstand älterer Beschäftigter gegen altersstereotype Zuschreibungen (Riach et al., 2014; Trethewey, 2001), selten jedoch mit einer Rückbindung an organisationale Praktiken (Spedale, 2018; Spedale et al., 2014). Demgegenüber steht die Altersmanagementforschung, die aus national vergleichender Perspektive darauf fokussiert, wie sich Bezahlung, Beförderung oder Weiterbildung altersabhängig unterschiedlich ausgestalten (Shiu et al., 2015). Es ist festzuhalten, dass die individualisierte Perspektive der Altersstereotypenforschung und ein diskursorientiertes, kontextbezogenes Verständnis von Alter häufig unverbunden neben der weitgehend national vergleichend angelegten Altersmanagementforschung mit ihrem Fokus auf Managementpraktiken stehen.

In unserem Fachartikel schlagen wir die Brücke zwischen Altersstereotypen, Altersdiskursen und Managementpraktiken. Dazu entwickeln wir das Konzept von *Age Work*,

welches die beschriebene Forschungsliteratur zu Altersstereotypen, –diskursen und -management mit dem neoinstitutionalistischen Konzept der Institutional Work (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006) verbindet. Age Work bezeichnet die Arbeit von Akteur_innen zur Aufrechterhaltung oder zur Destabilisierung von Alter als gesellschaftliche Institution. Es verbindet individuelle Handlungsfähigkeit mit der Berücksichtigung von Strukturen über verschiedene Analyseebenen hinweg und hilft damit zu erklären, warum Altersungleichheiten in Organisationen trotz gegenteiliger Bemühungen oftmals fortbestehen.

Die empirische, vergleichend angelegte Analyse zum Umgang mit Arbeitnehmer_innen über 50 Jahren in vier Organisationen aus der Stahlindustrie, dem Einzelhandel, der Chemieindustrie und dem Bildungsbereich führt zu einem kontraintuitiven Ergebnis: Die rhetorische Dekonstruktion von Altersstereotypen führt nicht automatisch zum Abbau von Altersungleichheiten, sondern kann zu deren Verschleierung beitragen. Gleichzeitig bedeutet ein Rückbezug auf Altersstereotype nicht zwangsläufig, dass damit Altersungleichheiten bei der Bezahlung oder der Beförderung gerechtfertigt und verfestigt werden. Betriebsräte verweisen beispielsweise auf sinkende, physische Leistungsfähigkeit von älteren Beschäftigten, um den weiteren Abbau von Altersteilzeit im Kontext eines gesamtgesellschaftlichen Zurückfahrens von sozialen Sicherungssystemen zu verhindern und Altersarmut zu reduzieren.

Ein intersektionaler Vergleich der vier Fallbeispiele verdeutlicht weiterhin, wie die Age Work von Job- und Einkommenssicherheit sowie Geschlechterrollen beeinflusst wird. Beschäftigte der Stahlindustrie und des Einzelhandels fürchteten zum Beispiel umgesetzt zu werden, daher akzeptierten sie Managementpraktiken, die Altersungleichheiten beförderten. Besonders die männlichen Stahlarbeiter vermieden es dabei ihre gesundheitlichen Probleme offenzulegen, obwohl ihnen durch die Umsetzung keine Einkommenseinbußen drohten. Sie fürchteten jedoch einen Statusverlust. Dieser spielte bei den überwiegend weiblichen Einzelhandelsbeschäftigten keine Rolle. Sie machten sich hingegen Sorgen darum nach einer Umsetzung weniger zu verdienen, da eine Absicherung durch entsprechende Tarifverträge, wie in der Stahlindustrie, fehlte.

Der Fachartikel unterstreicht, dass eine diskurs- und dekonstruktionsorientierte Perspektive auf Diversity-Kategorien (Spedale et al., 2014; Thomas et al., 2014) an bestehende organisationale Praktiken und sozio-kulturelle Kontexte rückgebunden werden muss, um die Fortschreibung von sozialen Ungleichheiten zu verstehen. Gleichzeitig trägt der Fachartikel

dazu bei aufzuzeigen, wie gewinnbringend es sein kann neoinstitutionalistische Forschung stärker mit Kritischer Managementforschung und ihrem Fokus auf Machtfragen zu verbinden (Munir, 2015; Suddaby, 2015).

C Summary of ‘*Critical–Reflexive–Political*’

The theoretical research paper entitled ‘*Critical–Reflexive–Political*’ was published in 2018 in *Management Learning* (Collien, 2018). In the paper I explain, from a sociological and postcolonial perspective (e.g. Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992b; Heinemann, 2014) why relations of dominance are often automatically reproduced in organizational learning processes. Using an empirical case study (Heinemann, 2014) to illustrate the theoretical claims, I further demand that being critical in the sense of questioning taken-for-granted practices, behaviour, and identities may not be sufficient to study and understand the persistence of social inequalities in organizations. Instead, I emphasize that researchers must also elaborate on their normative underpinnings and political views on a particular research topic (being political) and reflect on the effect of their position within social inequalities on the research process (being reflexive).

C.1 English summary of ‘*Critical–Reflexive–Political*’

Power-sensitive organizational learning research views learning and knowing from a social–constructivist perspective as a result of social interaction (Chiva and Alegre, 2005). Consequently, researchers claim that a situated understanding of learning must ‘demonstrate how learning processes are inextricably implicated in the social reproduction of wider institutional structures’ (Contu and Willmott, 2003, p. 294) and related unequal societal power relations. Revisiting studies on power and politics in organizational learning, this article highlights that a considerable amount of effort has been exerted to propel a situated, power-sensitive understanding of learning, and the research field has thus predominantly developed in two directions.

Some researchers have focused on the innerorganizational level and detailed how actors use individual and organizational power bases and micro-politics to drive innovation (Lawrence et al., 2005; Vince and Saleem, 2004) or how an organizational climate of fear and fault intolerance hinders the questioning of established power relations and practices (Nicolini

et al., 2004; Vince, 2001). Others have connected levels of analysis and suggested that social divisions manifest in micro-conflicts in group learning processes (Contu and Willmott, 2003; Cunliffe, 2008) or problematized how macro-level discourses limit individual learning in organizations by aligning the learning aspirations of employees and managers to an individualized logic of presentable skills and knowledge (Antonacopoulou and Chiva, 2007; Ferdinand, 2004).

This article addresses the need for a stronger theoretical and empirical engagement of power-sensitive organizational learning research with societal power relations and issues of persisting dominance. I thus connect the two research streams, focusing on how societal structures of dominance are often automatically reproduced in micro-level learning processes. Based on Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) sociological theory of practice and postcolonial extensions of the theory (Heinemann, 2014), I build a theoretical foundation to understand why the reproduction of unequal power relations and dominance structures is an inherent part of learning processes in organizations. Subsequently, I address the consequences for research that arise from such a theoretical framing and define a conceptual triad of being critical, being reflexive and being political as necessary elements to identify and dismantle dominance structures in learning processes. I use Alicia M. B. Heinemann's (2014) postcolonial case study on advanced training in Germany to illustrate the triad's benefits for organizational learning research.

This article contributes to power-sensitive organizational learning research in several ways. First, it provides a profound theoretical framework to better understand the connections between structure, agency and power in reproducing systems of dominance through learning processes in organizations. Furthermore, it refines notions of interest-driven micro-politics shaping learning in organizations (Lawrence et al., 2005; Vince, 2004) by linking them to societal power relations and dominance structures. For example, I outline how actors require symbolic capital which provides them with the necessary recognition and visibility to establish new practices through micro-politics. However, such capital is historically grown and unevenly distributed along the lines of gender, race, class, disability etc. (Ahmed and Swan, 2006). I thus claim that researchers not only need to question taken-for-granted identities, practices, and behaviour in organizations as a fundamental element of *being critical*, but they furthermore need to read identity and power bases in learning processes in their historic context to dismantle embedded, hidden dominance structures (see Chapter 3.3

on the strategy of counter-hegemonic reading). I additionally demand that researchers should be aware of their own positioning in societal power relations and in the academic field, and should also question the process of knowledge production, which often follows distinct field logics apart from concrete practice (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992a). This second element of *being reflexive* expands on the current understandings of reflexivity in organizational learning research (Cunliffe, 2008; Nicolini et al., 2004) by linking it to a broader notion of context. Finally, the third element of *being political* requires researchers to render their ideological underpinnings transparent to encourage the called-for, ethically informed dialogue on the nature of the observed organizational learning processes (Cunliffe, 2008; Willmott, 1997).

C.2 German summary of ‘*Critical – Reflexive – Political*’

Lernprozesse von und in Organisationen finden nicht im luftleeren Raum statt, sondern sind eingebunden in einen soziohistorischen und organisationalen Kontext (Contu and Willmott, 2003). Ein Forschungszweig der Literatur zu Organisationalem Lernen begreift Machtverhältnisse und Macht als charakteristisch für diesen Kontext. In meinem Fachartikel verdeutliche ich, dass sich die Forschung zu Macht/-verhältnissen in Prozessen organisationalen Lernens in zwei Richtungen entwickelt hat. Forschende mit einem innerorganisationalen Fokus untersuchten, wie Akteur_innen individuelle und organisationale Machtressourcen und Mikropolitiken einsetzen um Innovationen voranzutreiben (Lawrence et al., 2005) oder wie ein Klima der Angst und der Fehlerintoleranz ein kritisches Hinterfragen etablierter organisationaler (Macht-)Strukturen verhindert (Nicolini et al., 2004; Vince, 2001). Andere Wissenschaftler_innen richteten ihren Fokus stärker auf die Verbindung der Mikro- und Makroebene. So untersuchten sie, wie gesellschaftliche Diskurse zu erlernende Kompetenzen vordefinieren und damit individuelle Lernprozesse in Organisationen begrenzen (Antonacopoulou and Chiva, 2007; Ferdinand, 2004) oder sie postulierten, dass sich gesellschaftliche Machtverhältnisse bezogen auf Geschlecht, Klasse oder Ethnizität auf das Lernen in Gruppen auswirken (Contu and Willmott, 2003; Hong and Fiona, 2009) – jedoch ohne eine empirische Untermauerung ihrer theoretischen Erkenntnisse.

Bis dato fehlte im beschriebenen Forschungsfeld ein einheitlicher, theoretischer Erklärungsrahmen dazu, wie gesellschaftliche Machtverhältnisse Lernprozesse in und von Organisationen beeinflussen und wie damit soziale Ungleichheiten fortgeschrieben werden. Es ist daher nicht verwunderlich, dass der vorliegende Fachartikel als eine der wenigen

Studien hervorgehoben wurde, die auf Machtverhältnisse in Prozessen organisationalen Lernens fokussieren (Anderson et al., 2019). In dem Artikel verbinde ich die beiden beschriebenen Forschungsstränge und entwickle, ausgehend von der Praxeologie des französischen Soziologen Pierre Bourdieu (1977) und postkolonialer Erweiterungen seiner Theorien (Heinemann, 2014), ein theoretisches Gerüst, um besser verstehen, warum selbst marginalisierte Akteur_innen Macht- und Dominanzverhältnisse in Lernprozessen häufig reproduzieren.

In einem zweiten Schritt diskutiere ich die Konsequenzen, die sich aus diesem theoretischen Zugang für die Forschungspraxis ergeben und unterstreiche meine Schlussfolgerungen mit Rückbezug die postkoloniale Studie von Alicia Heinemann (2014) zur Teilnahme von deutschen Frauen mit sogenanntem Migrationshintergrund an Weiterbildungsprogrammen. Ich argumentiere, dass eine kritische Haltung gegenüber etablierten Praktiken und Diskursen, wie sie von vielen Forschenden relativ unspezifisch gefordert wird, nicht ausreicht, um im Forschungsprozess tief verwurzelte Dominanzverhältnisse aufdecken zu können. Hierzu ist vielmehr eine Triade aus kritischer Haltung (*being critical*), politischer Positionierung (*being political*) und Selbstreflexion (*being reflexive*) notwendig, wie ich sie aus dem Theoriegebäude Bourdieus (Bourdieu, 1992; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992b) heraus entwickle.

Der Fachartikel trägt in vielfacher Hinsicht zur theoretischen Erweiterung der Forschung zu Macht(verhältnissen) in Prozessen organisationalen Lernens bei. So ermöglicht mein Theoriekonzept es, die Diskussion um den Einfluss von Mikropolitiken und organisationalen Machtressourcen im Kontext von Lernprozessen in Organisationen (Lawrence et al., 2005; Nicolini et al., 2004) an gesellschaftliche Machtverhältnisse rückzubinden. Ich argumentiere, dass Akteur_innen beispielsweise symbolisches Kapital (z.B. Anerkennung, Prestige) benötigen, um durch Mikropolitiken neue Praktiken zu etablieren. Dieses Kapital ist jedoch entlang von historisch gewachsenen vergeschlechtlichten, rassialisierten und klassenspezifischen Einteilungen von Subjekten und Körpern ungleich verteilt (Ahmed and Swan, 2006), bleibt häufig unsichtbar und ermöglicht oder erschwert das Etablieren neuer Praktiken und Identitäten in Organisationen. Konsequenterweise fordere ich, dass es als Forschende notwendig ist, Identitätszuschreibungen in Lernprozessen in ihrem historischen Gewordensein zu betrachten, um inhärente Dominanzstrukturen aufzudecken (*being critical*).

Eine detaillierte Erläuterung zur daran anknüpfenden Strategie des gegenhegemonialen Lesens (Englisch: counter-hegemonic reading) findet sich in Kapitel 3.3.

Weiterhin sollte im Forschungsprozess, neben der eigenen Positionierung in gesellschaftlichen Machtverhältnissen und im akademischen Feld, auch der Wissensproduktionsprozess hinterfragt werden, der teils abgekoppelt vom praktischen Anwendungskontext stattfindet. Mit dieser Dreiteilung des Reflexionsaspekts (*being reflexive*) erweitere ich das bisherige, wenig kontextsensible Verständnis von (Selbst-)Reflexion im Forschungsfeld des Organisationalen Lernens (Ferdinand, 2004; Nicolini et al., 2004). Das dritte Element (*being political*) verweist schließlich darauf, dass Forschende ihre politischen Überzeugungen offenlegen sollen. Denn: Von dieser Position aus werden Bewertungen von Lernprozessen in Organisationen vorgenommen. Eine Offenlegung dieser Position bildet folglich die Basis für einen seit längerem geforderten, verantwortungsvollen Dialog zur Bewertung von Lernprozessen in Organisationen (Cunliffe, 2008; Willmott, 1997).

D Summary of ‘*Concepts of Power in Boundary Spanning Research*’

The review article entitled “*Concepts of Power in Boundary Spanning Research: A Review and Research Agenda*” was first submitted to the International Journal of Management Reviews in 2019. It has since been revised twice, required a minor revision the second time and is currently under review. The paper develops a novel analytical framework which highlights the common differentiations of power concepts in OMS. Based on this framework, I review how power has been conceptualized in boundary spanning research and how power-sensitive boundary spanning studies have advanced our understanding of key boundary spanning concepts (e.g. boundaries, agency and innovation). I further point to avenues for future research in power-sensitive boundary spanning studies, showing that seemingly conflicting research perspectives have the potential to enrich each other.

D.1 English summary of ‘*Concepts of Power in Boundary Spanning Research*’

Why are some boundary spanners more successful than others in driving organizational innovation and building sustainable inter-organizational collaboration? A considerable amount of boundary spanning literature explains their success by their ability to skilfully

navigate and combine various boundary spanning activities, such as networking, brokering diverging interests or transferring information between teams and organizations (e.g. Ancona and Caldwell, 1992; Johnson and Duxbury, 2010; Ryan and O'Malley, 2016). Power-sensitive boundary spanning research has deemed it essential that scholars account for power to answer this question (Hawkins et al., 2016; Lindgren et al., 2008).

This stream of research emphasizes that boundary spanners draw on power bases, such as an influential organizational position or expert status, to implement new practices (e.g. Ibarra, 1993; Jemison, 1984). In multinational corporations, boundary spanners empower themselves and others to cooperate by skilfully navigating cultural repertoires (Kane and Levina, 2017; Yagi and Kleinberg, 2011). Thereby, they also must tackle power relations of gender, race or class, which have been proven to hinder knowledge sharing in organizations (Qureshi et al., 2017). Despite these manifold insights on the effect of power on boundary spanning, there has been as yet no in-depth study of this body of research.

In this paper, I review power-sensitive boundary spanning research and illustrate how it has contributed to understanding key boundary spanning concepts (e.g. boundaries, innovation, or agency). To do so, I develop an analytical framework, which combines previous categorizations of power concepts (Clegg and Hardy, 1996; Göhler, 2009) with categorizations of research perspectives in OMS (Deetz, 2003; Sieben, 2007) in a novel and counterintuitive way. Based on this framework, I am able to contrast research insights on power in boundary spanning studies and thereby point to avenues for future research. My review demonstrates that the research field could profit from a mutual integration of various perspectives on power.

Overall, power-sensitive boundary spanning research has provided strong evidence that power enables, broadens and limits boundary spanning practices and outcomes. Researchers with a functionalist research perspective have primarily studied how boundary spanners use various power bases to foster innovation and collaboration in organizations (Ibarra, 1993; Jemison, 1984; Spekman, 1979). My review shows that these structure-focused approaches to power could profit from the integration of agency-oriented perspectives on power. The latter have stressed the contribution of all actors to boundary spanning processes and outcomes, whereas functionalist perspectives have predominantly portrayed the boundary spanner as a single, influential agent. Even in those cases where the use of power bases has been studied as a common endeavour (Friedman and Podolny, 1992), the seemingly 'receiving' end of

boundary spanning activities has been left underexplored. I argue that including the power bases of all actors involved in boundary spanning processes would more closely align power-as-resource studies with an important aspect of their power concept: the relational nature of power bases.

However, researchers must also learn to detect the contribution of all actors, especially those at the organizational margins. The few emancipation-oriented approaches to power in boundary spanning research have developed tools to reveal (subtle) acts of resistance against power, dominance and control in boundary spanning processes (e.g. Ravishankar et al., 2013; Söderberg and Romani, 2017). I outline how research streams, such as postcolonial studies in OMS (see Prasad, 2003), provide a rich conceptual repertoire for addressing the ambiguities produced by complex, historically grown power asymmetries in a globalized world and for highlighting the contribution of all actors to collaboration and knowledge sharing.

My review further shows that aspects of demographic diversity have rarely been considered when discussing boundary spanners' access to and use of power bases to drive innovation. When they have been, age (in the sense of seniority), status or cultural differences have been accounted for (e.g. Ibarra, 1993; Levina and Vaast, 2005, 2008), whereas gender, race and class have largely been overlooked. Linking CDS (e.g. Ahmed and Swan, 2006; Zanoni et al., 2010) to boundary spanning research could be a fruitful starting point for integrating diversity-related power bases. CDS scholars assert that gender, race, class, disability, sexual orientation, or age influence the visibility and influence of actors in organizations (e.g. Cox and Nkomo, 1990; Lewis and Simpson, 2012). Transferred to boundary spanning research, this means that social identities and related unequal power relations shape whether and how actors can use power bases to influence decision making. For example, a Black person as boundary spanner may have to invest more resources to be accepted as a person of authority in white organizations (power base of legitimate power).

It could also be fruitful to expand poststructuralist studies on power, discourse and knowledge in boundary spanning research. Researchers have primarily focused on the effect of so-called boundary objects on enabling and hindering knowledge sharing and learning in organizations (e.g. Hawkins et al., 2016; Huvila, 2011). So far, subjectifying power effects on the boundary spanners themselves have not been examined. Existing studies (Sage et al., 2010) could be expanded by examining how a specific project management software with its predefined roles and related tasks affects the self-awareness of actors as boundary spanners.

Overall, the review shows how different, seemingly irreconcilable perspectives on power can enrich each other. Researchers may thus gain a more fine grained understanding of the influence of power dynamics and power relations on boundary spanning in organizations. In particular, societal power relations have seldom been accounted for, yet have great potential to advance the research field of power-sensitive boundary spanning studies.

D.2 German summary of ‘*Concepts of Power in Boundary Spanning Research*’

Organisationen stehen vor der Herausforderung auf eine zunehmend komplexe Umwelt zu reagieren und sich gegebenenfalls anzupassen (Tushman and Scanlan, 1981). Seit den 1970er Jahren untersucht die Fachliteratur zu *Boundary Spanning* die Rolle von Grenzgänger_innen und Brückenbauer_innen (*boundary spanners*) in diesem Anpassungsprozess. Ein Zweig dieser Forschungsliteratur beschäftigt sich seit ihren Anfängen speziell mit dem Thema Macht (Hawkins et al., 2016; Ibarra, 1993; Spekman, 1979) und postuliert, dass zentrale Boundary Spanning-Konzepte nicht verstanden werden können ohne Macht in die Analyse einzubeziehen (Hawkins et al., 2016; Lindgren et al., 2008). Mein Fachartikel fasst den aktuellen Forschungsstand der Boundary Spanning Forschung zu Macht erstmals systematisch zusammen und identifiziert Lücken in der Thematisierung von Machtfragen.

Um herauszufinden, wie Macht in der Boundary Spanning Literatur verstanden wurde, entwickle ich ein Analysewerkzeug. Dieses verbindet Kategorisierungen von Forschungszugängen zu Macht (Clegg et al., 2006; Göhler, 2009) mit Einteilungen unterschiedlicher Forschungsperspektiven in der Management- und Organisationsforschung (Deetz, 2003; Sieben, 2007) und zeigt dabei Verbindungslinien zwischen scheinbar unvereinbaren Forschungsperspektiven auf Macht auf. Das Ergebnis sind sechs analytische Kategorien. Sie veranschaulichen Forschenden unterschiedliche Foki bei der Machtanalyse und regen sie an, ihre spezifische Forschungsperspektive kritisch zu reflektieren und die Grenzen der jeweiligen Forschungsperspektive zu überwinden.

Angewandt auf die Forschungsliteratur zu Boundary Spanning konstatiere ich in meinem Review-Artikel, dass es vielfältige Beweise dafür gibt, dass Macht Boundary Spanning Prozesse ermöglicht, aber auch be- und verhindert. Besonders funktionalistische Perspektiven auf Macht als strukturelle und individuelle Ressourcen dominierten seit den 1970er Jahren die Machtanalyse in der Boundary Spanning Literatur. Forschende interessierten sich besonders dafür, wie einzelne Brückenbauer_innen auf ihren Expert_innenstatus, ihre Führungsposition

oder ihre Position in informellen Netzwerken zurückgriffen, um Innovationen durchzusetzen und Netzwerke zu initiieren (u.a. Ibarra, 1993; Jemison, 1984; Spekman, 1979). Dabei geriet ihnen der Beitrag aller Akteur_innen zum Gelingen von Boundary-Spanning-Prozessen aus dem Blick, welcher vor allem in Verständnissen von Macht als gemeinsames Handeln (*power as collective agency*) vorangetrieben wurde. Der Einbezug von Machtressourcen (*power bases*) aller Akteur_innen wäre eine vielversprechende Erweiterung des bisherigen Forschungsfeldes. Dabei wäre es auch wichtig, den Blick für scheinbar unsichtbare Handlungen, Einflüsse und Widerstände zu stärken, wie emanzipationsorientierte Perspektiven auf Macht in Boundary-Spanning-Studien es tun (u.a. Ravishankar et al., 2013; Søderberg and Romani, 2017). Diese greifen vor allem auf postkoloniale Theorien zurück, um zu zeigen, dass indische Zulieferfirmen sich beispielsweise nicht einfach an europäische Managementstile anpassen, sondern diese kritisch-reflektiert imitiieren und so den kolonialen Blick zurück werfen (Søderberg and Romani, 2017).

Diversitätskategorien werden in Boundary-Spanning-Studien bisher kaum als mögliche Machtressource betrachtet, mit Ausnahme von Seniorität, Status und kulturellen Unterschieden (e.g. Ibarra, 1993; Levina and Vaast, 2005, 2008). Geschlecht, Rassismus und Klassenhintergründe wurden so gut wie nicht thematisiert (eine der wenigen Ausnahmen ist die Studie von Qureshi et al., 2017). Hier liegt großes Potenzial für die Weiterentwicklung des Forschungsfeldes und für die Verschränkung unterschiedlicher Analyseebenen. Die Forschung zu Machtressourcen könnte beispielsweise mit Rückbezug auf die Kritische Diversitätsforschung erweitert werden, indem Geschlecht, Hautfarbe, Behinderung, etc. als symbolische Machtressourcen verstanden werden. Diese beeinflussen, ob eine Person als IT-Exper_in ernst genommen wird oder ob ihr die notwendige Hartnäckigkeit zugetraut wird, um in kniffligen Verhandlungen als Führungskraft zu bestehen.

Spannend wäre es auch, den poststrukturalistischen Forschungsstrang zu Diskurs, Macht und Wissen in der Boundary-Spanning-Forschung weiter auszubauen. Hier haben Forschende vor allem gezeigt, wie sogenannte Boundary-Spanning-Objekte Lernprozessen und Wissenstransfer zwischen Teams und Organisationen ermöglichen und/oder verhindern (u.a. Hawkins et al., 2016; Huvila, 2011). Bisher unbeleuchtet bleiben die subjektivierenden Machteffekt auf die Brückenbauer_innen selbst. Existierende Studien (Sage et al., 2010) könnten beispielsweise dahingehend erweitert werden, wie sich eine spezifische

Projektmanagementsoftware mit vordefinierten Rollen, Zeitplänen und Aufgaben auf das Selbstverständnis von Grenzgänger_innen auswirkt.

Die Analyse zeigt, wie sich unterschiedliche Perspektiven auf Macht gegenseitig bereichern und damit die Forschung zu Macht in Boundary Spanning Prozessen voranbringen können. Besonders strukturelle, gesellschaftliche *Machtverhältnisse* werden bisher selten betrachtet, bergen aber großes Potenzial um besser zu verstehen, warum manche Brückenbauer_innen so erfolgreich sind, während andere scheinbar nicht vorankommen.

E Original published papers

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