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On Theoretical Connections, Assumptions and Implications for Practice

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Identity, Diversity and Diversity Management: On Theoretical Connections, Assumptions and Implications for Practice

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Identity, diversity and diversity management: On theoretical connections, assumptions and implications for practice

Abstract

Purpose: We examine the relationship between the identity and diversity literatures and discuss how a better understanding of the theoretical connections between the two informs both diversity research and diversity management practices.

Design/methodology/approach: Literature review followed by a discussion of the theoretical and practical consequences of connecting the identity and diversity literatures.

Findings: We inform future research in three ways. First, by showing how definitions of identity influence diversity theorizing in specific ways. Second, we explore how such definitions entail distinct foci regarding how diversity should be analyzed and interventions actioned. Third, we discuss how theoretical coherence between definitions of identity and diversity perspectives – as well as knowledge about a perspective's advantages and limitations – is crucial for successful diversity management research and practice.

Research limitations/implications: We argue for a better understanding of differences, overlaps and limits of different identity perspectives, and for a stronger engagement with practice.

Practical implications: Our work can encourage policy makers, diversity and HR managers to question their own practices and assumptions leading to more theoretical informed diversity management practices.

Originality/value: The theoretical connections between identity and diversity literature have so far not been reviewed systematically. Our work foregrounds how important it is for diversity scholars to consider identity underpinnings of diversity research to help further develop the field within and beyond the three streams we discuss.

Keywords

Identity, diversity, diversity management, HR diversity practices.

Paper type

Literature review

Introduction

Diversity scholarship has for many years discussed the way we perceive, treat and manage people's differences such as demographic differences in the work force, behavioral differences between and among cultural groups, as well as the intersection of such differences (see for example Holvino and Kamp 2009; Ghorashi and Sabelis 2013; Jonsen *et al*., 2013; Janssens and Zanoni, 2014). As these differences are ascribed to an individual – or a group of individuals – diversity theory is linked to the way individuals are perceived and constructed by themselves and others. Such a construction and perception of the self has been the focus of the interdisciplinary research field on identity. Identity theories aim at understanding how we seek to answer the existential questions "who am I?" and "how should I act?" (see for example Alvesson *et al*., 2008).

Identity can be considered as construction of the self that rests on an alteration, or 'otherness' construction: "Who am I not and how am I different? How am I different and from who? How am I similar and from who?" (Czarniawska, 2007, p. 4). Thus, dealing with the issue of diversity is always closely linked to individuals experiencing their own identity as 'being different or not' in a particular context. Moreover, identity construction does not happen in an arbitrary vacuum. When constructing their identity, individuals draw on social identities and/or discourses available in their social environment. This shapes how they act and how they interpret events (Kenny *et al*., 2011; Toyoki and Brown, 2014; 2013; Roberson, 2006; Weick *et al*., 2005). Hence, identity and identification are central concepts when aiming to understand diversity.

Whether diversity or 'difference' are defined in essentialist terms (considering specific individual traits or socio-demographic groups as the basis for diversity and/or identity definition) or whether identities and diversity are viewed as socially constructed in specific and dynamic contexts (Tatli and Özbilgin, 2012) thus has important implications. Diversity and identity literatures are profoundly intertwined in ways often not explicitly acknowledged by diversity scholars, especially within the diversity *management* literature, *i.e.* the part of the diversity literature explicitly concerned with the practical application of how differences are and should be managed in organizations, and to what ends (e.g. Holvino and Kamp, 2009; Tatli and Özbilgin, 2012). In practice, the presumptions about identity with which HR, middle managers and other diversity managers approach matters of diversity have practical implications regarding the definition of who is the target group of diversity interventions, on which criteria of sameness/difference distinctions these interventions are based, and whether

‘the business case’ or social justice/moral intentions guide the rationales behind diversity interventions (Tomlinson and Schwabenland, 2010; Oswick & Noon, 2014; Kamp and Hagedorn, 2004).

We suggest that, while authors and practitioners may have specific positions on how they view diversity or engage with data from organizations that developed diversity policies based on certain assumptions about identity, these identity positions and assumptions are rarely addressed frontally. We suggest that this lack has led to a fragmented diversity literature that address the issue of diversity in organizations from different identity perspectives, and with different aims. Furthermore, we see the relative absence of acknowledgement of identity theory underpinnings and the presence of these ‘fault lines’ as preventing a more fruitful dialogue across diversity perspectives, but also between researchers and practitioners. The paper is structured as follows: We start by introducing identity theory and detailing three overarching perspectives, their translation and application in the field of diversity, as well as the limits of each approach. Acknowledging the limits of dividing a large field into three such sub-themes, we then propose a discussion of how our review – and tripartition – can contribute to developing fruitful research in the field of diversity, and ultimately impact everyday practices of diversity management in organizations.

Linking identity and diversity literatures

Identity is a broad and multidisciplinary topic, and as such has been studied from varied perspectives, which have themselves been classified and labeled differently across time and disciplines (see for example Kenny *et al*., 2011). However, some key dichotomies are recurrent, such as “the extent to which identities are chosen or ascribed, stable or dynamic, coherent or fragmented” (Brown, 2014, p.4). In this article, we read existing diversity scholarship along the continuum from the one to the other constituent of these dichotomies. Although there are obvious limitations to doing so, in particular as it is at times impossible to assign a given article to one perspective and because streams can overlap, we will for the analytical purpose of discussing the theoretical links between the identity and diversity literatures divide identity literature into three perspectives: Social Identity Theory (and similar) perspectives; critical perspectives on identity; post-structural perspectives on identity. A broad partition, beyond its limitations, is a relevant way to make sense of a very large body of literature about identity with regards to a specific focus (Ramarajan, 2014), here the ties of identity scholarship(s) with diversity literature.

Coherent and unified identities - Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory and similar perspectives view the identity of a person as having a core that is specific and fixed for each individual; one that is unified (Brown, 2014; Ybema *et al*., 2009). Identity develops as a personal (ideally coherent) sense of self, which is extremely important for how any individual sees him or herself as well as engages with others. A major approach derived from this line of thinking is Social Identity Theory (SIT), which was introduced in the 1970s in the field of social psychology by Tajfel and Turner (e.g. Tajfel and Turner, 1985). Some groups are more relevant and salient to the self-concept than others, and these relevant groups constitute social identity (van Tilburg and Igou, 2011; Dokko *et al*., 2013; Brewer *et al*., 2010; Deaux, 2001).

Social identity expands one's sense of self at the group-level: by means of social identification processes, we define ourselves in terms of categories that we share with other people, and social identity theory presumes commonalities with others based on rather fixed categories (Tran *et al*., 2010; Deaux, 2001). In an organizational context such socio-psychological group processes are used to explain organizational phenomena such as inclusion and exclusion, the formation of in- and out-groups, and 'similarity attraction' in workgroup and team formation (Shore *et al*., 2011; Tran *et al*., 2010; Ellemers, *et al*., 2002). The formation of these groups – and the corresponding categories that are formed based on such group formation to classify whether people belong or not – help organizational members navigate the complexity of stimuli in social relating as a certain ordering is enforced, providing members with systematic means of defining others and to locate oneself (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). This means that SIT is composed of, on the one hand, characteristics that are fixed and tied to the self, such as phenotypical attributes or values, and, on the other hand, of "a social identity encompassing salient group classifications" (Ashforth and Mael, 1989, p. 21) that can be multiple, for example identification as a woman, as an accountant, or as a Dane.

SIT perspectives in diversity research – managerial arguments

Within a SIT conceptualization of categories, the focus has been on demographic attributes, in particular race and gender, as they are deemed the strongest predictors of group formation in organizations. For example, part of the literature presents findings claiming that gender represents not only surface level characteristics but also refers to deep-level differences (e.g. Harrison and Klein, 2007; Jehn *et al*., 1999) such as differences in values (Gove, 1994; Weber *et al.*, 2009). Such differences in values are important because value similarities have been

shown to be positively associated with social attraction (McGrath, 1984) and group member interaction (Thibaut and Kelley, 1959).

The topic of racial/ethnic diversity is predominant in the field of social psychology or cognitive psychology. In relation to diversity research, some of the more frequently cited theories – apart from SIT – include a wide range of related theories such as intergroup theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1985), social- and self-categorization theories (Pettigrew, 1986; Tajfel, 1981), the similarity-attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1971; Lazarsfeld and Merton, 1954), and tokenism and proportionality theories (Kanter, 1977; Oliver *et al*., 1985). Studies in line with such theories have been used to consider negative predictions and outcomes of race/ethnicity (Mamman *et al*., 2012; Shore *et al*., 2009) or gender differences on, for example, organizational processes, performance, or innovation (Adams and Fereirra, 2009; Lauring and Selmer, 2010). Other studies consider positive predictions in relation to 'valuing diversity' and the 'business case' claiming that diversity leads to positive outcomes such as bottom-line gains, improved corporate image, enhanced problem solving ability, or increased team and organizational learning (Cox, 1993; Thomas and Ely, 1995). A popular example is the literature stream examining the effect of women directors on firm performance (Hoogendoorn *et al*., 2013; Lückerath-Rovers, 2011).

Critique of SIT inspired diversity literature

SIT-inspired work in the field of diversity is underpinned by an assumption that 'salient' diversity categories are fixed, stable, and analyzable, and as such transcend time and place – and are therefore barely changeable (Benschop and Van den Brink, 2013; Tatli and Özbilgin, 2012; Jonsen *et al*., 2011; Boogaard and Roggeband, 2009). SIT grants the individual some autonomy in relation to identity formation by being able to identify with different groups (unified but not unitary selves), but simultaneously it produces a rigid perception of identity as having a fixed and permanent core, assuming that as long as people can be classified and mapped, they can be better managed. Beyond this limit, it means we evade the issue of changing historical perceptions of for example age or gender. It follows that the SIT perspective largely ignores the complexity of shifting and multiple forms of identification that people draw on in changing situations and contexts (Calás *et al*., 2012), and therefore makes positive social transformation difficult (Kenny *et al*., 2011). Another key critique of the SIT perspective is the element of 'depersonalization', *i.e.* of seeing the self as an embodiment of the in-group prototype, as argued for example by Alvesson (2010). This can lead to

privileging the group or organization as a source of identity whilst assuming that the way different individuals perceive themselves and their group/organization is comparable.

This is also what Tatli and Özbilgin (2012) identify as an 'etic' approach to diversity based on pre-established and pre-fixed (ex ante), rather than emerging categories of difference. This essentialist approach to diversity studies is often combined with a single-category focus (e.g. gender, race or ethnicity, or age), thus overlooking the role of the intersections of multiple forms of difference. In addition, it often lacks a sense of context and thereby disregards the dynamic nature of power and inequality relations. Although easily applicable and also useful for given analytical designs, this can lead to oversimplification and stereotyping – either reinforcing stereotypes by the tendency to combine 'difference' with otherwise marginalized groups on the labor market, or as a means to gloss over and 'dissolve differences' in pursuit of corporate integration and profitability (Tatli and Özbilgin, 2012; Zanoni *et al*., 2010; Lorbiecki and Jack, 2009). This has led to an oscillation between 'colorblind diversity policies' in the quest to overcome resistance or 'identity conscious' in the quest for social justice and articulation of historically based structural and power related inequalities (Tran *et al*., 2010).

Floating identities – a critical perspective

The fixing of categories can be a political strategy for practitioners. If working in and against a system built upon the privileges and rights related to certain fixed identities, then the uncovering of privilege can be converted into political actives, creating group solidarity as a point of departure for mobilization of pressure to change (Staunæs, 2003, p. 103). Following Clarke *et al*. (2009), identity construction should be seen as a dialectic process between structure and agency: "[…] while identities are achieved rather than ascribed, such identities may not always be of your own choosing" (Clarke *et al*., 2009, p. 347). This is in line with the idea that individual, collective and organizational identities can be seen as dynamic, open-ended and polyphonic identity construction processes (cf. Hatch and Schultz, 2002; Humphreys and Brown, 2002).

It is this sensitivity to both conventional social categories and identity regulation intersecting with a greater open-minded effort to explore identity work and reflexive identity that the critical perspective explores (Bardon *et al*., 2014; Giddens, 1996; Kuhn, 2006; Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). This position navigates between on the one hand *identity regulation* concerned with frames of discourses that provides scripts, roles and subject positions suturing people in social structures, and on the other *identity work* concerned with the actors' efforts to

create a coherent sense of self in response to the multiple and perhaps conflicting scripts, roles, and subject positions encountered in organizational relations (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Kuhn, 2006; Weber and Glynn, 2006). The critical perspective thus distances itself from the SIT perspective by examining what external dimensions of power and discourse influence the subject in ways that renders the individual autonomy – assumed by SIT – impossible. The critical perspective also has an emancipatory agenda as such views on identity lead to investigations of various ways identity regulation can be used as managerial control mechanisms (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2004; Muhr *et al*., 2013).

Critical perspectives in diversity literature – social justice for minorities and the less privileged

To make up for the 'flaws' of an essentialized static account of diversity rooted in SIT, an 'emic' approach (as opposed to the formerly mentioned 'etic' approach) based on emerging and situated, rather than pre-determined, categories of diversity has been proposed (Tatli and Özbilgin, 2012). This conceptualization of emergent, intersectional and relational identities is well established within critical diversity literature (e.g. Calás *et al*., 2012; Kenny and Briner, 2014). The critical diversity literature has in particular been focused on deconstructing and de-essentializing the notion of diversity to demonstrate how demographic categories and identities are not to be seen as static and fixed but as socially constructed and under constant redefinition under the influence of competing discourses and existing structures of power (Knoppers *et al.*, 2014; Lorbiecki and Jack, 2009; Van Laer and Janssens, 2011; Janssens and Zanoni, 2005). The principle that underpins much critical diversity literature is therefore the seeking for social justice. In order to 'unmask' power dynamics, it is illustrated how diversity management as a managerial practice can be a form of managerial control by defining minority employees in fixed, essential groups with negative connotations (see also Tatli and Özbilgin, 2012; Ghorashi and Sabelis, 2013; Zanoni *et al*., 2010; Boogaard and Roggeband 2009; 2000; Simon and Oakes, 2006; Roberson, 2006).

In a critical perspective, organizational discourses such as the one on "diversity management" are considered to favor the normalizing of truth claims and other forms of organizational indoctrination by organizing everyday conduct of the members (Fleming and Spicer, 2014; Muhr *et al*., 2013). In this way, the progressive rhetoric behind diversity management is 'unveiled' as *not* only imbuing a positive organizational endeavor empowering allegedly disadvantaged 'minority groups' and enhancing productivity (see for example Thomas and Ely, 1996). Lorbiecki and Jack (2000) also argue that the management of diversity discourse

presents managers as "the privileged subject who sees diversity as an object to be managed" (p. 23), creating two separate groups of those who manage and those who are diverse. In a similar vein, Janssens and Zanoni (2005) explore how the discourse on management of diversity equip managers with a great deal of authority in creating their version of diversity and how they situate it in a productive logic.

The focus on emerging and varying categories of differences that we see in the critical perspective is also recognized under the label of intersectionality. The main goal of the intersectional approach within the critical perspective is to analyze multiple identities in order to "avoid reducing [for example] ethnic minority employees to mere representatives of a stigmatized social group" (Janssens and Zanoni, 2014, p. 317), which risks reproducing the inequality institutionalized in broader society. Some post-colonial inspired work also fall under this category of critically informed diversity research. Inspired by postcolonial theory, organizational diversity scholars have investigated the difficulties encountered by employees of non-western ethnic origins when seeking to develop legitimate and respected work identities within the dominant Western social and political formations, which dominate capitalist organizations (e.g. Calás *et al*., 2012; Jack and Westwood, 2006; Muhr and Salem, 2014; Banerjee, 2000; Banerjee and Linstead, 2001; Westwood and Jack, 2007).

Critique of the critical perspective

Scholarship adopting the critical perspective is still rather young and emergent and thus holds great promise, but also has limitations. To start with, although existing critical contributions to the diversity literature have successfully helped understanding the shortcomings of SIT and essentialist, de-politicized categorizations, such streams have yet to develop solid empirical work mobilizing these theoretical insights; critical scholars themselves have pointed out this challenge (Lewis, 2009; Tatli and Özbilgin, 2012). For example, Tatli and Özbilgin acknowledge that limitations of the application of emic perspectives in empirical research are due to both convenience and legitimacy of the inquiry: "there is a strong tradition of using established categories of difference in analyses, whereas starting with an exploration of relations of power, leading to identification of salient categories, may yield surprising strands of differences, but leave the researcher in unchartered territory" (2012, p.189).

In addition, as power is often considered to be located primarily outside of individual reach, *i.e.* in structures, context, or discourse, then another kind of 'fixing' of the subject positions is produced. Excessive (structural) determinism, and/or the vision that specific groups hold power, underplays (dominated) individual agency. For example, critical research, with its

emancipatory aims, has tended to reify managers as being powerful and other employees as powerless, or to assume that bureaucracy is necessarily detrimental to the objective of developing egalitarian, inclusive and democratic organizations, and that power is necessarily repressive; such views have been critiqued in both theoretical and empirical work (see for example Courpasson and Clegg, 2012; Ekman, 2013; Fleming and Spicer, 2014; Holck, 2014). Thus, critical diversity literature has at times lacked a 'self-critical' edge. Also, while this approach has allowed for the development of attention to power differences and intersectionality in specific contexts, movement between different contexts/discourses/intersectionalities for single individuals is rendered difficult by a dialectical view of structure and agency (Calás *et al*., 2012). Finally, the critical perspective can be limited exactly for its focus on critique – sometimes for the sake of critique – and the limited attention to empirical work aiming at developing practical tools and recommendations.

Fragmented and becoming identities - A post-structural perspective

A post-structural perspective often implies a shift to talking about 'the self' or to subjectivity instead of identity, to point to how our sense of 'who we are' is shaped by the power relationships we are subject to or subjects of, as emphasized by for example Foucault (Loacker, 2013; Loacker and Muhr, 2009; Staunæs, 2003). For Foucault, discourses create normalizing standards of behavior in relation to which individuals perform their identities (Fleming and Spicer, 2014). Normalizing discourses thus produce certain 'truths' in our everyday lives, which inform our understanding of the 'way things should be'. This means that the concept of identity itself is considered as a form of subjugation. Through a post-structural, discursive lens, the SIT perspective of identity as centered, autonomous, and unitary – an essence or 'being' – is exchanged with a perception of identity as fluid, in constant 'becoming' and radically decentered (Ahonen *et al*., 2014; Chia and Tsoukas, 2002). Identity is, in the post-structural perspective, seen as fragmented by a variety of nested, overlapping identities, external influences, and levels of consciousness. This constant external influence on the formation of self implies that "a fragmented self constantly fluctuates among diverse and changing identities, pulled by issues and events to focus on one aspect of the self rather than the other – temporarily" (Martin 1992, p. 156). This perception aligns with Mead's (1934) conception of the individual as a 'parliament' of 'selves'. In this sense, people must renegotiate powerful and at times oppressive discourses, as identity is "constantly open and available to be negotiated and re-negotiated, defined and redefined" as the everyday self

emerges out of the reflexive social interaction with others – claiming a discursively constructed rather than an essential self (Tracy and Trethewey, 2005, p. 169).

Further, compared to other perspectives on power, it is seen as not possessed but only as exercised, which relativizes the vision of certain groups as rather powerless under given structural conditions. Several studies underline how employees are not only passive receptacles of managerial disciplining discourses – but can, as agents, reflect and act upon such discourses in more of less compliant ways, thus creating opportunities for micro-emancipation and spaces of resistance (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Zanoni and Janssens, 2007). Studies in this vein have shown how subjectification can be mobilized through a wide range of systems in contemporary organizations, with the result that the very identities of organizational members are enlisted to achieve certain political ends, such as productivity and efficiency.

This kind of thinking has informed research exploring the mutually constituting relationship between power and identity (e.g. Ashcraft, 2006; Gagnon and Collinson, 2014; Nicholson and Carroll, 2012; Scott, 2010; Toyoki and Brown, 2014; Tracy and Trethewey, 2005). Also, feminist philosophers in part drawing on Foucault, such as Butler (1990; 1993), Irigaray (2002), Grosz (2004) and Braidotti (2002) have insisted on seeing the subject as that which in essence is multiple, fragmented, and only temporarily integrated and rendered stable.

Post-structural perspectives in diversity research – transgressing binaries

Perceiving diversity as something constructed by ideological intervention and management of meaning – and differences as constructed and governed to produce desired managerial effects – renders diversity and its management a contested site of discursive struggles (Ahonen *et al.*, 2014). This leans on a post-structuralist understanding of identity and of the phenomenon of diversity, emphasizing how diversity is, on the one hand, articulated, staged and performed by the employees and, on the other, enforced upon, attributed to employees and articulated in the process of social relating and casting (Czarniawska and Hoepfl, 2002; Down and Reveley, 2009). Specialist discourses have an important role, and diversity management practices themselves should be understood as a form of 'truth regime' that constitutes the self and the other in specific ways (Ahonen, 2014). Diversity can therefore be used for divergent purposes, such as an idea, a taxonomical tool, or a mechanism for disciplining identities.

The very idea that diversity management can work as an unbiased mechanism seeking social justice is naïve and even at times unethical (Muhr, 2008). Rather, in order to resist the subjugating power of diversity, it becomes the main objective to "unmask 'hidden' contexts

and 'invisible' power relations" (Ahonen *et al*., 2014, p. 270) and questioning established structures of domination and subordination (Meriläinen *et al*., 2009). Post-structural approaches to diversity therefore often argue for an un-categorical approach (Muhr, 2008), or at least one in which the categories are rethought as events, actions, and encounters between bodies, *i.e.* relational existence as becoming rather than as being (Puar, 2012).

In such a post-structural critique of diversity, researchers have proposed to view diversity from a transgressive point of view where the transgression of binaries is at the center (see for example Muhr and Rehn, 2014; Pullen, 2006; Muhr, 2011; Philips *et al*., 2013). In response to the post-structural critique of diversity management, feminist and queer theories have been used to highlight the 'contingent foundations' of gendered and sexual subjectivities (Butler, 1990; 1993), and in so doing, they forward a political project aimed at opening up restrictive, dualistic notions of embodiment to a wider multiplicity of sexed, gendered, or sexual being(s). Post-structural writings on gender in organization studies (drawing on Butler, but also Cixous or Kristeva) have emphasized a transgressive, multiple or fluid way of seeing gender, one which is positioned to break with gender essentialism in organization studies (e.g. Borgerson and Rehn, 2004; Linstead and Pullen, 2006; Muhr, 2012; Muhr and Rehn, 2014; Pullen, 2006). Muhr and Sullivan's (2013) study of a transgendered manager for example clearly shows how co-workers – despite being supportive and generally very tolerant – change their expectations to the manager's abilities and skills after her change in gender appearance from man to woman. Such research aims at destabilizing our common sense, normalized understanding of gender (Muhr and Sullivan, 2013) or ethnic minority employees (Janssens and Zanoni, 2014; Ghorashi and Sabelis, 2013; Tatli and Özbilgin, 2009).

Destabilization is achieved by broadening norms, which offer multiple positioning that are less hierarchical in value and transgresses the normal hierarchical relationship between, for example, gender and ethnicities/origins. This kind of disruption therefore makes space for individual experience beyond the usual diversity categorization. In this way, the post-structural perspective criticizes the SIT perspective for being managerial and the critical perspective for being blinded in its search for social justice. Also, the post-structural perspective stresses that researchers should not only be critical towards the diversity practices under scrutiny, but also to their very own framing and comprehension of this, including the blind spots and bounded paths their approach brings about.

Critique of the post-structural perspective

Some of the critique that has been raised towards the post-structural perspective on identity and diversity is actually in line with the critique towards the SIT perspective. Critics point out that in the more austere, 'deterministic' versions of post-structuralism, the individual has no autonomy in 'identity creation' but is the subject of 'hegemonic' discourses shaping and imposing certain identities. This leads to the overemphasizing of the 'fragility' of the self and its vulnerability to the power of discourse, in what Alvesson and Kärreman (2011) term a 'muscular discourse', "… associating identity as tightly intertwined with and a product of the operations of power offering a hard-to-resist template" (Alvesson, 2010, p. 207) rendering actors' identities 'colonized and cloned' (Gagnon and Collinson, 2014) or formed as 'gingerbread' or 'McSelves', *i.e.* generic identity molds that each "elects to fit itself into" (Scott, 2010, p. 219). It has also been argued that individuals have a certain degree of agency, voluntarism and choice that is inherent in every power relation, meaning that actors do not experience the mortifying "loss of self through institutionalization" but "willingly discard the old selves in the hope to find something better" (Scott, 2010, p. 219) – within a limited range of possible identities, however.

This approach can be seen as an unfruitful decoupling or disconnection of discourse (what is said) and practice (what is done) (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2011, p. 1125). Moreover, Foucault's work, for example, does not let us clearly locate domination, including domination in gender relations: he has on the one hand claimed that individuals are constituted by power relations, but he has argued against their constitution by relations such as the domination of one group by another. That is, his account makes room only for abstract individuals, not women, men, or workers (Hartsock, 1990, p. 169). This means that for example the feminist identity risks being lost under the discursive turn of post-structuralism (Calás *et al*., 2012).

Concluding comments: Implications and directions for diversity research and diversity management practices

Our reading of diversity literature through the lens of identity has allowed us to outline three broad ways of defining and tackling diversity management. These are: 1) a perspective grounded in Social Identity Theory (SIT) and similar streams of literature, 2) a perspective that is critical of SIT and that emphasizes the social/structural embeddedness of identity work, identity construction and power dynamics, and 3) a perspective grounded in post-structuralist approaches to identity, where the concept of identity itself is seen as a form of subjugation.

From this classification, we propose to discuss more specifically what the implications are for future diversity research, and for the development of diversity management. If diversity categories are seen as fixed and unified, diversity management will focus on managing not the individuals, but the groups individuals identify or are associated with. This approach is arguably the most prevalent one in today's organizations (Tatli and Özbilgin, 2012), notably through the popularization of the 'business case' for diversity. Indeed, it simplifies HR work by tailoring practices to whole groups rather than individuals, and simplifies the justification of diversity policies, as group identification and assignation is seen as based on objective differences rather than on power differentials and constraint. Also, the 'business case' promotes an apolitical, power-void perception of diversity as individualized and a matter of personal skills and talents (Tomlinson and Schwabenland, 2010; Oswick & Noon, 2014). However, the difficulty of identifying which categories are relevant and important in a particular context makes it difficult to develop actionable tools for practice (Tatli and Özbilgin, 2012).

For diversity scholars in all perspectives, in particular in critical and post-structuralist-oriented work, this calls for a stronger engagement with everyday practice in order to be able to complement or supplement diversity management tools grounded in SIT, and enter into a closer dialogue with diversity policy makers, diversity and HR managers. Indeed, while the contribution of critical work has considerably enriched debates about diversity and diversity policies and practices in organizations, such scholarship has to frontally engage with practice, in order to fulfill its emancipatory aspirations and to be able to appraise the depth and breath of change required within and beyond organizations to develop more democratic, inclusive and equal workplaces. Then, as we have seen, the post-structuralist perspective has been critical of SIT perspective for its 'managerialism', and of critical work for its blindness to other possible power states than the ones recurrently identified. However, this distancing, or even disdain for management as a practice, and for policy making following managerial(ist) injunctions, can mean that there is a reluctance to take strong stances and experiment empirically. Also, these approaches are rather remote from the concerns of organizations, which are looking for ways to administer the 'now' and tend to function in an ethos of performance and data-driven human resources management, *i.e.* a measurable numerical and representative approach to diversity management.

Second, we highlight that the three theoretical perspectives fulfill different agendas. As a consequence, the three outlined perspectives are not necessarily to be hierarchized, but rather to be seen as a continuum of perspectives on the perception and construction of the self and of

how individuals can be considered and managed in an organizational context. We have shown how SIT has inspired practices such as diversity management and has triggered the development of a critical literature that is itself also critical of extreme versions of post-structuralist perspectives on diversity. However, one could also highlight the partial overlap, or continuity between different perspectives. Indeed, SIT acknowledges a relational dimension in identity formation, thus making it a socially situated act, paving the way for literature discussing both inward and outward facing identity work (Watson, 2008), and critical work considering how power and inequalities infuse this relational process. Similarly, discourse is considered as an essential element of identity and diversity debates in both critical and poststructuralist work. Finally, extreme versions of post-structuralism have been criticized for diluting the existence of recurrent discrimination against specific groups of individuals and thus overplaying the capacity of the individual to transcend existing states of power.

For practice, this co-existence of different identity perspectives and the fact that they constitute a continuum also means that diversity managers can develop interests into how economic expectations can be met while developing a higher sensibility to the forces at play in a given context, and try to integrate them into local diversity policy development and implementation, thus participating to integrating diversity in the organizational identity (Cole and Salimath, 2013). In addition, this review can encourage policy makers and (HR) managers to question the development and implementation of popular 'top-down' practices, for example, quotas or internal groups and network targeted at a supposed homogeneous group. Relatedly, our review can also encourage practitioners to question their own assumptions, and reflect on the extend to which individuals perform and embody an identity that is imposed on them by the organizational discourse itself rather than a core and fixed self-identity. As Ghorashi and Sabelis (2013) wisely advise, "the main challenge is to recognize otherness while making space for individual experiences beyond categorizations" (p. 83). Hence, destabilization of identity categories constitutes in itself a political act (Butler, 1990) and acquiring greater awareness of the political and power-structural implications of the complex entanglement of identity and diversity is a first step to strategically open up for possibilities for more situated, changeable, and ongoing choices when dealing with differences on an everyday basis (Janssens and Zanoni, 2014).

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