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BEYOND BARRIERS: EXPLORING ABLEISM IN THE WORKPLACE

Doctoral dissertation submitted to obtain the degree of

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With dedication to all those considered outside ‘the norm’.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Disabled people's right to participate fully in the domain of economic life has been stressed in the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (2006). Although countries have been pointed to their responsibility in ensuring that they can realize this right to work, the socio-economic disadvantaged position of disabled people remains a harsh reality in large parts of the world. Ample evidence shows how labor markets have not 'opened up' sufficiently to warmly welcome those deemed 'different'. This is illustrated by the persistency of various disability gaps, such as lower employment rates (OECD, 2010), segregation into low-skilled and low quality work (Jones, 2013; Maroto and Pettinicchio, 2014), overrepresentation in part-time work (Pagán, 2007; 2012), lower wages (Malo and Pagán, 2012) and a glass-ceiling (Braddock and Bachelder, 1994), making management and leadership positions for disabled people a rare phenomenon (Roulstone and Williams, 2014).

A wealth of studies have sought to explain the disadvantaged labor market position of disabled individuals, drawing on various 'models of disability'. Whereas an individual model of disability would search for the cause for socio-economic deprivation within the individual with an impairment, a social model of disability looks for explanations in the social environment. In the former model, bodily and cognitive deviations from the norm are seen as causing the disadvantage, while in the latter model social and political structures are held responsible for disabling people with impairments. The best known social approach, is the '*social barrier model*' that gained adherence both among activists and academics from the '70's onwards. Many agree that this model has been a revolutionary catalyst for the transformation of the understanding of disability from medical abnormality and personal tragedy to one of socio-political oppression (Thomas, 2007). Since the turn of the century, multiple eclectic versions of the social model have emerged as a consequence of an increasing number of criticisms on the early social barrier model by various sources such as feminists, postmodernists and poststructuralists (e.g. Corker, 1999; Thomas, 2004; Tremain, 2015). Focusing on the discursive aspects of disability, the '*cultural model*' was brought to light as a novel way of thinking about disability. Most theoretically aligned with the cultural model, the theoretical framework drawn upon here is 'ableism' which has recently emerged as a new lens to understand the mechanisms of disabled people's exclusion and subordination in workplaces. Ableism has been defined as 'a network of beliefs, processes and practices that produces a particular kind of self and body (the corporeal standard) that is projected as the perfect, essential and fully human (Campbell, 2001: 44)'. It puts forward as explanation for the exclusion of disabled people, the binary of disability/able-bodiedness which informs the meanings attached to disabled workers in negative and constraining ways.

The goal of this dissertation then is to theoretically refine the concept of ableism and extend it in the context of work. Empirically this thesis contributes to this goal through three separate papers, drawing on multiple sources collected in three organizations. These three organizations were a regional public organization, a private bank and a local public administration. This provided 65 interviews in total, of which 30 were held with employees with an officially recognized impairment, while the other 35 were held with other organizational actors such as supervisors, HR managers, labor union representatives and occupational doctors. The data were subsequently analyzed by means of critical discourse analysis and narrative analysis.

This introduction is structured as follows. First, the research that has been done on disability and work is outlined. The studies presented in the review follow an ordering along the underlying models of disability with which the studies most align. Secondly, 'ableism' is introduced and the value it holds for studying the disadvantaged labor market position of disabled people is touched upon. In the third part the methodology of the dissertation is explained. And in the last part, an overview of the following chapters of the dissertation are given.

1.1 Explanations for the socio-economic disadvantage of disabled people

Most studies on disability within the context of employment have sought to answer the following question: 'Why are so many disabled people socio-economically disadvantaged?'. In this section, an overview will be provided of the different approaches to explaining disabled people's disadvantaged labor market position. The overview is organized around four main perspectives grounded in distinct conceptualizations of disability: the 'medical model', the 'social barriers model', the 'minority politics model' and the 'cultural model'. In each of the four parts of this section, the theoretical underpinning of the respective model of disability is discussed, followed by its applications in (empirical) studies concerning issues of employment.

1 The medical explanation for the socio-economic disadvantage of disabled people

A first established tradition of research on disability in work contexts is grounded in a medical conceptualization of disability and mostly found in health and rehabilitation journals (for instance Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation, Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation). Such research considers the biological defect within individual minds and bodies as the main cause for disabled people's disadvantage on the labor market. Decreased employability is thus a direct consequence of physical dysfunction (Hughes and Paterson, 1997). The medical theorization of disability found here gained popularity during the Enlightenment period when the discipline of medicine developed and knowledge production on the 'normal' body/mind increased fiercely (Winance and Devlieger, 2009). In this model, impairment is seen as 'any loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological, or anatomical structure or function' whereas disability is then 'any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being' (Oliver, 1996: 31). Both disability and impairment are thus treated as similar medical and individual problems. Disability is 'a defect or failure within an individual's body that is inherently abnormal and pathological' (Goodley, 2011: 7).

In a medical model view, should the opportunity present itself, the disability has to be cured as soon as possible through rehabilitation and retraining on the part of the individual. Medical intervention and services offered by trained professionals are believed to cure or ameliorate the impairment or provide rehabilitation to learn to adjust to new conditions and reintegrate into the (paid) labor market (Jenkins, et al., 1998). The medical model underlies most rehabilitation facilities and medical research, who have the ambition to outline how the individual should be 'fixed'. This is arguably the most dominant way of thinking about disability today, as the Western world is permeated by a scientific paradigm. Power here accords with the power of the medical profession and authoritative discourses of medicalization which categorize and define the individual in pre-fixed ways.

In empirical studies of disability at work departing from this paradigm, work is considered therapeutic and essential for both the physiological survival and psychological well-being of disabled people in our societies (Chan, et al., 1997). Typically, such research is concerned with finding methods on how to make people return to work as quickly as possible (Brendbekken, et al., 2016). This research also focuses on how disabled workers can be prevented from acquiring work-related injuries through early intervention programs (e.g. Donovan, et al., 2016). The studies aim to explore how people can be rendered productive again in as limited time as possible (e.g. van Vilsteren, et al. 2016) to avoid that they pose a too large burden for society (de Vroome, et al., 2015). The efficacy of various return-to-work programs is compared and tested and personal strategies are explored that help workers stay productive despite various impairments such as persistent pain conditions (Oakman, et al., 2016).

2 THE SOCIAL BARRIER EXPLANATION FOR THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE OF DISABLED PEOPLE

A second vast tradition of research on the socio-economic disadvantage of disabled people have sought for explanations through barriers in the environment, more specifically the material and physical structures of society. Such studies are aligned with a social barrier conceptualization of disability. As a reaction against individual conceptualizations such as the medical model of disability that led only to medical action (Winance and Devlieger, 2009), this paradigm explains disability as the effect of social barriers. The model gained importance from the mid-seventies onwards when activists started to develop a new way of conceptualizing disability in which the biological impairment was defined separately from the social disability because it is not a person's impairment that disables him/her but rather the way in which society is structured (Oliver, 1996). By not being adapted to different kinds of human variation, society excludes many people with impairments, truly disabling them. In this view, if public places for instance were built with wheelchair users in mind offering lifts and ramps, or public information was made available in Braille, then many physically and hearing impaired people would be included in society. Disability then becomes a political and social problem, to be analyzed as the result of oppressive relationships (Winance and Devlieger, 2009). Soon academics too picked up on this idea, leading to a new stream of research called 'disability studies'. The solution for socio-economic disadvantage according to social barrier modellists lies in addressing disabled people's material needs through increased socio-political participation and socio-spatial inclusion. This perspective explicitly relates disability to power by revealing how oppressive societal barriers prevent access and integration in society.

Studies regarding the socio-economic disadvantage of disabled people on the labor market that are aligned with the social barrier model can broadly be ordered into two levels: explanations occurring on a macro (societal) level and explanations on a meso (organizational) level. Within the first level, scholars have looked for explanations within the capitalist nature of work, evolutions of capitalist societies, national policies and legislation and the educational system. With regard to the second level, explanations have covered items like the corporate culture, organizational policies and practices, and the built environment.

A first stream of disability studies from a macro-perspective have made materialist analyses of structural barriers, from a Marxist perspective (Abberley, 2002; Barnes and

Mercer, 2005; Finkelstein, 1981; Hall and Wilton, 2011; Roulstone, 2002; Wilton and Schuer, 2006). These early British disability studies explain how capitalism excludes certain groups from participating in economic activity (Russell, 2002). Grounded in the factory system, workplaces and labor processes in contemporary capitalist economies are geared toward an able-body/mind norm (Roulstone, 2002). As it is the deeply divisive nature of capitalist economies that renders disabled people open to exploitation (Goodley, 2011), it is capitalist society that needs to be changed, not the individual. Under this radical critique, disabled people will never be free of their oppression until capitalism is replaced with a more humane system (Finkelstein, 1981). Constructed as 'not profitable to the interests of capital' (Joly and Venturiello, 2012: 326), disabled people's labor becomes structurally devalued within capitalist societies, explaining their socio-economic disadvantage.

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More recent analyses have focused on the current evolutions within these capitalist societies to explain disabled people's exclusion on the labor market. Baumerg (2014) suggests that work has become more difficult and complex, endangering the employment of many disabled people. Others have raised questions regarding the impact of new technologies, as they can possibly improve the opportunities for physically impaired persons, yet might also further isolate them by confining them to their homes (Roulstone, 2002). Also the rise and intensification of neo-liberalism has been linked to the disadvantage experienced by people with impairments. Disabled people are being forced to enter an ever 'increasingly risk-based employment domain' (Roulstone, 2002: 630) in which objectives of businesses are placed center stage while state support is brought back to facilitative roles as opposed to serious economic intervening strategies. In addition, protective buffers between employer and worker have diminished due to trade union retraction (Roulstone, 2002). Also, the public sector workforce has been reduced while efficiency in such sectors has been prioritized. Jobs are now characterized by an increased control over output and socio-ideological group control and self-disciplining mechanisms (e.g. Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). On top of that the insecurity of jobs has increased and changing jobs multiple times during one's lifetime is now common practice. Roulstone further concludes that 'globalized capitalism with its disciplining discourse, represents major challenges for disabled people' (2002: 636). Yet more research is needed in order to account for the exact impact of these new labor market trends (Jolly, 2000).

As a second macro level explanation aligned with a social barrier model, the impact of national policies and legislations has been scrutinized. It is argued that policy makers rely on a-theoretical appraisals of certain strategies (Holler, 2014; Roulstone, 2002). In line with

neoliberal imperatives, some states have opted for less coercive policies such as employability enhancement programs. Such programs are put in place to aid the employer rather than the employee, reflect the demand side of labor (Jolly, 2000) and will not by themselves ban discrimination (Longhi and Plat, 2008). The emphasis has been on the individual's duties and giving personal advisors the role of expert marketers (Roulstone, 2000). Although policy-makers have become more aware of the need to address social barriers to inclusion, rather than focusing efforts only on individualized issues of impairments, their actions remain modest (Harris, et al., 2012). As a solution to the socio-economic disadvantage of disabled people, employment quotas and reserved job systems are proposed. Research has however stressed that in order to work, such systems have to be enforced and backed up with sanctions, for instance through sufficiently high levy-grants (Waddington, 1996). Another solution proposed in such studies are financial incentives for employers such as 'wage subsidies' yet caution is warranted as they can lead to misuses such as deadweight losses and windfall profits for organizations (Samoy and Waterplas, 2012). And as a last tool, the correction of discriminatory hiring practices through legal resources has been described as promising (Goss et al., 2000; Waddington, 1996), yet have also been found insufficient in itself to address the disadvantaged labor market position of disabled people (Joly and Venturiello, 2012) and only work retrospectively (Roulstone, 2000). The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) (1995) for instance, has been criticized because of its potential for deeming certain accommodations 'unreasonable' (Foster, 2007; Harlan and Robert, 1998) and being underpinned with medical assumptions, detrimental to the achievement of workplace inclusion (Woodhams and Corby, 2003). Studies within this stream are also concerned with new emerging challenges due to a growing emphasis on neo-liberalism. For instance, recent budget cuts by the UK Government have led to the deterioration of good adjustment-practices within local authorities (Harwood, 2014) and both Australian and British policies have moved towards stricter eligibility criteria and greater expectations of workless disabled people to try to participate in paid labor (Grover and Soldatic, 2013).

As a fourth and last macro-level explanation aligned with the social barrier conceptualization of disability, the educational opportunities that are given to disabled people are mentioned. Unequal educational opportunities form a significant threat to the possibility of competing for available jobs and bereave disabled people from the basic requisites for properly performing in potential jobs (Joly and Venturiello, 2013). Furthermore, the segregation in school systems too has been identified as a major reason for the disadvantage of disabled people, as their exclusion from mainstream education distorts their future relationships made with non-disabled colleagues and other organizational actors (Humber, 2014).

Besides the macro (society) level explanations grounded in a social barrier conceptualization of disability described in the previous paragraphs, meso level explanations within organizations too have been brought to the forefront by disability studies scholars. A first barrier lies in what scholars have termed corporate culture (e.g. Sandler and Blanck, 2005; Schur, et al., 2005; Schur, et al. 2009; Schur, et al., 2013; Spataro, 2005; Stone and Colella, 1996). Corporate culture can be defined as the values, attitudes, and norms embedded in a company. Most work is theoretical and advances a simplistic divides between flexible and bureaucratic organizations (e.g. Stone and Colella, 1996). For instance, they argue that companies that 'built on impersonal, bureaucratic rules with a strong emphasis on equity may foster greater resentment toward differential treatment of employees' whereas those that are 'flexible, supportive, and sensitive to individual needs' will be more

supportive of accommodations (Stone and Colella, 1996 cited in Schur, et al., 2005: 13). Gewurtz and Kirsh (2009) similarly argue that organizations would be well advised to move away from rigid rules and structures, towards a culture that fosters autonomy and supports individualized ways of approaching work duties (see also Schur, et al., 2009). These hypotheses have however to date hardly been investigated empirically, and so studies remain vague as to what sort of corporate environment is beneficial for which disabled employees. Much more research is needed that gives detailed case-study descriptions of the impact of such aspects (Schur, et al., 2005).

As a second meso level explanation next to the culture of organizations, a limited number of studies have concentrated on organizational policies and practices and how they can explain the disadvantaged labor market position of disabled people from a social barrier perspective. Critical sociologists argue that contemporary employment environments are disabling spaces, with expectations of work load and tasks, flexibility and behavior, based on able-bodied norms (Gleeson, 1999). Regarding the issue of job design, a study that analyzed four court cases through job descriptions found that employers constructed job descriptions based on able-bodied norms, making it impossible for disabled people to fill them in (Foster and Wass, 2012). Some research has rather highlighted informal general organizing policies and practices that disadvantage people with impairments, although research is still limited in this area. For instance in a study by Harlan and Robert (2006), HR officers and line managers regularly circumvented the meritocratic rules of the promotion system in one organization, in order to promote able-bodied employees over disabled ones, regardless of skills. And a further demonstration of ableist practices and policies is provided in a study about an exploitative manufacturing company in India (Kumar, et al., 2014). Here economic rationality and efficiency displaced the concerns for workers' health, social justice and equality. Multiple studies have focused on the process of granting reasonable accommodations. In a study by Corlett and Williams (2011), organizations were reluctant to accommodate disabled staff because they assumed everyone would fit in with existing organizing processes. Another study showed how essential information for disabled workers (on reasonable accommodations and other entitlements) was communicated only informally through peers. In order to get things done, disabled people could not rely on official policies but rather had to go 'through a back door', suggesting their issues were too marginal to include in general HR policies (Stone, et al., 2013). This forced many disabled workers to disregard their needs, conceal their disability and act as able-bodied as possible. Other studies have explained the denial of reasonable accommodation in terms of a lack of willingness to adapt work practices in order to retain control over work processes (Harlan and Robert, 2012) or challenge to managerial prerogative (Foster and Fosh, 2010). Moreover, negotiations seem to rely heavily on the goodwill of poorly trained line managers and the process of asking for accommodation often led to bullying (Foster, 2007; Harlan and Robert, 2006), making some people conclude that the cost of requesting is higher than its potential value (Baldridge and Veiga, 2001), falling back on general flexibilities to manage the difficulties of work and illness (Werth, 2015). These examples indicate how contemporary ways of organizing work and HR management continue to perpetuate the marginalization and oppression of disabled people (Hall and Wilton, 2011). Even if organizations have special diversity policies in place, these often constitute nothing more than an 'empty shell' (Hoque and Noon, 2004; Hoque, et al., 2014) or leave out disability (Ball, et al., 2005), as this is considered as 'a difference too far' (Woodhams and Danieli, 2000; Thanem, 2008). Proactive hiring policies for disabled people were for instance only found in 10% of all workplaces in the UK (Reynolds et al., 2001 cited in Woodhams and Corby, 2007).

A last and third social barrier, located on the organizational level that can explain the socio-economic disadvantage of disabled people is the built environment. Although research in this area is scarce, some research has made mention of the (potential) impact of spatial exclusion in the workplace (Barnes and Mercer, 2005). Only one empirical study has completely dedicated its research efforts to the difficulties for disabled employees and job seekers to physically access the built environment (see Newton, et al., 2007). Yet inaccessibility represents a serious barrier, as it can make optimal performance difficult (Garland-Thomson, 2011; Van Laer, et al., 2015). In addition, people's well-being can reduce, for instance when they are forced to ask co-workers to help them access the toilet (Colella and Stone, 2005; Van Laer, et al., 2015). Furthermore, social isolation can occur as another result of inaccessible spaces. In the study by Robert and Harlan (2006), disabled workers were socially excluded because coworkers gathered during lunch and coffee breaks in inaccessible areas (Robert and Harlan, 2006). Segregation even seemed to be encouraged by managers in order to make the disabled worker invisible.

3 THE MINORITY MODEL EXPLANATION FOR THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE OF DISABLED PEOPLE

The bulk of explanations given for the socio-economic disadvantage of disabled people, falls under the paradigm of disability as minority politics. Here, like in the social barrier model, the social environment is seen as the main reason for exclusion. Yet rather than material and physical barriers, the environment is here conceptualized as permeated by attitudinal barriers. In line with a 'minority model' of disability, this stream of research conceptualizes 'people with disabilities' as occupying a minority position in society which makes them 'devalued, stigmatized, discredited and discounted' (Goodley, 2011: 13). Like African-Americans, they share in the common experience of marginalization and are only offered peripheral membership in society. People with disabilities are disadvantaged because majority groups confer stigma onto minority groups. Compared to the social barrier model, the emphasis is here less structural and more on the experience of marginalization of people with disabilities (Shakespeare and Watson, 2001). This variant of the social model gained most of its adherence across the Atlantic Ocean among North-American activists and academics. This paradigm upholds as the solution for marginalization the introduction of anti-discrimination legislation. Studies writing from this perspective locate power in the cognitive processes that emerge in interactions between minority and majority members.

Research interested in explanations for the socio-economic disadvantage from a minority perspective has turned to various topics, such as low expectations from others, reasonable accommodations, strained relationships with coworkers and self-limiting behavior. Regarding the first topic of low expectations, studies have turned to a lack of social acceptance by coworkers and other organizational actors to understand this phenomena (Vornholt, et al., 2013). Drawing on social identity theory (SIT) which states that people evaluate their own group more positive in order to enhance their own self-view and refer negative characteristics to the outgroup (Tajfel and Turner, 1986), exclusion processes are explained by the different categorization of disabled people who are stereotyped. Stereotyping and stigmatization can lead to various detrimental effects for the careers of disabled people (Baert, 2016; McLaughlin, et al., 2004; Snyder, et al., 2010). For instance, disabled people have a lower chance of being invited to job interviews, are pitied and patronized (Van Laer, et al., 2011) and prompt low expectations regarding their capacities, performance and social skills (Colella, et al., 1998; Colella and Varma, 1999; Colella, 2001;

Colella and Stone, 2005; Hand and Tryssenaar, 2006; Louvet, 2007; Run, et al., 2008; Stone and Colella, 1996; Stone-Romero, et al., 2006). Specific job-disability fit expectations based on stereotypes and held by organizational actors also affect whether someone will be accepted into the workplace or not (Ren, et al., 2008). Such research has revealed that disabled people are expected to aspire a boring computer-operating job (Riach and Loretto, 2009) and even 'simple' jobs such as secretary work can be regarded as a poor fit for wheelchair users due to high requirements of interpersonal contact (Colella, et al., 1998; Louvet, 2007).

A second popular topic within studies explaining the socio-economic advantage of disabled people from a minority perspective is the granting and denial of reasonable accommodations. Research shows that many disabled people are often denied changes to their environment because stereotypes and misconceptions regarding the cost and legal enforceability persist (Colella, 2001; Colella and Stone, 1996; Kim and Williams, 2012; Kulkarni and Valk, 2010; Moore, et al., 2011; Roessler, et al., 2011). Coworkers often question the fairness of certain accommodations and can perceive their disabled colleagues as undeserving recipients of special treatments (Paetzold, et al., 2008). Despite this, offering disabled workers the needed accommodations has proven to be beneficial for all parties, bringing along higher employee well-being and reduced perceived discrimination (Konrad, et al., 2013).

Beside the detrimental effects of perceived lower performance and stereotypical expectancies regarding fit on career outcomes (e.g. McLaughlin, et al., 2004), having a minority status also leads to strained relationships among organizational members, further damaging the careers of disabled people. Stereotypes and stigmatization often lead to bullying, ill-treatment and lack of respect (Fevre, et al., 2013; Foster and Scott, 2015; Schur, et al., 2009) and possibly to physical segregation from co-workers (Stone, et al., 2007).

A fourth way of explaining the socio-economic disadvantage of disabled people aligned with a minority model of disability is through the concept of self-limiting behavior (Heslin, et al., 2012; Jones, 1997; Stone and Colella, 1996). This occurs when people internalize the negative perceptions conferred to them by others, subsequently constraining their own behavior. This internalization process undermines their emotional well-being and leaves people feeling worthless and unattractive, lowering their self-esteem (Van Laer, et al., 2011). Self-limiting behavior acts as a seemingly self-inflicted barrier to career success, but in reality is the result of social stigma. For instance, when workers' previous search for work was disappointing, they may become less assertive, discouraged and loose hope (Heslin, et al., 2012) and end up looking for jobs less actively despite similar aspirations as their non-disabled counterparts (e.g. Ali, et al., 2011). According to Pagán and Malo (2009), disabled people's higher job satisfaction is therefore explained through lower expectations about jobs. Furthermore, when disabled people are employed, dysfunctional career expectancies (Lustig and Strauser, 2003) and not seeking for work-related help proactively (Kulkarni and Lengnick-Hall, 2011) can further disadvantage disabled people (Kulkarni and Gopakumar, 2014). For instance not seeking for accommodation that helps people perform their jobs in the workplace due to fear of monetary and imposition costs or anxiety (Baldridge and Veiga, 2001, 2006) or due to lack of knowledge on legislation (Kim and Williams, 2012) is defined in the literature as an adverse self-limiting move (Kulkarni and Gopakumar, 2014).

4 THE CULTURAL EXPLANATION FOR THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE OF DISABLED PEOPLE

A last explanation for the disadvantaged labor market position of disabled people emerges from a 'cultural model' of disability and emphasizes the negative discursive constructions of disabled people. As in the previous two models, the social environment is seen as the main cause for disablement, but rather than assuming that the disadvantage is caused by cognitive processes and attitudinal barriers or by material and physical structures, discursive structures are upheld as the explanatory mechanism. This cultural model underlying such research was developed from two critiques to the social barrier model. In a first critique, it was argued that the social barrier model had conceptualized disability as merely a consequence of material relations, sidelining other sociocultural factors such as language (Corker, 1999; Shakespeare and Watson, 1997). Within a cultural model then, dis/ability is seen as a sign system that differentiates and marks bodies and minds, and here through produces disabled and abled bodies. By constructing a binary, it upholds the non-disabled person as 'the ideal' and everything else as inferior (Davis, 1995). The emphasis here lies on 'social formations that are used to interpret bodily and cognitive differences' (Goodley, 2011: 14). Disability is in this sense a signifier which places people in a certain identity category (Garland-Thomson, 2005). The solution for resolving the socio-economic disadvantage according to a cultural model lies in deconstructing normalcy and putting forward counter-cultures that celebrate difference, such as disability arts (Goodley, 2011). Inspired by post-structuralism, power is located in the linguistic constructions of disabled people, ordering them along a binary of normal/abnormal workers.

Although these type of explanations for the socio-economic disadvantage of disabled people are rather limited in scope, some good examples can be found among critical sociologists. Located both at the macro (societal) level and meso (organizational) level, these studies point to disabling discursive practices. Research at the societal level has for instance investigated the impact of negative discourses on how unemployed disabled people are portrayed in media and policy as undeserving social beneficiaries (Grover and Piggot, 2013), dis-employable citizens who are a burden on the welfare state (Vandekinderen, et al., 2012), welfare fraudsters (Soldatic and Meekosha, 2012), occupationally disabled (Holmqvist, et al., 2013), and abnormal (Garsten and Jacobsson, 2013). Studies have also more closely examined the underlying discourses in national policies. According to Lunt and Thornton (1994), the way disability is conceived, will define the solution a nation sees fit for dealing with employment issues of disabled citizens. Many active labor market programs today draw on neoliberal discourses (Harris, et al., 2012) that emphasize people's own responsibility to work, without including discourses of support and services that help remove wider structural barriers in society. Overall, there appears to be little evidence of social model discourses in employment policies (Roulstone, 2002). And even if the policy rhetoric contains 'a balance of rights and responsibilities', the emphasis seems to remain with the individual (Riach and Loretto, 2009: 114). Also a few reintegration programs have been discursively deconstructed by scholars and appear to lead to negative identity constructions instead of successful reintegration into the labor market (Holmqvist, et al., 2013; Vandekinderen, et al., 2012).

The second stream of studies aligned with a cultural model of disability have located processes of disablement at the organizational level. Here the socio-economic disadvantage follows from discursive constructions of people in paid work as 'unfit' (Duff and Ferguson, 2012; Duff, et al., 2007), 'incompetent' (Harlan and Robert, 2006; Zanoni, 2011), 'helpless'

(Vickers, 1997), 'feminized' or 'childlike' (Mik-Meyer, 2015; 2016a; 2016b), 'unexpected workers' (Stone, et al., 2012). Only on rare occasions are disabled people considered an asset due to the positive skills they bring to the workplace (Andreassen, 2012; Värlander, 2012). In more exploitative terms, through a business case discourse, disabled people are sometimes celebrated and described as 'assets' because they are seen as immobile, cheap and obedient laborers, ideal for boring repetitive jobs or noisy jobs (Friedner, 2015; Kumar, et al., 2014). Within a cultural model, such constructions of disabled people as abject and different are believed to be at the heart of workplace exclusion (Barnes and Mercer, 2005).

As a second critique to the social barrier model, its strict divide between impairment as biological and disability as social has been debated. Some researchers argued that seeing impairment as pre-social and pre-discursive was deemed erroneous (Thomas, 1999) since, 'the discourses we deploy to represent impairment are in fact already socially and culturally determined' and so 'there is no body, existing outside of discourse' (Shakespeare and Watson, 2001: 25). Also, what counts as an impairment was argued to be a social judgement in itself (Shakespeare, 2006b; Campbell, 2011). Aligned within a cultural model and thus sensitive to the role of discourse, yet also incorporating bodily aspects in a critical realist fashion, some scholars have written about impairment effects as a partial explanation for the disadvantaged socio-economic position of disabled people. Impairment effects are defined as the differences in 'bodily activity and behavior that are directly attributable to bodily variations designated "impairments" which are distinct from barriers imposed by social responses to disabled people' (Thomas, 2007: 136). In this view, the body is rather considered as a complex site of cultural and corporeal production (Shildrick, 2009) and disabled people's experiences of impairment effects are considered 'a combination of the bodily (or cognitive) variation and the social context' (Williams and Mavin, 2012: 170). In such a theorization, socio-economic disadvantage can be resolved when impairment effects are acknowledged and when the requirements these bring along for organizations are met (Williams and Mavin, 2012).

In line with such a view, a last small set of studies from a cultural perspective yet with attention to the body can be found that try to co-explain the disadvantaged socio-economic position of disabled people. Such studies offer a more agentic approach to impairment effects than originally expressed in Thomas' work (1999, 2007) by focusing upon the ways in which disabled people can turn their impairment effects into legitimate organizing requirements, rather than having them regarded as individualized problems in the workplace (Williams and Mavin, 2012). A good empirical illustration can be found in Williams and Mavin (2015). Their study on disabled academics illustrates how they experience real disadvantages in the execution of daily work routines due to effects of their impairment, such as tiredness or pain (Williams and Mavin, 2015). Also in Roulstone and Williams' (2014) piece on disabled managers, impairment effects jeopardized the construction of disability as valued diversity in the case where the effects became 'too unstable or overt and required remedial action' (11).

1.2 Ableism as the adopted theoretical lens to explain the socio-economic disadvantage of disabled people

In this dissertation an ableism lens is put forward as an alternative explanation for the socio-economic disadvantage of disabled people based on symbolic structures in society that privilege a specific type of human being and devalue all that diverts from this norm. Aligned

with a cultural model perspective of disability and paying much attention to language and representation issues, the ableism concept was most explicitly elaborated on by the Australian scholar Fiona Campbell in the beginning of the 21st century. It has since been picked up by various other scholars across the world in various domains.

Ableism has been defined as 'a network of beliefs, processes and practices that produces a particular kind of self and body (the corporeal standard) that is projected as the perfect, essential and fully human' (Campbell, 2001: 44). Those selves and bodies that are seen as functioning differently from the 'standard' are cast as lesser human. This constitution of disabled people through a relation of inferiority relative to able-bodied people is normalized through language (Linton, 1998). As a result, ableism informs an attitude that equates able-bodiedness to normalcy and devalues all that diverts from this norm (Ho, 2008). In ableist ideas, practices, institutions or social relations, able-bodiedness is thus presumed and disabled people are constructed as inferior and invisible 'others' (Chouinard, 1997). Impairments are constructed as inherently and naturally horrible and seen as the sole cause of the problems experienced by the people who have them (Amundson and Taira, 2005). An ableist society then can be described as a society that promotes 'the species-typical individual citizen' (Campbell, 2009), which is 'a citizen that is ready and able to work and contribute' (Goodley, 2014: xi). The ableist worldview upholds that people should either strive to become this norm, or keep their distance (Kumar, 2012). And so those people who do not have the certain sets of preferred capabilities, or are represented as if they do not have these, are discriminated against (Wolbring, 2008). Because ableism is so ingrained into our collective subjectivity, this discrimination becomes largely invisible and equating disability to inferiority is seen as a natural reaction to an aberration (Campbell, 2009).

Some say that the post-structural underpinning characteristic of ableism was already laid earlier by feminist disability writers who exposed the linguistic conventions structuring the meanings of disability and argued for the removal of the constraints imposed by the disabled/non-disabled norm (Corker, 1999; Meekosha and Shuttleworth, 2009). Different from studies that conceptualize disability in terms of social barriers, studies using an ableism lens focus on the assumptions, privileging and maintenance of non-disability as an organizing normative principle (Campbell, 2009; Williams and Mavin, 2012). In approaching disability as a dual constellation, the possibility for conducting innovative and 'different' research arises because attention must be payed to both sides of the coin: not only to the group of disabled people but also to those considered 'normal'. This advances our thinking about disability in the workplace because it asks of the researcher to 'take a step back' and investigate what is meant with 'the normal' and with 'ability'. In many of the studies reviewed above, these 'normals' or non-disabled employees were not part of the analysis, or only marginally featured in it. The lens of ableism on the contrary requires that both categories of disability and ability are investigated, for disability can only ever be understood in relation to ability and the other way around. The defective disabled other is needed for the reification of the perfect humanist self and so the social category of disability becomes part and parcel of the construction of the 'normal' worker (Campbell, 2009). This shift from the perspective of the minority itself to the relation then allows to focus on the underlying principles of classification and ordering that take place.

Despite growing attention to the concept of ableism, it has to date only marginally been used for studying the socio-economic disadvantaged labor market position of disabled people. Recently calls have been made for instance by Goodley (2014: 34) for 'sophisticated critical theories of ableism' and Williams and Mavin (2012: 174) for 'including ableism in the

doing difference thesis'. This dissertation answers to such calls and has as goal to theoretically refine the concept of ableism and extend it in the context of work. The theoretical framework of ableism is regarded as a powerful approach for explaining disabled people's marginalization as it allows to circumvent many of the critiques that have been outed towards previous explanatory frameworks. Some core characteristics of the specific ableism lens developed here will be outlined next. First of all, the lens of ableism is sensitive to social factors and conceives of disability as a social construct. On the contrary, studies explaining the socio-economic disadvantage of disabled people along a medical model have been criticized for individualizing the disability-related employment gap, hereby obscuring 'the real' barriers (Barnes and Mercer, 2005; Jones and Wass, 2013). Indeed, solutions then become (almost) entirely located on the employee side of the employment relation while social factors resulting from the non-adapted society are brushed aside. A similar critique has been outed towards psychological studies inspired by 'the minority model', in that these largely neglect the impact of contextual factors on the workplace experience such as the role of the broader macro-context (Zanoni, et al., 2010) or the role of specific organizational contexts (Snyder, et al., 2010; Schur, et al., 2013). Therefore, much like studies based on a medical perception of disability, psychological studies run the risk of depoliticizing the shared oppression of disabled people (Goodley, 2014). Moreover, psychology inspired explanations for the disadvantaged labor market position of disabled people relying on experimental, laboratory and survey studies often perceive disability in fixed and pre-existing terms. By conceiving disabilities as static characteristics of individual people, such studies overlook the constructed nature of disability in the workplace (Harlan and Robert, 1998; Barnes and Mercer, 2005).

A second characteristic of the ableism approach under development in this dissertation is its attention to the agency of disabled employees. Psychological studies from a 'minority model' perspective on the contrary have been criticized for victimizing people and reducing them to bearers of the 'suffered' discrimination. Disabled people are destined to undergo the stereotypes and accept the negative decisions of managers with prejudiced minds. Only rarely, are disabled people given voice in this type of research. There is no investigation into their lived day-to-day experience and no attention is paid to how they might resist the disabling stereotypes they daily encounter at work (Gabel and Peters, 2004). Also discursive studies aligned with a 'cultural model' perspective have been pointed to their overly deterministic nature, reducing people to mere victims of discursive structures (Zanoni and Janssens, 2007). A similar critique has been directed to the 'disability as social barriers' model: namely that the individual is ripped of much of his or her individual agency and considered a victim, without a thorough examination of resistant voices (Gabel and Peters, 2004). That is why Gabel and Peters propose to move beyond the social model and bring forward resistance theories of disability (2004). Others too have argued that disabled people's experiences are better explainable through a framework that treats the individual/society dichotomy as dialogic and disabled people as social agents, rebalancing the structure/agency debate (Corker, 1999).

Lastly, the ableism lens that is proposed here pays attention to both discursive practices and social practices. Strictly discursive studies working from a 'cultural model' perspective that neglect social practices and materiality risk to obscure important aspects of how ableism disables individuals, as power is not only exerted by constituting identity categories, but also by virtue of how such categories come to be enacted in social practices and with material effects (e.g. Zanoni and Janssens, 2007; Fairclough, 1998). In light of the growing attention to socio-materiality in organization studies, a social

interpretation of disability focusing on discourses and material aspects was already proposed by Williams and Mavin (2012), who rather focus on bodily material practices through impairment effects.

1.3 METHODOLOGY

This dissertation relies on a multiple case study and multiple sources design. More specifically, data was gathered through 3 case studies, providing 65 interviews. This design, using multiple distinct cases and multiple sources herein, seemed most suited to document on the presence of ableism and how it varies across different organizations (Creswell, 2013; Myers, 2013; Yin, 2009). The three cases were purposively sampled (Jupp, 2006) in order to generate rich information (Patton, 2002) and theory development (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). They had to answer to a minimum set of requirements, in order to be considered for selection. First of all, the organization had to be 'big enough' to be able to employ a minimum of 10 disabled people and have union representation, yet could not employ more than 15% disabled staff (to avoid using extreme cases, Eisenhardt, 1989). Secondly, the cases needed to be located in both private and public sectors because research has pointed to a possible differential treatment of disabled personnel due to different motives (Versantvoort and van Echtelt, 2012). Thirdly then, we looked for organizations with some sort of disability-related set of policies. The reason here fore is that we expected those organizations to have banned blatant forms of overt discrimination, making it possible to focus more on subtle forms of ableism. The first company in which interviews occurred was EmployOrg. EmployOrg is a public organization employing about 5,000 employees and providing several services for jobseekers such as personal guidance and trainings. The second company was LocGov. LocGov is a regional public administration body, employing around 1000 employees. It covers a wide array of services including physical planning of the region, promotion of the touristic attractions and social well-being of its inhabitants. And the last company was BankCorp. BankCorp is a large private banking and insurance company, employing about 15 000 people.

The voices of multiple actors were included in this research project. First of all and most importantly, 30 interviews were conducted with employees with an officially recognized impairment, as defined by the Flemish administration: 'every long-term substantial problem of participation in work due to an interplay of functional limitations of mental, psychological, physical, bodily or sensorial nature, limitations in performing activities, and personal and external factors' (Samoy, 2014: 6, own translation). In order to recruit these, all the disabled employees within each firm were sent an email in blind copy by someone in the personnel office, addressed by the first author with the question if they wanted to participate in an anonymous study on the employment opportunities of disabled people in Belgium. In the first company, EmployOrg, 13 out of 63 disabled employees responded positively. At LocGov, 8 out of 17 disabled employees were willing to participate. And at BankCorp 9 out of 68 agreed to be interviewed by the researcher. Secondly and chronologically subsequent, 23 interviews were held with supervisors of disabled employees (though not necessarily of the ones interviewed earlier). These were recruited after being send a similar email through someone in the HR office by the first author. And next, 4 interviews were done with HR staff members, who were contacted directly by the first author. The inclusion of supervisors and HR personnel in this particular study was important because in general, these actors are an important but understudied aspect of disabled people's careers (McLaughlin, et al., 2004; Kulkarni and Valk, 2010). Next, 6 union representatives were interviewed after being

contacted directly by the first author. This was done because of the highly unionized context of the Belgian labor market and because previous research has demonstrated the important role for disabled employees in reconfiguring the 'personal as political' and integrating disability concerns into wider organizational agendas (Foster and Fosh, 2010). In addition, 2 more occupational doctors were interviewed, after being referred to the first author by someone in the HR office. In addition to these sources, internal documents of the organizations were gathered such as job vacancies, mission statements, disability guides, diversity reports, accessibility evaluations of offices, etc.

Table 2. *Overview of the Respondent Groups per Organization*

	EmployOrg	BankCorp	LocGov	*Total*
Disabled employees	13	9	8	*30*
Managers	7	9	7	*23*
HR staff	2	1	1	*4*
Occupational doctors	1	1	-	*2*
Union reps	2	2	2	*6*
Total	*25*	*22*	*18*	*65*

Table 3. *Overview of the Respondents*

EmployOrg's disabled employees					EmployOrg's organizational actors	
Name	Age	Gender	Impairment	Job Title	Name	Job Title
Dirk	31	M	visual (blind)	administrative worker	Sandrine	disability expert
Stefanie	45	F	physical (fybromyalgie)	job consultant	Sarah	HR manager
Marjan	49	F	physical (fybromyalgie), hearing	job consultant	Victor	manager
Jean	49	M	physical (epilepsy)	job consultant	Rutger	manager
Alice	47	F	physical (colostomy)	data analist	Hannah	manager
Betty	32	F	physical/mobility	instructor	Isabelle	manager
Els	32	F	deafness	administrative worker	Diane	manager
Sofie	39	F	physical/mobility, hearing	serviceline worker	Ann	manager
Marco	50	M	visual	receptionist	Valeria	manager
Louisa	55	F	hearing	receptionist	Dean	union rep.
Claire	48	F	physical	instructor	Benny	union rep.
Jana	34	F	CFS	job consultant		
Liz	58	F	hearing, scoliosis	job consultant		

BankCorp's disabled employees					Other organizational actors	
Name	Age	Gender	Impairment	Job Title	Name	Job Title
Maarten	51	M	visual and mobility (MS)	officer business loans	Kate	diversity manager
Peter	49	M	visual (blind)	web support manager	Charlotte	manager
Marc	52	M	hearing (deaf)	graphic designer	Vicky	manager
Dieter	24	M	visual	campagne evaluator (and trainee)	Cody	manager
Ella	32	F	mobility (wheelchair)	financial accountant	Nicolas	manager
Carolien	33	F	mobility	receptionist	Nicole	manager
Julie	24	F	hearing	social media marketing	Maddy	manager
Eric	34	M	mobility (wheelchair)	security manager	Steve	manager
Tom	27	M	hearing	sales advisor professional clients	Cécile	manager
					Chelsey	manager
					Wout	union rep.
LocGov's disabled employees					Other organizational actors	
Name	Age	Gender	Impairment	Job Title	Name	Job Title
Patrick	55	M	physical	coordinator accessibility	Wim	disability expert
Robin	29	M	psychosocial (Asperger)	administrative worker	Nancy	manager
Katherin	35	F	psychosocial (chronic depression)	administrative worker	Marie	manager
Bridget	44	F	psychosocial (dyslexia)	staff worker	Jos	manager
Ann		F	physical (fibromyalgia)	product design	Peter	manager
Harold	57	M	physical	coordinator substance abuse	Heleen	manager
Adriaan	33	M	hearing	project manager spatial planning	Jozef	manager
Tim	51	M	physical (chronic back pains)	manual green worker	Annelies	manager
					Henk	union rep.

This study was commissioned by the Policy Research Centre on Equal Opportunities and funded by the Flemish Government.

1.4 OVERVIEW OF THE DISSERTATION

As mentioned in the beginning of the introduction, our central goal is to theoretically refine the concept of ableism and extend it to the context of work. Here fore, three different papers are proposed. The first two papers 'Constructing positive identities in ableist workplaces: Disabled employees' discursive practices engaging with the discourse of lower productivity' and 'Ableism at work: Disability/able-bodiedness as a principle of organizing subjects in three organizations' draw on a tradition of research that analyses the socio-economic disadvantage of disabled people as following negative discursive constructions, aligned with a cultural model of disability. The third paper 'Extending the lens of ableism through the use of Bourdieu: a case study of one financial services company' focuses on social practices through the framework of Bourdieu and is more aligned with research locating the disadvantage within organizational policies and practices from a social barrier perspective.

Each paper separately and through its unique research questions aims to extent our knowledge on ableism. In the first paper, it is highlighted how ableism informs negative representation of disabled employees in the workplace and how disabled employees themselves deal with such assumptions in order to retain a positive sense of self. In the second paper, the characteristic feature of the binary within ableism is used to investigate localised translations of ableism in three organizations. And in the third paper, it is explored how ableism restricts the social practices of certain disabled employees more than of others.

Table 4. *Overview of Chapter 2, 3, 4*

	Chapter 2	Chapter 3	Chapter 4
Title	Constructing positive identities in ableist workplaces: Disabled employees' discursive practices engaging with the discourse of lower productivity	Ableism at work: Disability/able-bodiedness as a principle of organizing subjects in three organizations	Extending the lens of ableism through the use of Bourdieu: a case study of one financial services company
RQ's	*How do disabled employees craft positive identities amid the ableist assumption of lower productivity?*	*How do organizational identity regulatory discourses normalize able-bodied subjectivities and render disabled subjectivities abnormal?* *How do these discourses impinge on the identity work of disabled workers?*	*What do the rules of the game in the organizational field of BankCorp look like?* *In how far do these rules imply ableism-based symbolic violence?*
Theory	Foucauldian theory, identity work, discursive practices	Foucauldian theory, socio-ideological control, identity-regulation, identity work	Bourdieu theory, ableist practices
Method	Critical discourse analysis	Critical discourse analysis	Narrative analysis
Data	30 interviews with disabled employees, spread across the three different companies	65 interviews with all interviewees	22 interviews with all organizational actors in the bank

Table 4 provides an overview of each paper's research questions and the theory, method and data used to provide an answer to those questions.

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2 EMPLOYEES' DISCURSIVE PRACTICES ENGAGING WITH THE DISCOURSE OF LOWER PRODUCTIVITY[1]

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Ableism has recently been advanced as a new lens to conceptualize the marginalization of disabled people at work (Corlett and Williams, 2011; Williams and Mavin, 2012).[1] Ableism refers to 'ideas, practices, institutions and social relations that presume able-bodiedness' (Williams and Mavin, 2012: 271) or non-disability as an normative organizing principle against which all are assessed (Campbell, 2009; Wendell, 1996), generating a collective understanding of disability as a diminished state of being human (Campbell, 2008). Applying this concept to workplaces, this emerging literature has started to document how disabled employees are discursively constructed as less capable, willing and productive workers and thus as less valuable for and/or employable by organizations (e.g. Foster and Wass, 2013; Holmqvist, et al., 2013; Lindsay, et al., 2014; Vandekinderen, et al., 2012). Resting on a Foucauldian understanding of power (Campbell, 2008), these studies have advanced prior understandings of disability in the workplace by unveiling the normalizing effects of discourses of disability. These discourses – structured collections of texts that bring objects and subject positions into being (Fairclough, 1992; Hardy and Phillips, 1997) – produce and maintain subordinate identity positions which become established over time as transparent, normative expectations (Abberley, 2002; Corker and French, 1999).

Aiming to underscore the disciplinary power of language (Foucault, 1977), the literature informed by ableism has focused on deconstructing how dominant representations of people with impairments disable them, paying relatively scant attention to how disabled subjects themselves engage with such discourses in the workplace (Williams and Mavin, 2012). Yet from the critical literature on employees' identity work in organizations, we know that subjects are not passive consumers of managerially designed discourses. On the contrary, they more or less actively and critically interpret, make own and enact such discourses to construct and maintain positive identities (Knights and Willmott, 1989), or identities that imbue the self with worth (Fine, 1996) and that are associated with a positive social meaning (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Collinson, 2003). This is not only true for employees who have historically been cast as the norm, but also for those who have been constructed in subordinate terms in relation to that norm, such as women (e.g. Denissen, 2010), ethnic minorities (e.g. Van Laer and Janssens, 2011) and older workers (e.g. Ainsworth and Hardy, 2009). In this perspective, the power of ableist discourses is predicated upon disabled employees' own self-positioning within such discourses, through the development of identities aligned with them (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002).

Taking stock of these theoretical insights, this paper aims to advance the emergent literature on disability from an ableist perspective by analyzing how disabled employees discursively engage with the prevailing ableist discourse of disability as lower productivity in crafting positive workplace identities. We conduct a critical discourse analysis of the discursive practices through which speakers, in their identity work, deploy the discursive resources available to them to construct preferred versions of themselves (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999; Kornberger and Brown, 2007). Our analysis is guided by the research question: How do disabled employees craft positive identities amid the ableist assumption

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of lower productivity? Empirically, we address this question by analyzing 30 semi-structured in-depth interviews with disabled employees of three Belgian organizations.

Disabled employees are a particularly relevant group to gain a better understanding of how language exert power in subjects' own identity work because they inhabit a highly contradictory discursive position in the workplace. As disabled individuals, they are discursively constructed for what they are *unable* to do, a defining characteristic of the social identity ascribed to them in all types of social settings (Davis, 2002; Shakespeare, 2006a). On the contrary, as employees, they are hired for what they are *able* to do, as human resources creating value for their employer (Foster and Wass, 2013; Zanoni, 2011; Vandekinderen, et al., 2012). In this sense, disabled employees represent an extreme case of a social group for whom the crafting of a positive workplace identity is exceptionally challenging and thus empirically more transparently observable (Eisenhardt, 1989), enabling theory development.

2.2 Ableism at work: Disabled individuals as less productive employees

Ableist ideas and practices produce a particular kind of self and body that is projected as perfect and thus 'fully human' (Campbell, 2001). Embedded deeply and subliminally within culture, ableism therefore reproduces a widespread collective belief that 'impairment is inherently negative and should the opportunity present itself, be ameliorated, cured or eliminated' (Campbell, 2008: 6).

Conceptually, the notion of ableism builds on a social model of disability which, since the late 1960s, has increasingly displaced traditional individualized and medical explanations for the economic and social deprivations encountered by disabled people (Barnes, 2000; Abberley, 2002; Goodley, 2010). In the social model, disability is not an individual trait but rather the effect of cultural, social and material structures of the modern world which create disability and marginalize individuals (cf. Barnes and Mercer, 2005; Barnes, 2000; Abberley, 2002; Roulstone, 2002). The social model literature highlights how industrial capitalism has historically oppressed disabled people by constituting them as inherently less productive or reliable individuals than the 'normal worker' (Foster, 2007), or as synonym for those who cannot meet the demands of the modern production systems (Galvin, 2006; Woodhams and Danieli, 2000). This negative representation continues on in contemporary capitalism where global competition constantly increases productivity demands (McMullin and Shuey, 2006).

Similar to the social model literature, the emerging literature on ableism points to the socially constructed nature of disability. Yet it highlights the key role of language in normalizing negative representations of disabled people as deviant, unproductive and unemployable, excluding them from paid work or subordinating them within organizations. This normalization becomes particularly striking in a neo-liberal context (Wilson and Beresford, 2002) in which workers are no longer simply seen as partners in the exchange relationship with the employer, but rather as living embodiments of human capital, which they need to proactively manage, as 'entrepreneurial subjects' (Munro, 2012; Foucault, 2007).

For instance, Foster and Wass (2013) show how, drafted with the ideal worker in mind, job descriptions requiring multiple-tasking, inter-changeability and teamwork

reproduce an ideology of candidates with an impairment as unfit, disabling them. Similarly, Zanoni (2011) shows how lean production systems exclude disabled workers, fostering their discursive construction in the factory as either unable or unwilling to work. Recent studies about disabled jobseekers document how they are commonly discursively represented as lacking experience and soft communication skills which are essential in the service economy (Lindsay et al, 2014) and as passive and unable to meet the criteria of employability (Holmqvist, et al., 2013; Vandekinderen, et al., 2012). These studies share an emphasis on what disabled people *cannot* do and cast them as not entrepreneurial.

The pervasiveness of negative representations of disabled workers has also been documented by the social psychological literature. Focusing on individual cognitive and psychological processes, these studies show how bias and stereotypes of disability as lower productivity, incompetence, helplessness and dependency persistently disadvantage workers in selection processes (Heslin, et al., 2012) and hamper their social acceptance by others when employed (Colella, 2001; Ren, et al., 2008; Stone and Colella, 1996). Common concerns are the additional costs of employing disabled individuals (Colella, et al., 2004; Snyder, et al., 2010) and expected lower levels of performance (McLaughlin, et al., 2004; Vornholt, et al., 2013). Accordingly, disabled workers themselves have been found to feel a constant obligation to disclose their impairment and to persuade both employers and coworkers that they can be productive (Von Schrader, et al., 2013).

Whereas reasonable accommodations might alleviate some of the barriers encountered by disabled employees in their work environment (Kim and Williams, 2012; Roessler, et al. 2011), reasonable accommodations do not challenge ableism as an organizing principle. Reflecting an individual, post-entry approach, they fail to remove barriers *a priori*, such as the physical inaccessibility and the disabling social organization of work (Wilton and Schuer, 2006). In addition, employers have been reluctant towards granting accommodations (Paetzold, et al. 2008; Kulkarni and Valk, 2010) precisely because they potentially disrupt the institutionalized (ableist) hierarchy in the workplace (Harlan and Robert, 1998). Such 'special privileges' elevate disabled employees above able-bodied employees, which is considered out of proportion to their worth in the organization (Robert and Harlan, 2006).

These streams of disability literature have generated important insights into the multiple mechanisms through which negative symbolic representations of disability – variously conceptualized – contribute to the persistent marginalization of people with an impairment in contemporary workplaces. Much smaller is however our current knowledge on how disabled people themselves engage with such discourses in their attempts to craft positive workplace identities. In general, studies giving voice to disabled workers and their identity work are still sparse, likely due to the emphasis of social model and ableism studies on material and discursive structures (Foster, 2007). The studies that do (e.g Brown, et al., 2009; Gupta, 2012; Kim and Williams, 2012; Roulstone and Williams, 2013; Värlander, 2012; Vick, 2012) approach their narratives as entry points into their workplace experiences rather than as ways to engage with powerful discourses. As the individual sense-making remains disconnected from hegemonic, macro-level discourses reproducing ableism, this approach fails to shed light on the key role of the own identity work of disabled individuals in the operation of power (cf. Thomas and Davies, 2005).

In this study, we would like to advance the extant literature through a fine-grained analysis of the discursive practices by which disabled employees justify their being in the

organization and create positive workplace identities amid the negative ableist discourse of lower productivity. To our knowledge, only Corlett and Williams (2011) have to date examined individuals' discursive practices to investigate how disabled academics negotiate reasonable accommodations. While attuned to our theoretical perspective, the focus on reasonable accommodations only tangentially addresses the challenge encountered by disabled workers in developing positive identities compatible with the foundational idea of employees as *productive* human resources. This challenge is paramount in ableist workplaces in contemporary societies infused with a neo-liberal ideology (Vandekinderen, et al., 2012).

2.3 DISCURSIVE PRACTICES, IDENTITY WORK AND POWER

The identity work of people belonging to historically subordinated groups in the workplace has been widely investigated. The underlying idea is that not only class-based but also other social identities shape power relations in organizations (e.g. Collinson, 1988; Brown and Coupland, 2005). In this literature, identity is conceived as the precarious product of discursive activity in which subjects themselves partake. Their identity work occurs through discursive acts, securing a sense of identity, which can express self-reflection or dissatisfaction with a specific identity position (Fleming and Spicer, 2007; Mumby, 2005; Thomas and Davies, 2005). For instance feminist scholars have documented female employees' discursive acts resisting male privilege through irony (Trethewey, 1997) and humor (Martin, 2004), casting themselves as mother over younger male employees (Kondo, 1990), claiming to work extra hard (Dick and Hyde, 2006), suppressing gender difference by appealing to shared identities and beliefs (Denissen, 2010), and even graffiti (Bell and Forbes, 1994). Rumens and Kerfoot (2009) explored how gay men struggled with normative discourses of professionalism to maintain a positive identity. Slay and Smith (2011) and Van Laer and Janssens (2011; 2014) documented the struggles of ethnic minorities to construct professional identities in white dominated contexts. Other studies have shown how older workers, who are commonly discursively constructed as 'in decline' and less productive, can re-appropriate such discourses to craft resistant workplace identities (Ainsworth and Hardy, 2009; Trethewey, 2001; Zanoni, 2011).

This literature shows how, in order to fully understand language and power, close attention is warranted to the ongoing discursive practices through which subjects constitute their sense of the self (Ashcraft, 2005). A focus on how speakers' discursive practices proactively co-shape subject positions for themselves by using available discursive resources (Thomas and Davies, 2005) reveals the productive dimension of power enabling possibilities of being, not only foreclosing them (Foucault, 1977; Mumby, 2005). Speakers enter a struggle with other social actors to fix advantageous meaning and definitions over who they are (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999), which might challenge, to various extents, existing power relations (Phillips and Hardy, 1997). As stated by Mumby, '[a]lthough certain grand narratives or Discourses frame the interpretive possibilities, the struggle over meaning remains open to alternative, resistant and counterhegemonic accounts' (2005: 33). Ultimately speakers may more or less explicitly resist, in their identity work, the construction of selves within managerially inspired discursive contexts (Alvesson, et al., 2008; Brown and Coupland, 2005; Kornberger and Brown, 2007; Zanoni and Janssens, 2007). Taking this theoretical lens allows us to gain insight in how disabled people construct positive identities in ableist workplaces imbued with discourses of disability as lower productivity.

2.4 METHOD

1 THE BELGIAN INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

The empirical study was carried out in Flanders, the northern region of Belgium. Historically, the Belgian policy on disability has been one of segregation, both in education and on the labor market (Samoy and Waterplas, 2012). The Belgian employment rate for disabled people is significantly lower than the European average: 20 of the 31 European countries fare better (Samoy, 2014). Moreover, when professionally active, disabled people are often employed in state subsidized sheltered workshops (Samoy and Waterplas, 2012).

In the last two decades, the Belgian social welfare system has increasingly evolved towards a workfare system. Under impulse of EU labor market policies and legislation (European Commisson, 2010), paid work has become the main way for historically underrepresented groups to participate in society (Vandekinderen, et al., 2012). More generally, social security benefits have increasingly been made conditional not only upon individuals' past employment but also on their efforts to regain access to paid work when professionally inactive. Recent measures have limited unemployment benefits in time and increased the legal retirement age to 67. Long exempt from activation because considered unfit for work, disabled people are today increasingly being 'activated'.

In line with this paradigmatic shift, the Flemish regional government has invested in activation measures to raise the employment rate of disabled people from 40,4% in 2013 to 43% by 2020. This target is to be reached in the first place through integration in the regular labor market (Samoy, 2014) but also by means of a 3% quota on public administrations (Departement Bestuurszaken, 2014). Activation is pursued through free-of-charge employment support for unemployed disabled job seekers. Based on a medical assessment, this guidance is geared to measuring individual competencies and developing skills to enhance the fit between disabled candidates and employers' demands (cf. Vandekinderen, et al., 2012).

This policy change reflects broader international trends of neo-liberal social valuation of human life characterized by strategically reduced social intervention (Roulstone, 2002), along an increased emphasis on individual self-actualization and flexibility (Wilton and Schuer, 2006; Yates and Roulstone, 2012). In line with what Foucault, in his later work, has termed neo-liberal governmentality, state intervention is today primarily aimed at developing human capital (Foucault, 2008; Munro, 2011) to reduce the distance between disabled people and the open labor market (Barnes and Mercer, 2005). Disabled citizens are recast from passive receivers of benefits or citizens entitled to a suitable job in a sheltered workplace to individuals who are themselves responsible for making active efforts to enter the labor market or return to it as soon as possible (Berghman and Lammertyn, 2005).

Despite the novel focus on activation, the Belgian policy also shows continuity with the past. Since 1965, a system of wage subsidies has provided financial incentives for businesses to employ disabled people by compensating estimated productivity loss caused by impairments and the higher risk incurred by the employing organization (Samoy and Waterplas, 2012). This measure compensates for wage costs ranging from 40% in the first year of employment to 20% in the third, fourth and fifth year. However, the employer may apply for up to 60% reimbursement if a higher productivity loss can be demonstrated. After

a period of five years with the same employer, the subsidy can only be extended if an assessment of the worker's productivity in the subsidized job shows a continued need for it. The wage subsidy is important to our study because it institutionalizes the hegemonic discourse of disabled employees as less productive and less valuable employees into compensatory bureaucratic and organizational praxis.

2 CASES AND DATA

This study is based on a total of 30 in-depth semi-structured interviews with disabled employees in three large organizations: a regional public agency (13 interviewees; 2.3% disabled staff), a local public agency (eight interviewees; 2.0% disabled staff) and a private bank and insurance company (nine interviewees; 0.4% disabled staff). The data were collected during a larger, publicly funded project for the Flemish Policy Centre for Equal Opportunities Policies 2012-2015, which also included in-depth interviews with other actors: supervisors, HR staff, company doctors, and trade union representatives. The organizations were selected through purposive sampling (Jupp, 2006) because they employed sufficient numbers of people with a work-related disability, as defined by the Flemish government administration: 'every long-term substantial problem of participation in work due to an interplay of functional limitations of mental, psychological, physical, bodily or sensorial nature, limitations in performing activities, and personal and external factors' (Samoy, 2014: 6, own translation).

The first author contacted the human resources department of each organization, providing information on the objectives and the methodology of the study. They agreed to participate in the study and subsequently launched an open call to recruit disabled employees as interviewees. Common ethical guidelines concerning informed consent were followed (Creswell, 2012) and anonymity was stressed in all communication. The names included in this text are pseudonyms. Participants were 15 men and 15 women, had a broad range of chronic illnesses and impairments, covered a broad age range and were employed in a variety of jobs.

The semi-structured interviews were carried out following a questionnaire of open questions organized in five main sections: the nature of the impairment, the professional trajectory, the current job, social relations at work, and policy-related issues. To inductively identify relevant topics to be included in the questionnaire, next to those featuring in the disability literature, six pilot interviews were conducted (Turner, 2010) with three disability/diversity experts in the organizations, one disability expert of the public Service for Mediation and Employment and two professionally active disabled persons who were not members of the three organizations. From the pilot interviews, the issue of productivity emerged as a relevant theme. Therefore, some specific questions on this topic were included in the interview guideline: Could you describe how your disability affects your job? Would you say you have a similar productivity compared to other colleagues performing a similar job? Do you think others in this organization (colleagues/supervisor) believe that you are less productive? The guideline was set up following the life course, yet the interviewer allowed the order to be altered by respondents to not disrupt the flow of the conversation and to pursue emerging themes based on the respondent's answers. The interviews lasted between half an hour and an hour and a half, were all audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The analysis of the data was conducted on the transcripts in the original language

(Dutch), translating only the excerpts that were included in the findings sections once the interpretation had been written up.

3 DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis aimed at identifying and classifying the discursive practices through which disabled workers engage with the issue of productivity in their identity work. An overview of the steps in the data analysis, the full coding tree and the frequencies are provided in Table 5.

Table 5. *Data Analysis Scheme*

Step 1: Identifying fragments on productivity	Step 2: Positioning towards lower productivity discourse in identity work	Step 3: Discovering the underlying discursive practice to craft a positive workplace identity	Claim	Step 4: Identifying the discursive resources used
Fragments on productivity (109)	Contesting lower productivity (73)	Rejecting association disability – lower productivity (39)	Claiming equal productivity	Proactively managing the disability (15) Calling in objective measures (11) Questioning the need for wage subsidies (6) Calling in job fit (7)
		Generating alternative meaning to productivity (32)	Claiming higher productivity	More motivation/loyalty (17) Better understanding (7) More concentration (2) Superior handling of repetitive tasks (2) Superior verbal skills (3)
	Reproducing lower productivity (36)	Rejecting individual responsibility (36)	Complying with lower productivity + Questioning who bears responsibility	'Willing but unable' (27) Lack of accommodation (7) Wage subsidies (2)

First, the first author identified all fragments on productivity (109) in the interview transcripts, mostly but not exclusively resulting from answers to the above mentioned questions on productivity. In a second phase, we conducted a critical discourse analysis, focusing on the discursive and argumentative structure of the excerpts. Relying on axial coding (Wicks, 2010), the authors jointly identified two main ways in which the fragments related to the hegemonic discourse of disability as lower productivity. The majority of the

fragments (73) contested the discursive construction of disability as lower productivity, while the remaining reproduced it (36).

In a third phase, we further examined the first set of 73 fragments, identifying two sub-categories: 1) excerpts in which respondents claimed equal productivity as able-bodied employees (39) and 2) excerpts in which respondents claimed superior productivity (32). We observed that while the former sub-category mentioned commonly used measurements of productivity, the latter redefined productivity in alternative ways. We then examined the second set of 36 fragments. Although we could not identify any further lower-level codes, we observed that in these fragments the idea of lower productivity was reproduced yet systematically followed by the speaker's rejection of individual responsibility for it. Our data analysis thus resulted in three main discursive practices, which featured in our data with similar frequencies.

Fourth, the first author initiated the open coding of each individual fragment based on the discursive resources featuring in it (e.g. proactively managing the disability, calling in objective measures). These third-level codes emerged based on the discursive resources through discussions with the second and third author in multiple rounds, to ensure inter-coder agreement (Creswell, 2012). To end our analysis, we checked how the three discursive practices were distributed across individual respondents and organizations. Twenty-six respondents out of 30 used at least two discursive practices, five respondents used only one practice and two respondents used no discursive practice. Although the small numbers do not allow to make conclusive statements, the first discursive practice was slightly more frequently used in the bank and insurance company, the second in the regional public agency and the third in the local public agency.

2.5 FINDINGS

In speakers' narratives, the topic of productivity emerged both spontaneously and in articulated answers to the productivity-related questions asked by the interviewer. In their attempt to construct positive workplace identities, they positioned themselves towards the discourse of disability as lower productivity, casting them as slower, less flexible, more absent, etc. workers, by combining three discursive practices, which distinctively positioned them in relation to productivity.

1 CRAFTING *A POSITIVE IDENTITY BY CONTESTING THE DISCOURSE OF LOWER PRODUCTIVITY*

Through the first discursive practice, speakers openly contested the ableist discourse defining them as less productive compared to a hypothetical 'normal' able-bodied worker by relying on a variety of discursive resources. Most frequently, they highlighted their own agency, their ability to eliminate potential productivity loss caused by their disability:

> I try to deal with the effects of my impairment. When I'm in a meeting and someone talks too softly for me to hear, *I just ask him to speak up*. I tell him also because I assume that others [non-disabled] might have troubles understanding him, too. But for me then of course the problem is more pronounced. But *I always look for an appropriate space to have the meeting,*

> *in advance*. A space that is as small as possible. (Adriaan, project manager with a hearing impairment)
>
> *To me it's really important that I work as hard and as good as anyone else*. *I have made it my personal point to never hide behind the fact that, for instance, 'I did not see it'*. To give an example: once in a while it could happen that when making slides, little errors sneak in. Little things such as a wrong alignment, or a small typo. I know that, so *I focus on this really hard to avoid it*. (Dieter, trainee with a visual impairment)

In these excerpts, respondents project identities as workers in full control, proactively and preemptively creating the conditions that ensure their own productivity.

A second frequently deployed discursive resource were past positive productivity assessments and outcomes of HR appraisals. The following quotes are illustrative:

> I don't think I suffer from productivity loss, *if that was the case they wouldn't have promoted me twice so far*. I work in a commercial environment, you've probably heard this from other colleagues, too. Here they are really not going to give you slack because of your disability. *Numbers are the only thing that interests them*. (Tom, financial advisor with a hearing impairment)
>
> I regret that we aren't paid *on a variable basis*. I think that if we were, I would *earn more*. (Dieter, trainee with a visual impairment)

Similar to these excerpts, other ones mention quantitative evidence such as the number of telephone calls handled, files processed or complaints treated as well as positive feedback on performance received from managers, colleagues or the HR department. These 'objective' measures enabled speakers to discount the alleged lower productivity and promote a more positive identity for themselves.

Another type of 'objective' evidence featuring in the narratives was the wage subsidy received by the company. Speakers deployed this resource to counter the dominant discourse of lower productivity indirectly. They questioned the ethical legitimacy of a financial compensation for productivity loss that did not occur:

> I believe that *it isn't fair that there is a wage subsidy for me*. I know I will prove myself and that *there is no need for financial compensation*. I am convinced that I do my work as well as anyone else and even better than some colleagues. (Dieter, trainee with a visual impairment)
>
> An employer would be stupid of course not to accept the wage subsidy. But *it feels wrong* somehow. *Why should you reward somebody for hiring people with a disability? I think it's a bit wrong*. A wrong attitude. It looks as if you should give a bonus to a company for hiring disabled people while most disabled people can perform their job correctly. (Eric, manager and wheelchair user)

Finally, some fragments highlighted the good fit between the speaker's competencies and the job requirements as evidence for his/her productivity:

> I dare to claim *that there is no single difference between my productivity and that of colleagues in the same business.* Why? My work is not affected by the fact that it takes me longer to move around. Most of my job consists of coordinating work, managing teams, yes sometimes travel, but okay that's

> just travel time. In the end, you are judged based on the results of your team and yourself, and I am confident there is no productivity loss. (Eric, manager and wheelchair user)

In this case, the speaker deploys the content of his job as manager as evidence to argue for the irrelevance of his disability. By circumscribing the job demands, he is able to craft a work identity as a fully competent worker. The claim is further strengthened by adding additional evidence pointing to his team's and his own performance.

In this first discursive practice, disabled employees explicitly contest the discourse of disability as lower productivity by constructing themselves as productive workers. To do so, they proactively draw on various discursive resources to create an identity as conscious managers and even as 'guardians' of their own productivity. Speakers thus leverage the neo-liberal discourse of subjects as entrepreneurs of their own human capital (Munro, 2011) to counter the discourse of disability as of lower productivity.

This discursive practice relates to ableism as an organizing principle in a two-fold, contradictory way. Though countering the discourse of disability as lower productivity, it also reaffirms the rightfulness of productivity as a key criterion for determining who can be a worthy organizational member. Hereby it explicitly uses able-bodied colleagues as a term of reference for assessing productivity. By stressing that they produce work output that is (at least) as high as the output of able-bodied workers, speakers resist a negative identity but reproduce dominant discourses of productivity valuation and the measures that enact them in the workplace, contributing to their taken-for-grantedness.

2 CRAFTING A POSITIVE IDENTITY BY REDEFINING PRODUCTIVITY

Through this second discursive practice, speakers also explicitly countered the ableist discourse of disability as lower productivity. Most frequently, they constructed the higher productivity in terms of their inherent and superior dedication to work:

> *People with polio have the tendency to prove themselves*. That's something really odd. I know a couple of other people like that. I once got a reaction of someone that came into my office looking for the office chief and he said: "You're the person in charge? You?". I said "Yep, sorry, you're going to have to do with me'. (Harold, project manager and a wheelchair user)

> Last time I was placed, I was out for eight months… People should understand though, we shouldn't get fired on the spot because we are not capable. People with a psychological disability are not incapable. *They even want more, they are more motivated to perform well as soon as they are better*. They fight, they fight their illness. (Katherine, administrative worker with chronic depression)

Also common were constructions of one's disability as a source of superior understanding and empathy for ill colleagues and clients:

> When I have a client in prison who could qualify for an [accredited] work-related disability, I tell him. Usually the reaction is: "Yes, but a people with a disability…". They are reluctant [to apply] because they expect they will get an extra negative label [on top of having been in prison]. When I then tell people that I am disabled myself and explain to them how it works, they'll go

> like: "Really? Do you also have a disability?" *and then that's one barrier less between us*. (Stefanie, counselor with fibromyalgia)
>
> When people have something going on, I will more quickly defend them, because I know what it is like to be different. Even if it is only temporary. We're a close team and I am very helpful, if I can help out, I will. And people appreciate that. They respect me and my disability. (Karolien, financial advisor with a mobility impairment)

By focusing on specific qualitative dimensions of their own productivity, speakers create novel discursive possibilities to reconfigure their disability as enhancing their performance in the workplace directly or indirectly by contributing to a positive social climate.

Finally, one's disability was recast as the source of other valuable competences. The following excerpt constructing a hearing disability as a source of superior concentration is exemplary:

> After my internship, I experienced a lot of problems during my search for work. Often jobs require being able to handle telephones or people just don't have too much faith in deaf people. They doubt very quickly whether you will be able to do the job. *But as a matter of fact, as a deaf person, you are able to completely focus on the administrative tasks. […] Because I can't hear anything, I don't have to pick up the phone and I can completely focus on the files*. For instance, my colleagues will be working on a file and then the phone rings and their work gets interrupted. I don't have that problem of course. (Els, administrative worker with deafness)

Similarly, other respondents argued that they could better handle repetitive tasks or had better verbal skills due to their impairment.

Through this discursive practice, disabled employees contest the discourse of disability as lower productivity by generating alternative meanings of productivity and projecting an identity of more productive workers. Different from in the first discursive practice, disability is here highlighted, yet its negative evaluation reversed into a positive one. Echoing the business case for diversity (cf. Zanoni and Janssens, 2004), speakers infuse disability with economic value and thus as a valuable asset for the organization. In order to do so, they redefine productivity in selective ways, often stressing qualitative aspects.

The relation of this discursive practice to ableism as an organizing principle is again two-fold. On the one hand, this discursive practice powerfully counters the discourse of disability as lower productivity, by systematically associating disability with higher productivity. On the other hand, to do so it needs to reduce disabled workers solely to their productivity. Although this discursive practice enables speakers to craft powerful, positive workplace identities, this is achieved at the cost of downplaying their agency. In order to eliminate doubts surrounding one's competences, they are portrayed as 'natural' manifestations of one's impairment, with a strong self-essentializing effect. Similar to the first, this second discursive practices has self-disciplining effects: it produces docile bodies by 'quasi-fixing' their meanings, reifying the dominant social order (Clegg, 1989; Foucault, 1977; 1990).

3 CRAFTING A POSITIVE IDENTITY BY REFUSING INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR LOWER PRODUCTIVITY

Distinct from the previous two, the last discursive practice reproduces the ableist discourse of disability as lower productivity. However, speakers at the same time de-problematize lower productivity by rejecting responsibility for it. Most fragments rejected responsibility by referring to one's inability to be more productive despite one's will. The following quote is exemplary:

> You can make as many adaptations as possible, and I will be able to work faster, but I don't think I will ever be as fast as someone else. It works, it's not that I'm sitting there doing nothing. But I think *I'll always work at a slower pace.* […]. My previous supervisor did not want to accept that I indeed, at the end of the day, *whether I want to or not,* I can do my very best and all, I did try really hard to make her happy, but… (Dirk, administrative worker with visual impairment)

Other interviewees similarly described, in all honesty, how they worked at a slower pace, or could not handle as many tasks as they used to, or were unable to deal with stressful and complex situations demanding flexibility on their part. In all cases, they took distance from their disability casting it as a tragic event that could have happened to anyone, completely outside their control and thus something for which they should not be held individually accountable. A respondent told us:

> Sometimes people say: 'Well, I'd fancy working from the home as well'. That's very difficult for me. People that don't understand the situation and… well don't give pleasant reactions. You know… I am already struggling with it [my disability] so much, because I want to keep up with the team, and I used to do all that, I used to really be an eager beaver, and now… Pfff… I really can't… [Laughs with despair]. *So yeah, you do less and less just because you can't do it anymore*. (Marjan, counselor with fibromyalgia)

This speaker expresses her deep regret about being less and less able to work due to the worsening of her impairment, casting herself as willing but unable to do more. This is often discursively achieved by stressing the lack of understanding from able-bodied people, as in the previous quote, or the incommensurability between one's situation and theirs, as in the following one:

> I got some remarks like: "Oh, my back hurts, too" and "Others will get jealous [of your reasonable accommodation]". You know, if your back hurts that bad, then get it accredited [by the Flemish Service for People with a Disability]. And if others also want a day off in the week and a couch in their office, I'll tell them: "Fine! But then you'll have to carry a bag of poo around your waste 24/7, too. *We'll switch places. You can have it!* And I'll come to work 5 days a week! *You can have it all!* But that [stoma], you take with you!" And then it gets quiet of course. (Alice, data analyst with chronic illness)

A second discursive resource speakers deployed to explain their productivity loss was the lack of accommodations from their employer:

> *I am sure there is a loss of productivity.* […]. I do compensate for a lot, if you ask me. I've been at this department the longest. I know how many things work around here, I handle them more quickly than others, but I lose huge

> amounts of time when I have to go through documents *because things aren't in an accessible format*. (Peter, web support manager with visual impairment)

> I think it's a missed opportunity for the organization as well. Because, *say I had had the program installed from the beginning […], there would have been an increase in output,* I would have benefitted from it and so would they. I could have gone through two more evaluations yesterday for example. (Brigitte, personnel staff worker with dyslexia)

Here, the unsuitable work conditions are foregrounded to shift the responsibility for one's lower productivity to the organization.

A last discursive resource deployed by respondents was the wage subsidy, as illustrated by the following quote:

> People should be respected as they are! If they are a bit slower, then let them be! It's not their fault, either. I always get the impression around here that if you get paid the same, you should perform the same. But that's just not how things work. I used to think that since I'm always sick, the company does not benefit from me at all, so *I decided to go and get my "disability label", now at least I'm worth a dash and a subsidy. That will compensate for what I give too little.* Somewhere you bear this sense of guilt […]. But they should just respect people and deal with them in a normal way without pointing fingers and saying: "You over there, you don't perform enough". (Claire, instructor with chronic illness)

In this fragment, reference to a compensation by the state for the speaker's productivity loss allows her to claim a rightful membership in the organization independent of her productivity. By collectivizing the cost and thus the responsibility, the compensation relieves the individual from 'bearing all the guilt' for the productivity loss. In this way, an alternative positive identity is crafted by contesting the moral legitimacy of the organizational expectation of equal productivity.

Through this discursive practice, respondents reaffirm the discourse of disability as lower productivity, yet proactively draw on various discursive resources to construct the negative consequences as a collective rather than an individual responsibility.

Although distinct from the previous two, also this third discursive practice stands in an ambiguous relation to ableism as an organizing principle. On the one hand, at first sight it embraces the subject position offered by the ableist discourse of disability as lower productivity. On the other, it introduces a fundamental critique of productivity as a key criterion for individual disabled workers' valuation as worthy organizational members. Interestingly, here speakers simultaneously highlight the lack of control over their disability and reaffirm their own agency, claiming a legitimate place in the organization and legitimizing their refusal to strive to meet the norm of able-bodied workers. This discursive practice is radical in that it reclaims organizational membership based on ethics, undermining dominant instrumental understandings of employees as productive human resources. Fundamentally questioning the neo-liberal individualization of the subject (Foucault, 2008), it enables speakers to advance alternative metrics of valuation to construct themselves outside economic worthiness (Hall and Wilton, 2011) and to reaffirm a collective responsibility for their disability in the workplace.

2.6 Discussion

Taking stock of the critical literature on identity, control and resistance, this study aimed to get a fine-grained understanding of how disabled employees engage with the institutionalized discourse of disability as lower productivity. Whereas the literature on ableism highlights the disabling and exclusionary effects of disability discourses, we directed our attention to disabled employees' own discursive practices, engaging with the discourse of lower productivity in an attempt to construct identities imbued with worth. From our analysis, three discursive practices emerged through which disabled speakers distinctively positioned themselves vis-à-vis representations of disability as lower productivity. Despite the partially conflicting workplace identities these practices project, they were frequently combined in speakers' narratives, resulting in complex, multilayered identities which stand in ambiguous relations to the discourse of lower productivity and to ableism as an organizing principle. Below we first discuss how our study contributes to the extant literature on ableism in the workplace and then reflect on how, conversely, it speaks to the broader critical literature on identity.

A critical, identity-centered perspective advances current understanding of power in the literature on ableism in the workplace by highlighting how language exerts power by impinging upon the subject's own understanding of the self (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). As our findings illustrate, even hegemonic discourses of disability do not succeed in completely fixing the meaning of disability in subordinate terms, but are on the contrary re-appropriated, as discursive resources, in creative ways that partially question subordination. By approaching disabled individuals' discursive practices as constitutive of discursive structures, we show how power, control and resistance are precarious effects of contested identity work (Foucault, 1986; Knights and Willmott, 1989), rather than structural outcomes. This articulation of macro-level discourses and micro-level discursive practice is theoretically appealing as it allows to recover individual agency within a social model of disability. The social model has increasingly been critiqued for its overemphasis on structure leading to overly deterministic accounts in which disabled individuals are absent (Shakespeare, 2006a). While others are looking for ways to recuperate the subject outside the social, for instance through the notion of impairment effects (Williams and Mavin, 2013) or psycho-emotional disablism (Reeve, 2002), our approach rather highlights the co-constitutive nature of the relation between the subject and discursive structures, re-balancing it. Our findings further add to the literature on ableism by shedding novel light on the relation between ableism as a principle of organizing and hegemonic workplace discourses of disability. Whereas this relation is currently conceptualized as a linear, one-to-one correspondence (e.g. Foster and Wass, 2013; Holmqvist, et al., 2013; Lindsay, et al., 2014; Vandekinderen, et al., 2012), our analysis points to complexity and ambiguity. In the first discursive practice we see how explicit opposition to the discourse of disability as lower productivity goes together with the re-affirmation of ableism. In the second, such opposition is rather paired with a rejection of ableism and through the redefinition of productivity. Conversely, the third practice reaffirms the lower productivity discourse, yet radically rejects productivity as a metrics for valuation, thereby rejecting ableism.

By simultaneously drawing on other hegemonic discourses, speakers further complicate this relation, with different implications on the dynamics of control and resistance. This is particularly manifest in the second discursive practice, which contests ableism by using the business case of diversity, yet by doing so inevitably reduces the disabled subject to a productive resource. This reduction deflates the political effect of this

discursive practice, as superior productivity becomes an essential condition for the inclusion of disabled employees in the workplace, and thus also a legitimate ground for exclusion when unmet (Zanoni and Janssens, 2004). Future research could further develop this insight by investigating more systematically how specific organizational discursive regimes offer specific sets of discourses, which speakers can draw on when engaging with discourses of disability.

Third, the analysis of the discursive resources deployed by our respondents reveals that hegemonic discourses which commonly produce subordinate representations of disabled individuals – such as the medical discourse (Barnes and Mercer, 2005), the business case for diversity (Zanoni and Janssens, 2004) or neo-liberalism (Munro, 2011) – can be re-appropriated by disabled employees to construct positive workplace identities. This is a theoretically and politically important observation, as it points to the possibility for speakers to leverage negative hegemonic discourses, next to the social and legislative discourses (Corlett and Williams, 2011), to their own advantage. Combining them inter-textually, they can generate counter-hegemonic discursive practices to claim recognition on their own terms in the workplace (Foster, 2007).

This study also speaks to the broader critically oriented literature on minorities' identity struggles and resistance in the workplace. In line with this literature, our findings highlight the simultaneous compliant and resistant nature of the workplace identities crafted by members of historically subordinated social groups (e.g. Denissen, 2010; Rumens and Kerfoot, 2009; Thomas and Davies, 2005; Van Laer and Janssens, 2014). Our analytical focus on discursive practices, however, revealed speakers' simultaneous deployment of multiple discursive resources – e.g. representations of disabled workers as superior 'self-managers' and as 'victims of their impairment' – to construct even contradictory representations of the self. In this sense, the crafted identities do not appear to be particularly secure (cf. Collinson, 2003; Knights and Willmott, 1989) but rather diffuse. This diffuse character defers meaning, making it difficult to pin these identities down, decreasing the likelihood that they be re-appropriated by others to discursively reproduce disabled employees' subordination. These insights complement and qualify current understandings of compliance and resistance through subordinate subjects' identity work, which tend to focus on the struggle involved in resolving the incompatibility between organizational cultures based on the ideal worker's norm and social identities such as ethnicity, religion, age, class (e.g. Collinson, 2003; Denissen, 2010; Nkomo and Cox, 1996; Thomas and Davies, 2005). Future research might want to examine how speakers belonging to subordinate social groups combine a broader variety of hegemonic discourses, including but not limited to those constitutive of social identities, and to which extent these combinations result in coherent identities.

The observed re-appropriation of negative hegemonic discourses of disability by disabled employees to construct positive workplace identities is further important as it counters the idea, widespread in the critical diversity literature, that only representations of the subject resting on legal discourses such as equal opportunities, reasonable accommodations and anti-discrimination are conducive to more equality. Our study rather shows that subordinating discourses can also offer discursive resources from which subjects can create alternative, more positive identities and subject positions for themselves (Wrench, 2005).

2.7 CONCLUSION

With this paper, it has been our intention to provide a catalyst for research denaturalizing ableism and unveiling its disabling effects. Specifically, we have examined how people with impairments engage with the disabling hegemonic discourse of productivity and, by doing so, themselves co-shape the possibilities for alternative, non-ableist workplaces. Approaching disabled people as agents, we have attempted to recuperate their own role in the operation of power in ableist workplaces to re-balance the historical focus of the social model literature on social structures. Attention to disabled subjects' own discursive practice is theoretically and politically warranted. Theoretically, it is needed because the power of ableist discourses is predicated upon their self-positioning within such discourses. Examining this self-positioning is crucial for understanding how such discourses are reproduced and/or subverted and resisted. Politically, it is warranted because it advances representations of disabled workers as political subjects who can 'fracture' ableism, even if partially and temporarily, rather than as mere objects of policies by organizations and the state. This type of representations is vital to envision social change in the workplace respecting the principle of disabled workers' self-determination 'nothing about us without us'.

Notes

[1] A note on terminology is warranted here. Both the terms 'disabled individuals' and 'individuals with impairments' are currently used by scholars and activists working from a social model of disability. Where disability has predominantly been approached as an issue of minority politics, as in the US and Canada, the term 'people with disabilities' is generally used to refer to a minority in society that is devalued, stigmatized, and marginalized. Where the emphasis has rather traditionally been on social barriers to inclusion, as in the UK, the term 'disabled people' is more common. This term highlights that it is society that disables and oppresses people with impairments, by preventing their access, integration and inclusion to all walks of life, making them disabl*ed*. Both approaches are social, as the cause of the disability is primarily located in society (rather than in the individual) and is problematized. As the literature on ableism in which this paper is positioned consistently uses the term 'disabled individuals' (e.g. Campbell, 2009; Foster and Wass, 2012; Goodley, 2011; Vandekinderen, et al. 2012; Williams and Mavin, 2012), for coherence, we use this term.

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3 ABLEISM AT WORK: DISABILITY/ABLE-BODIEDNESS AS A PRINCIPLE OF ORGANIZING SUBJECTS IN THREE ORGANIZATIONS[2]

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Disability at work has increasingly been made the object of critical inquiry. Although psychological (McLaughlin, et al., 2004; Stone and Colella, 1996) and materialistic sociological approaches (Barnes and Mercer, 2005; Jones and Wass, 2013) have traditionally dominated research on disability at work, some authors have recently started to critically examine how ableist norms and practices come to prevail. Despite recognition of the heterogeneity of lived realities behind disability (Shakespeare, 1996), these studies consistently show how disabled individuals are often seen as unemployable and excluded from paid work (Foster and Wass, 2013; Garsten and Jacobsson, 2013; Holmqvist, et al., 2013; Vandekinderen, et al., 2012). When in employment, they are frequently represented as children in need of care and help (Mik-Meyer, 2016b), feminized (Mik-Meyer, 2015), marginalized and ill-treated (Corlett and Williams, 2011; Fevre, et al., 2013; Foster and Scott, 2015) or denied accommodations (Foster, 2007; Foster and Fosh, 2010; Harlan and Robert, 1998; Robert and Harlan, 2006). As disabled employees are commonly considered by employers as less productive (Jammaers, et al, 2016; Zanoni, 2011), it has even been argued that disability represents a 'difference too far', one which cannot be re-appropriated by organizations through the business case (Thanem, 2008; Woodhams and Danieli, 2000). While in neo-liberal workfare regimes disabled individuals are expected to participate in paid work (e.g. Grover and Piggott, 2005; Hall and Wilton, 2011), work intensification and complexification tend to exclude them (Foster and Wass, 2013), feeding into discursive representations that other and subordinate them vis-à-vis able-bodied workers in organizations (Zanoni, 2011).

Although this literature has produced invaluable insights on the power-laden construction of disability in relation to work, it has to date still left largely unexamined how organizations themselves deploy the disability/able-bodiedness binary in their normative, socio-ideological control of their workforce (Corlett and Williams, 2011; Hearn and Parkin, 1993). This disinterest is startling considering that theorizing and documenting how organizations exert power by proactively fostering specific subjectivities and identities aligned with organizational goals has been paramount in critically oriented organizational scholarship (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Knights and Willmott, 1989; Townley, 1993; Willmott, 1993). More specifically, the critical diversity literature has consistently shown how organizations deploy social identities such as gender, racio-ethnicity and age as discursive resources in the construction of identity regulatory discourses to exert control over their workforce. A highly recognizable vocabulary, these social identities imbue representations of normal/ideal versus abnormal/abject workers, functioning as key organizing principles which reproduce subordination at once along organizational hierarchies and social identity axes (Acker, 2006; Ainsworth and Hardy, 2009; Calás and Smircich, 2009; Dick and Cassell, 2002; Liff and Wajcman, 1996; Nkomo, 1992; Thanem, 2008; Zanoni, et al., 2010).

Taking stock of this literature and Hearn and Parkin's (1993) call, over two decades ago, to develop a critique of how organizing norms are established around able-bodiedness

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(see also Williams and Mavin, 2012), this paper investigates how ableism informs processes of subjection of workers in contemporary workplaces. Since the turn of the century, ableism – 'a network of beliefs, processes and practices that produces a particular kind of self and body (the corporeal standard) that is projected as the perfect, essential and fully human' (Campbell, 2001: 44) – has increasingly been used to theorize the processes of subordination and othering of disabled individuals in contemporary societies (Campbell, 2009; Corker, 1999; Shildrick, 2012). The notion of ableism is grounded in a Foucauldian understanding of the subject as constituted through powerful systems of government that classify and order bodies (Goodley, 2014). At its core, it rests on a binary understanding of the disabled and the able-bodied as co-relationally constitutive, entailing that disabled people are, from inception, constituted through a relation of inferiority relative to able-bodied people (Linton, 1998). Importantly for our reasoning, hegemonic constructions of disabled people are not only performative of their marginalization (Chouinard, 1997), but also of the ideological constitution of the 'normal' (able-bodied) subject. The 'uncivil' disabled body is essential for the reiteration of the truth of the 'normal', modern human self, a self who is endowed with the positive characteristics of certainty, mastery and autonomy (Campbell, 2009; Goodley, 2014). Such a 'perfected naturalised humanity' cannot be performed without 'the aberrant, the unthinkable, quasi-human hybrid and therefore non-human' that negates it (Campbell, 2009: 6).

Applying an ableism lens to the workplace, we examine how organizations exert socio-ideological control by differentiating and ordering individuals and imposing certain subject positions along the disabled/able-bodied binary, which come to be seen as 'true' and largely taken for granted. We show how organizations regulate the identities of their workers and how disabled employees are in particular enjoined in their own subjection through identity work along the disabled/able-bodied binary. Our analysis is guided by two research questions: 1) How do organizational identity regulatory discourses normalize able-bodied subjectivities and render disabled subjectivities abnormal? 2) How do these discourses impinge on the identity work of disabled workers? To address them, we comparatively analyze identity regulatory processes in three Belgian organizations – a regional public agency, a bank, and a local administration – participating in a larger research program on disability and inclusion sponsored by the Flemish Ministry for Equal Opportunities Policies. A multiple-case study design is particularly suitable for our purpose because the comparison of identity regulatory discourses across organizational settings enables the theorization of ableism in socio-ideological control (cf. Creswell, 2012; Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007; Yin, 2009).

Our study advances the literature on disability at work by showing how the disabled/able-bodied binary is discursively deployed by organizations to sustain and normalize specific ideologies of highly desirable ideal workers versus undesirable ones. Specifically, we unveil how organizational identity regulatory discourses rely on representations of disabled workers with the aim to discipline not only these latter but the whole workforce. Shifting the focus from disability to the disable/able-bodied binary, our analysis unveils how ableism operates analogously to patriarchy and whiteness as a key principle of organizing that ensures the subordination of alterity in the workplace. The study further advances current understandings of the relationship between ableism and the production of neo-liberal subjectivity by showing how organization-specific identity regulatory discourses reproduce the hierarchically ordered disabled/able-bodied binary underpinning ableism.

3.2 DISCOURSES OF DISABILITY IN PAID WORK

In recent years, a number of studies have critically deconstructed hegemonic representations of disabled people and disability in relation to paid work (Garsten and Jacobsson, 2013; Goodley, 2014; Holmqvist, et al., 2013; Roulstone, 2010; Soldatic and Meekosha, 2012; Vandekinderen, et al., 2012; Wilton 2004; Yates and Roulstone, 2012). Most studies have examined how, in contemporary neo-liberal societies in which citizenship needs to be earned through paid work, workfare systems construct unemployed disabled people as deviant from a dominant neo-liberal norm of self-governing, active and entrepreneurial individual subject who responsibly manages herself in order to maximize her human capital, employability and productivity (Vandekinderen, et al., 2012). Drawing on medical power/knowledge, welfare systems often classify individuals into able-bodied and disabled, deserving and undeserving, sorting the 'worthy and respectable' subjects from the welfare fraudsters (Grover and Piggott, 2013; Soldatic and Meekosha, 2012). Disabled jobseekers struggle to meet the standards of 'hyper-ablebodiedness', often subjecting themselves to the official classificatory systems used by caseworker professionals that reinforce standards of normalcy (Garsten and Jacobsson, 2013; Goodley, 2014; Holmqvist, et al., 2013).

A handful of studies have examined the discursive representation of disabled workers in organizational settings. In her recent work, Mik-Meyer (2015; 2016a, 2016b) deconstructs the othering of disabled individuals by co-workers, showing how ableism is discursively reproduced through the association of disabled workers with other subordinate 'different' groups, such as gay people, immigrants and 'unintelligent' people (2016a), children (2016b) and women (2015). Rather taking the perspective of disabled employees themselves, Elraz (2013) documents how the neo-liberal discourses of employability, self-realization, entrepreneurial selves, and autonomy, encourage employees with mental health problems to hide their disability and silence the problems they experience at work in order to live up to an idealized subject, sacrificing their health to fit with expectations of the 'employable' individual. Along the same lines, a recent study by Jammaers and colleagues (2016) identifies discursive practices through which disabled workers deal with the pervasive ableist assumption of their lower productivity in an attempt to construct positive identities. The analysis highlights how language exerts power by impinging upon the subject's own understanding of the self, although hegemonic discourses of disability do not succeed in fully fixing the meaning of disability in subordinate terms.

Some studies rather reconnect discourses of ideal workers to job design and work organization aimed at raising workers' productivity, leading to the exclusion of workers with impairments as well as workers belonging to other historically subordinated social groups. For instance, Foster and Wass (2013) show through an analysis of court cases how increasingly complex jobs, teamwork, lean production systems and performance based rewards increase the gap between an ideal worker predicated upon ableist assumptions and workers with impairments, leading to their dismissal. Along the same lines, a couple of studies similarly deconstruct managerial discourses of diversity, including disability, showing how disabled workers and other 'different' workers are commonly conceived and represented as 'lacking' productivity and flexibility as opposed to the ideal worker (Zanoni, 2011) and only exceptionally positively, as embodying an ideal worker who is compliant and cheap (Kumar, et al., 2014; Zanoni and Janssens, 2004). Different from the above studies, this literature conceptualizes power effects as originating in specific combinations of discursive

and material organizational practices, rather than through discursive processes of subjection.

3.3 Ableism, identity regulation and identity work

Although the extant literature has generated key theoretical and empirical insights by critically deconstructed hegemonic discourses of disability and the social practices of their production and consumption, we lack in-depth analyses of how organizations deploy ableism to exert socio-ideological control on their workforce. Such analyses are warranted as, resting on the binary, mutually constitutive relation between 'the disabled' and the able-bodied, which provides 'the layout, the blueprint for the scaling and marking of bodies and the ordering of their terms of relation' (Campbell, 2009: 6), ableism provides management with a powerful normative principle to enforce organization-specific desirable subject positions onto the workforce. Ableism emphasizes the role of language in classifying and documenting individuals and placing them under continuous forms of surveillance, turning them into objects of power/knowledge (cf. Foucault, 1977).

The foundations of the notion of ableism were laid by post-structuralist feminist writers, who were the first to expose the linguistic conventions structuring the meanings of disability resulting in oppression (Linton, 1998) and to argue for the removal of the constraints imposed by the disabled/able-bodied norm (Corker, 1999). Such binary is fundamentally marked by a deep-seated 'belief that impairment/disability is inherently negative and should the opportunity present itself, be ameliorated, cured or eliminated' (Campbell, 2009: 5), and that disabled people should accordingly strive to attain non-disability and become 'normal'. In an ableist worldview, impairment and disability are treated as harmful not only to individuals – psychologically, spiritually and bodily – but also to the social order, and, more particularly, economic life (Campbell, 2009), as disabled people are seen as less productive (Jammaers, et al., 2016). Ableism helps illuminate how social structures and the individuals inhabiting them come to favor certain abilities over other ones and to steer subjects into embodying them.

Defined as the process by which 'employees are enjoined to develop self-images and work orientations that are deemed congruent with managerially defined objectives' (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002, 619; see also Casey, 1995; Kärreman and Alvesson, 2004; Kunda, 1992; Rose 1989; 1999). Referring to a mode of control that operates through the self, identity regulation is considered better suited than relations of authority and direct supervision to steer workers' behavior in knowledge-intensive jobs requiring workers to retain some degree of discretion. Conceptually, identity regulation is germane to ableism as it is similarly grounded in a Foucauldian understanding of power and subjectivity. Through language and embodied social practice, a truth of normality is defined, 'ruling in certain ways of thinking, talking, and acting, while ruling out others' (Hardy and Thomas, 2014: 324). In this sense, power regulates life not only by repressing, but also, most importantly, by *producing* specific ways of being. Individuals are governed through 'the guiding, influencing, and limiting of their conduct in ways that accord with the exercise of their freedom' (Tremain, 2015: 18).

Although identity regulation can be enforced through a variety of organizational practices, discourses play a particularly important role in this process of control: managerial arrangements make specific discourses available within which workers are drawn to

construct identities aligned with organizational goals, ultimately enforcing a form of self-control from *within* the subject. Indeed, for its own operation, identity regulation requires individuals to be implicated in their own self-constitution, as subjects (Foucault, 2012), through identity work. Identity work entails processes of shaping, maintaining, repair and revision through which people attempt to author coherent and distinctive understandings of themselves (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003; Watson, 2008). It refers to the 'work' individuals continually do to grapple with questions such as 'who am I?' and 'who do I want to be?' and, more specifically, to do so in ways that position them with respect to these regulatory attempts (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). Identity regulatory efforts are however not totalizing since socialization into any one discourse is never complete (Foucault, 1980). Subjects retain the possibility to oppose these relations of power (resist) or transform themselves within them (Foucault, 1982). Inconsistencies between identity regulatory discourses produce gaps and possibilities for subjects to resist identity-regulating efforts and maintain or promote preferred versions of their selves (Kärreman and Alvesson, 2001; Knights and McCabe, 2003; Musson and Duberley, 2007), by engaging in 'creative' identity work (Boussebaa and Brown, 2016; Brown and Coupland, 2015; Thomas and Davies, 2005). Workers, including particularly disadvantaged ones, can and do in fact resist the categories imposed upon them (for instance Dick, 2008; Jammaers, et al., 2016; Zanoni and Janssens, 2007).

A number of studies have examined the multiple discourses which organizations deploy to mould the human subject and control at a distance through the construction of the appropriate work subjectivities and identities, steering employees in the desired direction. Investigated discourses range from professionalism (Clarke, et al., 2009) to participation (Musson and Duberley, 2007), new public management (Thomas and Davies, 2005), elitism (Roberston and Swan, 2003) and authenticity (Fleming and Sturdy, 2011). Despite widespread recognition of how social identities inform notions of the ideal workers, excluding and subordinating certain types of subjectivities and identities in terms of gender, religion, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, and disability (e.g. Acker, 2006; Ainsworth and Hardy, 2009; Calás and Smircich, 2009; Dick and Cassell, 2002; Liff and Wajcman, 1996; Nkomo, 1992), to our knowledge, only two studies have to date investigated disability in relation to identity regulation. In a recent study, Holmqvist and colleagues (2013) revealed how identity regulation through medico-economic discourses in a specialized work program constituted participants as passive and unable to meet the criteria of employability, and therefore 'occupationally disabled'. An earlier study by Zanoni and Janssens (2007) on minority workers examined how two disabled workers engaged, in their identity work, with the same set of organizational identity regulatory discourses in distinct ways from their specific position, and how such engagement opened up differential possibilities for micro-emancipation for them.

Rather than investigating disabled workers or job seekers as a group occupying a disadvantaged position of the labor market and in organizations, this study builds on the tradition of research on organization's socio-ideological control through managerially inspired, identity regulatory discourses (e.g. Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Fleming and Spicer, 2004; Knights and McCabe, 2003; Knights and Vurdubakis, 1994; Thomas and Davies, 2005) to unveil how ableism – the marking out of workers as able-bodied versus disabled – is used by organizations to differentiate, order and normalize workers and thus ultimately to control. Ableism offers '[a]t once an epistemology (a knowledge framework) and an ontological modality (a way of being) that frames an individual's identity formation' (Campbell, 2009: 29), allowing to de-center the analysis away from disability in itself,

problematizing and de-naturalizing able-bodiedness and its normalizing effects. Accordingly, we address the following research questions: How, do organizational identity regulatory discourses normalize able-bodied subjectivities and render disabled subjectivities abnormal? And how do these discourses impinge on the identity work of disabled workers?

3.4 Investigating ableism through a multiple case study research design

To empirically address our research questions, we conducted a multiple-case study of three organizations. The first organization, EmployOrg, is a regional public agency providing labor market mediation, competence development and career services and employing around 5 000 employees. Of these employees, 2.3% had an officially recognized disability, as defined by the Flemish administration: 'every long-term substantial problem of participation in work due to an interplay of functional limitations of mental, psychological, physical, bodily or sensorial nature, limitations in performing activities, and personal and external factors' (Samoy, 2014). Although we realize that this (or any other) definition is problematic from a post-structuralist perspective, as it constitutes a 'violent imposition of epistemic power' (Shildrick, 2012: 34) preemptively defining subjects along the disabled/able-bodied binary and reproducing it, we temporarily suspend our judgement and provide this figure as it is relevant to contextualize the identity regulatory discourses under analysis (cf. Shildrick, 2009). The second organization, BankCorp, is a private banking and insurance company providing retail and corporate banking services. Its personnel staff count stood close to 15 000 at the time of the study, with 0.4% members having a disability. The third organization, LocGov, is a local public administration with about 1 000 employees, 3.0% of whom with a disability. It is responsible for outlining regional policies and providing a wide array of services including the physical planning of the region, the promotion of the tourist attractions and the social well-being and health of its inhabitants.

The selected organizations met three key criteria. They largely employ personnel in qualified, service-providing jobs entailing some degree of discretionality, which increases the relevance and likelihood of identity regulation as a mode of control (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000); they employ a substantial number of employees with an officially recognized disability, increasing the likelihood of obtaining access to such respondents; and they implemented formal policies and practices concerning disabled employees, allowing for additional triangulation in the analysis of identity regulatory discourses. Although public organizations are more often under scrutiny for their equal opportunities practices and have been associated with a greater prevalence of disability policies (Jones and Wass, 2013), the diffusion of managerial instruments and a new public management has tended to align their practices to those of private firms (cf. Thomas and Davies, 2005).

1 Data sources

As common in case study research (Cresswell, 2013) as well as research on identity regulation and identity work (e.g. Ainsworth and Hardy, 2009; Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Boussebaa and Brown, 2016; Gotsi, et al., 2010), we collected qualitative data from multiple data sources. They comprise 65 extensive semi-structured interviews and secondary data including the organizational websites (3), annual diversity reports (3), job vacancies (30), industry reports (3), marketing materials (4) and newspaper articles (2).

The 65 interviews were conducted with 30 disabled employees, 23 supervisors of disabled employees, 4 HR managers, 2 occupational doctors and 6 trade union representatives (see Table 6 for an overview). Supervisors and HR personnel were included because extant literature suggests they play a key role in shaping workplace experiences of disabled employees yet remain understudied (McLaughlin, et al., 2004; Kulkarni and Valk, 2010). They are responsible for organizing practices such as general requirements of work, recruitment and hiring, wage setting and supervisory practices but also informal actions while doing the work (Acker, 2006; Duff, et al., 2007). More specifically for this study's purpose, as authoritative speakers, they have a hand in regulating the identities of workers in accordance with managerially defined goals (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). Occupational doctors were included because the literature suggests that medicine represents a particularly powerful discourse in the construction of disabled workers (Holmqvist, et al., 2013) and because of their potential facilitating role in processes of reasonable adjustments and conflict management (Foster and Scott, 2015). Finally, trade union representatives were included because in the Belgian national context trade unions have historically played an important role in shaping workplace norms through collective agreements at various levels. In addition, previous research has demonstrated their important role for disabled employees in reconfiguring the 'personal as political' and integrating disability concerns into wider organizational agendas (Foster and Fosh, 2010).

Table 6. *Overview of the Participants*

Name	Job Title	Company	Age	Gend-er	Impairment
Dirk	administrative worker	EmployOrg	30-40	M	visual (blindness)
Stefanie	job consultant	EmployOrg	40-50	F	physical (fibromyalgia)
Marjan	job consultant	EmployOrg	40-50	F	physical (fibromyalgia), hearing
Jean	job consultant	EmployOrg	40-50	M	physical (epilepsy)
Alice	data analyst	EmployOrg	40-50	F	physical (colostomy)
Betty	instructor	EmployOrg	30-40	F	physical/mobility
Els	administrative worker	EmployOrg	30-40	F	deafness
Sofie	service line worker	EmployOrg	30-40	F	physical/mobility, hearing
Marco	receptionist	EmployOrg	50-60	M	visual
Louisa	receptionist	EmployOrg	50-60	F	hearing
Claire	instructor	EmployOrg	40-50	F	physical
Jana	job consultant	EmployOrg	30-40	F	physical (CFS)
Lize	job consultant	EmployOrg	50-60	F	hearing, scoliosis
Maarten	officer business loans	BankCorp	50-60	M	visual, mobility (MS)
Peter	web support manager	BankCorp	40-50	M	visual (blindness)
Marc	graphic designer	BankCorp	50-60	M	hearing (deafness)
Dieter	marketing evaluator	BankCorp	20-30	M	visual

Ella	financial accountant	BankCorp	30-40	F	mobility (wheelchair)
Karo	receptionist	BankCorp	30-40	F	mobility
Julie	social media marketing	BankCorp	20-30	F	hearing
Eric	security manager	BankCorp	30-40	M	mobility (wheelchair)
Tom	sales advisor	BankCorp	20-30	M	hearing
Patrick	coordinator accessibility	LocGov	50-60	M	physical
Robin	administrative worker	LocGov	20-30	M	psychosocial (Asperger)
Katherin	administrative worker	LocGov	30-40	F	psychosocial (chronic depression)
Bridget	staff worker	LocGov	40-50	F	psychosocial (dyslexia)
Ann	product design	LocGov		F	physical (fibromyalgia)
Harold	coordinator	LocGov	50-60	M	physical (polio)
Adriaan	project manager	LocGov	30-40	M	hearing
Tim	green worker	LocGov	50-60	M	physical (chronic back pains)
Victor	manager	EmployOrg		M	
Rutger	manager	EmployOrg		M	
Hannah	manager	EmployOrg		F	
Isabelle	manager	EmployOrg		F	
Diane	manager	EmployOrg		F	
Ann	manager	EmployOrg		F	
Valeria	manager	EmployOrg		F	
Charlot	manager	BankCorp		F	
Vicky	manager	BankCorp		F	
Cody	manager	BankCorp		F	
Nicolas	manager	BankCorp		M	
Nicole	manager	BankCorp		F	
Maddy	manager	BankCorp		F	
Steve	manager	BankCorp		M	
Cécile	manager	BankCorp		F	
Chelsy	manager	BankCorp		F	
Nancy	manager	LocGov		F	
Marie	manager	LocGov		F	
Jos	manager	LocGov		M	
Peter	manager	LocGov		M	
Heleen	manager	LocGov		F	

Jozef	manager	LocGov	M
Annelies	manager	LocGov	F
Henk	union representative	LocGov	M
Ted	union representative	LocGov	M
Dean	union representative	EmployOrg	M
Benny	union representative	EmployOrg	M
Wout	union representative	BankCorp	M
Gerty	union representative	BankCorp	F
Sandrine	disability expert	EmployOrg	F
Sarah	HR Manager	EmployOrg	F
Dan	occupational doctor	EmployOrg	M
Kate	diversity manager	BankCorp	F
Willem	occupational doctor	BankCorp	M
Wim	disability expert	LocGov	M

The able-bodied respondents included in our sample are all in positions of supervisors, managers, doctors and trade union representatives. Although we had initially planned to interview able-bodied colleagues of respondents with an occupational disability, we ultimately decided not to include them to guarantee maximal privacy to our disabled respondents. Whereas we can re-construct the identity regulatory discourses from multiple data sources, our analysis of identity work is therefore limited to occupationally disabled workers. This sampling strategy is in line with our conceptualization of ableism as a hierarchically structured, relationally constituted binary disabled/able-bodied informing identity regulatory discourses and individuals' engagement with them in their identity work, rather than as a comparison between groups of individuals defined as disabled or able-bodied beforehand.

The first author initially approached the HR unit of each organization to ask for participation in the study. All employees with an occupational disability in each firm were then sent an email by the personnel office in blind copy asking whether they wanted to be interviewed in the context of a study on the employment opportunities and experiences of disabled people. In EmployOrg, 13 disabled employees of the 63 responded positively, in BankCorp 9 of the 68 and in LocGov, 8 of the 17. The first author asked respondents by mail if they had any special needs (such as sign language translator or transport arrangements) to host the interview. Supervisors of disabled employees were asked to participate through a similar procedure. The interviews were carried out in Dutch by the first author, mostly during office hours and occasionally during lunch breaks or after work.

Composed mainly of open-ended questions, semi-structured interviews are a suitable interview technique because they allow the researcher to structure the conversation ensuring some degree of uniformity around selected topics of relevance, yet at once leave respondents a degree of freedom to answer questions in their own words and to (de-)emphasize specific aspects, best capturing their situated perspective on the phenomenon under study. The interviews with the supervisors, trade union representatives and HR staff were guided by an interview guide (Patton, 2002) of open questions organized in five

sections concerning: 1) the own professional trajectory (e.g. Can you describe your career in this organization so far?), 2) the experience with disability (e.g. Does your employee's disability affect his/her work? Can you describe how?), 3) the support given to disabled employees (e.g. Can you tell me what the company does for disabled employees?), 4) the support received from the organization to deal with disabled employees (e.g. Are you supported by your company concerning disability related issues? How?), and 5) policy-related issues (e.g. How do you evaluate the process of requesting reasonable accommodations in this company? Do you have suggestions for policy improvement?). The interviewer allowed the order to be altered by respondents to not disrupt the flow of the conversation and to pursue emerging themes based on the respondent's answers.

The interviews with disabled employees were based on an interview guide organized in five sections concerning: 1) the nature of the impairment (e.g. Could you tell me something about the medical and social aspect of your impairment?), 2) the professional trajectory (e.g. Can you tell me about your experience of searching for a job? Since when do you work for this organization?), 3) the current job (e.g. Can you describe your current work? How long have you been doing this job? How important is this job to you?), 4) social relations at work (e.g. Can you tell me about the relationship with your colleagues? When you first started working here, how did your supervisor related to you?), and 5) policy-related issues (e.g. How do you feel about reserved jobs and quota? What do you think are important factors in providing a good work environment for disabled people?). Although in our own research practice we generally avoid asking questions centred on the respondent's socio-demographic profile early in the interview, not to foreground often negatively connoted categorizations and to limit probing effects, in this case we did opt to start, after a brief introduction of the research highlighting the confidentiality of the interview, with a question on the respondent's impairment. We deemed that some key information about (the lived experience of) the impairment enabled the respondent to guide interviewer's understanding and, conversely, allowed the interviewer to better understand the respondent's narrative and engage in the conversation with sufficient background information. Furthermore, some probing had already taken place prior to the interview, as respondents were aware of the goal of the study and had already been asked about their specific needs for the interview. We are aware that this choice is not neutral, yet would like to also stress that respondents maintained control over the amount and nature of information they shared about their impairment.

The interviews lasted between 21 and 107 minutes with (51 minutes in average), were all audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcripts ranged from 7 to 25 pages and the total number of transcribed words amounted to 416 185. The analysis of the data was conducted on the transcripts in the original language (Dutch), in which all involved researchers are fluent. To stay close to original wording and meaning and postpone possible accuracy loss due to translation, the included excerpts were translated only after the interpretation had been drafted. They were translated by the first author and then checked by the other authors. As a whole, we attempted to stay close to the original text and respect the register used by the speaker, two common guidelines to ensure accuracy in translations. Translation was facilitated by the fact that, employed in service organizations, most respondents are educated and spoke rather standard (Flemish) Dutch (rather than dialects) reflecting the formal/professional situation in which they were interviewed and the fact that they did not know the interviewer personally. Common ethical guidelines of informed consent were followed (Creswell, 2012) and throughout the interviews anonymity was guaranteed, including changing participants' names into pseudonyms.

Taking a critically oriented, social constructionist approach, we are aware that the identities we examined were not only constructed within a specific organizational discursive context but also empirically co-constructed in the dialogue between the respondents and the first author during the interviews, a dialogue in which each brought his or her own lived experiences into the interview situation (Coupland, 2001). The first author's embodiment – young, white, female, middle-class and able-bodied – informed the data collection process (Cunliffe, 2003). For instance, able-bodied managers might have been more open to discussing the 'hardships' in employing employees with impairments to a female, young, able-bodied researcher than it would be otherwise the case. Or disabled interviewees' expectation that the able-bodied interviewer is unable to fully comprehend their experience of disability might have led them to stress certain aspects and downplay other ones. At the same time, we would like to stress that, given that multiple researchers with diverse embodiments were involved in the whole process of inquiry – starting from including theoretical preference and research design to the interpretation and even the revisions during the review process – the analysis ultimately reflects the meanings negotiated among all these various subjects, their own perspectives and sensitivities concerning the topic under investigation. The advanced interpretation of the participants' accounts is thus inevitably selective (Alvesson, 2010; Danieli and Woodhams, 2005), one among many possible ways of interpreting and understanding the data produced in the research process (Cunliffe, 2003; Boussebaa and Brown 2016).

2 DATA ANALYSIS

In a first exploratory phase, each author separately read a sample of interviews with different types of respondents to get acquainted with the interview material and familiarize with the three organizations. Already from this early reading and joint discussions, we shared the impression that the three organizations offered distinct subject positions for their employees, and that such subject positions relied on the disabled/able-bodied binary in distinct ways.

In a second phase, to address the first research question – How do specific identity regulatory discourses normalize able-bodied subjectivities and render disabled subjectivities abnormal? – we systematically analyzed the 35 interviews with HR personnel, supervisors, occupational doctors and trade union representatives and the internal documents (websites, brochures, mission statements and job vacancies) gathered in the three organizations. In all this this material, we looked for fragments featuring identity regulation in three main ways, along three clusters advanced by Alvesson and Willmott (2002): by defining the scene, the ideal worker and workers directly or indirectly through reference to others. Table 7 provides examples of each type of fragment. A few fragments were doubly coded, as they contained elements of two types.

First, we identified fragments describing the 'scene', that is, the conditions in which an organization operates or its 'zeitgeist' and the established ideas and norms about the 'natural way of doing things' (n= 120). By defining the context, these fragments indirectly indicate the kind of subject and identity that fits within it (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002: 632). No specific questions in the interview guide provided information on this type of identity regulation, however this information emerged on occasion throughout the interviews with managers and union representatives, but also through the other documents such as the mission statements on the organizations' websites.

Second, we coded fragments that expressed workers' ideal behavior and ideal characteristics (n= 48). In these cases, identity regulation is achieved 'through appropriate work orientations' (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002: 629-632). Some questions asked during the interview more directly suited this purpose for instance the question 'What does the ideal employee at your organization look like?'. However other questions as well as the analysis of job advertisements also provided information on this type of identity regulation.

Lastly, we looked for fragments that defined disabled people as a group or as individual workers (n= 176). Such fragments fall in what Alvesson and Willmott have termed 'regulations in which the employee is directly defined' and regulations in which the disabled worker is 'defined by defining others' (2002: 629). Although in principle this identity regulation mode might be enacted through definitions other than disability, as disability was central in the interview guide and in the interviews, our largest data sources, we focused our analysis on this identity from the outset. Some questions generated a large share of fragments in this category. For instance, the question 'Can you describe how you manage your employee with an impairment? Do you manage him/her differently than your other employees? How?' and the question 'Would you hire another employee with an impairment in your team?'. Also the following question provided information in this regard 'What is your opinion on affirmative action for disabled employees (for instance through quota)?' However, this type of identity regulation also featured in other interview questions, archival data, brochures on diversity and disability.

A fourth way of regulating identities advanced by Alvesson and Willmott (2002) is through social relations. This type defines by referring to hierarchal location or group categorization or affiliation. Being a member of a particular team, department, hierarchal position or company may then become a significant source of one's self-understanding and self-monitoring. This type of regulation hardly featured in our data, likely because our research design is suitable to identify identity regulatory discourses at the organizational level yet much less to conduct an intra-organizational analysis, both in terms of sample and interview guide (cf. own ref). Accordingly, it was left out of the analysis.

Table 7. *Overview of the Three Types of Identity Regulation in the Three Cases*

	EmployOrg	BankCorp	LocGov
Fragments defining 'the scene' (N = 120)	We used to have a lot of low level functions but they're almost all gone now so that leaves few opportunities left here for some. (Valeria) ***N= 39*** Our mission is to help citizens develop their careers (with special attention to disadvantaged groups) and to create a better labor market and welfare for all.	Manual work is disappearing, so now it's all IT specialists programming complicated stuff or sales persons. We used to have maintenance, and catering jobs done by our own people and so it was easier to find jobs for disabled people. (Wout) ***N= 39*** We aspire to be the reference among European banks with	As a manager it is my task to ensure that people process files in time, so that the tax payers get what they pay for. But on the other hand, since people spend a large part of their day at work, it is also my task to make sure they enjoy working here. (Helen) ***N= 42*** The organization cares about the well-

	(organization's website)	a global reach, the preferred long-term partner to our clients, and a contributor to responsible and sustainable global development. (organization's website)	being and motivation of employees and believes in the philosophy that every person transmits his or her motivation, enthusiasm and appreciation to one another. (organization's manifesto)
Fragments on the behavior and characteristics of an ideal employee (N = 48)	Communication is important in our team, they have to know what everyone's working on. […] Also flexibility is needed, if someone is out, others have to be immediately able to pick up the work. (Victor) I have to make sure the team works well together, helps each other and trust each other. (Hannah) ***N= 12***	You have to be able to sell your case… think one step ahead, take charge of things, and not just be a follower you know… (Charlotte) Organised, structured, open-minded, be adaptive to different situations, … Also be a good communicator in order to work well with others. (Chelsey) ***N= 28***	The biggest issue that I as manager have to deal with are personalities. Not so much impairments. (Jos) Someone in an expert function like accounting needs to work independently and look for solutions proactively. (Nancy) ***N= 8***
Fragments defining disabled people directly / or through defining others (N= 176)	I keep telling my staff they have to have her approval because she has the expertise. If necessary, they have to go see her. So I give my people the permission to travel to Bruges [where she works], which means a two hour productivity loss due to travelling per staff member. (Diane) He could be promoted to mailer or back officer […] Only I'm not quite sure those things are actually realistic for him, he doesn't write without mistakes, he might be clever enough but his Braille reader makes	People should be able to work independently without being pampered. We should not patronize them and so we have to just make a few deals to ensure they can perform to the fullest. […] These days everyone needs a specialized supervision, the 'one fits all' era is long gone. So there's no need in exaggerating the matter [disability], it's just about accepting human differences. (Cody) When she transferred to my department she did not have a good evaluation, they were not satisfied	I think someone without a disability would get more work done in that job. I think you just need to take that into account when hiring a disabled person. We have opted here to include a certain number of disabled workers and that's that, I see no point in focusing on productivity losses (Annelies). I don't think that someone who is mobile would do his job different or better. We only have to take into account that the places he goes and visit are accessible. (Jos) ***N=59***

	mistakes I think… (Isabelle) ***N = 62***	with her, the supervisor was Flemish while she spoke French, but I said well I'll take my time to get her started and that went well. Now she has the highest score of our department. (Steve) ***N=65***	

We then examined how identity was regulated in each case through the combination of these three types and then compared across cases (Eisenhardt, 1989). We inductively coded the material thematically, clustering emerging labels into higher-order ones. This process revealed that each organization offered a distinct subject position for its employees highlighting a specific set of preferred abilities (cf. Wolbring, 2012) and that disability was specifically constructed in relation to such set, in two of the three cases – EmployOrg and LocGov – offering distinct subject positions for disabled employees. In EmployOrg, 75% of the quotes (45 out of 62) defined disabled workers as 'lacking' the characteristics constituting the ideal worker and justified against the background of the scene. In BankCorp, 71% of the quotes (46 of 65) defined disabled workers as 'competent worker' fulfilling the characteristics constituting the ideal worker and justified by reference to the scene. Finally, in LocGov, 68% of the quotes (40 out of 59) defined disabled workers as 'deserving care/social responsibility from able-bodied co-workers' and thus as necessary for the ideal worker in the specific scene.

Finally, to answer the second research question – How do these discourses impinge on the identity work of disabled workers? – we examined the 30 interviews with disabled employees. Identity work was here operationalized as the efforts by those 'targets of identity regulation' to construct identities that position themselves with respect to the organization's regulatory attempts. The fragments featuring disabled employees' identity work clearly reflected the specific identity regulatory discourses offered to them by the organization. They further varied in the extent to which they constructed conforming identities – whereby speakers operate on themselves in accordance with the disciplinary practices they are subject to – or resistant ones – whereby speakers reject, complain about, and/or creatively re-appropriate such disciplinary practices (cf. Boussebaa and Brown, 2016; Brown and Coupland, 2015; Thomas and Davies, 2005). By looking at fragments of the narratives of disabled workers answering the question of 'who am I?', we unveil the extent to which disabled employees defined themselves (and others) in ways that reproduced and/or contested dominant identity regulatory discourses of the organization and, in particular, their ableist underpinning along the disabled/able-bodied binary. Table 8 provides illustrations of both conformist and re-appropriating/resistant identity work by case.

Table 8. *Illustrations of Disabled Employees' Identity Work*

Type of identity work	EmployOrg	**BankCorp**	**LocGov**
Conformist	After a while I noticed they were like 'He's not going to get it anyways	When your outlook on life is positive and you have a 'can do' attitude	Well, I work in a social sector, the people that work here are more

	so let's not waste any more effort on trying to make him understand'. […] I now try out new stuff but of course I can't perform all the tasks, right? (Dirk, visual impairment) They have the tendency to think of me as a poor wretch. Feeling sorry for me and all […]. When growing up it was the same […]. When I got married it was the same […]. And here I also feel as if they think of me as a poor thing. (Lize, physical and hearing impairment)	and handle things creatively, then there are only solutions and no problems. I never complain about my wheelchair. (Eric, mobility impairment) I speak up for myself, when I notice they're giving me the more easy jobs, I'll tell them what's up. […] I do think I'm very clear on that and I am as able as my colleagues. (Julie, hearing impairment)	attuned to social issues, so yeah people easily accept me. (Harold, physical impairment) They keep in mind that everyone reads at his or her own pace, i only did 4 on a whole day while others probably do 6 on half a day, but I've never heard any negative feedback about it, it's more like we all have our talents and diversification in the team. (Bridget, psycho-social impairment)
Re-appropriating/ resistant	There is no loss of productivity in my case because I work half time, and if I do function less due to my headaches, I work longer hours on other days. (Jana, physical impairment) They sometimes assume I won't understand things, […], can't handle things. And then I really make clear to them, 'it's okay you can ask me'. (Els, hearing impairment)	We were 6 there and for every man who retired, nobody new was hired. I did the same work they did, as much, sometimes even better, and still when someone left they were unwilling to give me the promotion. When the last man left they had no choice but to appoint me. I've really had to fight for it, though! (Marc, hearing impairment) I think others are promoted more easily than me because there is always the possibility of them leaving […]. It's a presumption, it could be that I don't deserve it as well, there is no way of knowing for sure I guess. (Peter, visual impairment)	I'm quite social so I'll just tell someone when they need to speak up, because I assume that other people too will have difficulties understanding them. (Adriaan, hearing impairment) They take my disability into account. They told me 'If you can't do it just tell us'. They really take it serious. But I'm not someone who is going to take advantage of that, I'd rather feel a bit of pain than profit from the situation. It's just not the way I work. (Tim, physical impairment)

3.5 FINDINGS

1 REGULATING IDENTITY AT EMPLOYORG: (ABLE-BODIED), FLEXIBLE, CLIENT-ORIENTED TEAM PLAYERS VERSUS DISABLED INFLEXIBLE AND UNPRODUCTIVE WORKERS

EmployOrg's website announces its mission as 'helping citizens to develop their careers (with special attention to disadvantaged groups) and creating a better labor market and welfare for all'. To this end, the organization employs job consultants, whose main task is to guide

'clients' towards employment, and instructors, who teach 'clients' additional skills to increase their employability. EmployOrg is considered by the public as the main knowledge center in Flanders on employment issues including those concerning groups with a disadvantaged position on the labor market, such as disabled, low-educated, and long-term unemployed individuals as well as individuals with a migration background. As the organization was historically part of the public administration, employees' internal careers are still today strictly bound to formal educational qualifications, and wages are collectively negotiated at the sector level. At the same time, EmployOrg employees are today no longer hired as civil servants but rather through a less protecting private law contract. Various interviewees referred to repeated budgetary cuts over the past years leading to the reduction of the workforce as well as the increasing difficulty of jobs:

> We are today in a difficult situation because our personnel is being reduced. We have lost 300 positions compared to a number of years ago. Right now they want to reduce personnel [again] by 7%. (Dean, able-bodied labor union representative)

> We used to have a lot of C and D-level [low-rank] jobs, which are now almost gone. When people leave, they are not substituted with new hires, so many people cannot be taken on board. (Valeria, able-bodied manager)

These fragments sets the scene of an organization in which work is intensifying and, accordingly, individuals and teams are expected to be highly flexible and efficient to carry out the work with less personnel.

Interviewees accordingly describe the ideal employee as someone 'who communicates openly and clearly in the team, and who can flexibly and immediately pick up the tasks of others in case someone is absent' (Victor, able-bodied manager), 'who lies well within the team and is trusted by the other team members' (Sandrine, able-bodied disability expert), and who 'proactively asks for additional tasks as soon as he or she has a free spot in his or her agenda' (Rutger, able-bodied manager). Flexibility towards colleagues is also one of the key characteristics mentioned in job advertisements, which however equally stressed the relational competences needed in the service delivery. Candidates are expected to be a 'good listener' and 'empathic towards clients'.

Discursive constructions of particular disabled employees and disabled people as a group commonly defined them as lacking precisely the characteristics ascribed to the ideal worker against the background of the organizational scene. Managers pointed for instance to disabled workers' higher absenteeism, lower work pace and productivity, and inflexibility both in terms of the tasks they could perform or potential jobs they could fill in in the organization.

> Say a wheelchair user is at one of these desks here, and he or she needs to go to the toilet. The toilet for disabled people is downstairs. That person, and I am certain of this, will be away from his desk for 40 minutes. Well then, that person has not been productive for 40 minutes, right?! (Sandrine, able-bodied disability expert)

> Two disabled people in such a small team as mine is really too much. Outsiders [in the organization] don't take into account that this isn't a full functioning team… They have standard expectations of me but don't realize how limited I am in a number of things. (Rutger, able-bodied manager)

They further mentioned the support needed by disabled workers' as an additional cost to the organization, themselves and co-workers:

> [Disabled] people sometimes receive negative comments from colleagues […]. And once in a while I notice that they lose motivation because of it. And so I then have to cheer them up, motivate them. And that is a very time consuming thing. (Victor, able-bodied manager)

These texts largely constructed disabled workers by contrasting them to the ideal EmployOrg worker, who flexibly and efficiently carries out ever more demanding jobs due to personnel cuts.

Such discursive construction was sustained by bureaucratic procedures installed to document and manage the disability and its evolution, the estimated productivity loss, subsidy requests and applicable accommodations. At the heart of this disability policy lied the 'integration protocol', which extensively documented the impairment and the occupational disability and the granted accommodations at the start of the employment relation or when returning to work after having acquired an impairment. Although this document was meant to 'objectivize' the disability so that accommodations could not be questioned by co-workers or new supervisors, it inevitably also performed disability by 'fixing' individual workers in the category of disabled people and imposing on them a definition centered on their inability. The micro-politics involved in this subjection process of the disabled worker as other-than-ideal are manifest in the following fragment:

> For instance here I had to state here that 'she endures severe cramps due to fatigue with unintentional loss of output as result' […] And here Sarah [the disability expert] states that 'she has trouble accepting her disability, is truculent and brave' […]. Filling out the integration protocol was very time consuming though, partly because Serena had trouble accepting it [her impairment]. She was like 'you're not actually writing down all that stuff about me'. It required a whole conversation each time about each tiny aspect, it was exhausting for both Sarah and me… (Diane, able-bodied manager)

Other more positive discourses to construct disabled workers were exceptionally used, such as a social responsibility discourse or discourses that constituted disabled workers as competent employees 'like anyone else'.

In their identity work, disabled employees' extensively engaged with EmployOrg's identity regulatory discourses. Many faithfully reproduced such discourses to construct themselves as inadequate employees. Consider how the following speakers describe themselves as a team member and to serve jobseekers respectively:

> I think I have become quite incapable of being a valuable member in my team. And my chef, she complains […] and says: 'You have your written document, you have gotten a reduction in tasks, but for the loss in productivity you cause, I'm not given any substitution.' Yeah, so I have less tasks to do, but it's at the expense of my team and colleagues. And I feel that this is not right. For me, I am left with so much guilt, unbelievable. (Marjan, physically impaired job consultant)

> If I was to be a real consultant, register people who come in and look for work, go over files and stuff. No, I believe I can't take on such a job. I always think to myself, is that fair towards the client sitting in front of me? And then my

> answer is no. I think I should not be in such a position. (Marco, visually impaired receptionist)

Only occasionally, disabled workers' identity work rather drew on the disabled/able-bodied binary underpinning EmployOrg's identity regulation discourses to reverse the meanings attached to it. For instance, a consultant describes himself as willing to take on others' work, even when he is busy, re-aligning his identity to the offered subject position of the ideal worker:

> Even if I'm way behind on my own work I'll be like 'Well then, come on, hand it over'. I'll take it on anyways, because that's what I'm like. […] I have a [able-bodied] colleague working here, ask her and she will be like 'No, no, no! It's too much" […] My boss should be happy I'm on the verge of a burnout, because it means I care about my job. […] It's not in my nature to give up easily but that colleague, give her an extra file and she'll be home for a month I swear. (Jean, physically impaired consultant)

Exceptionally, respondents constructed preferred, alternative versions of their selves by rather drawing on alternative discourses of the law and competence, rather than by engaging with the subject positions offered through EmployOrg's identity regulatory discourses:

> I knew that the wage subsidy could be used for granting the disabled worker reduced working hours […]. So I figured, I'll start working half time at first, because I had my disability certificate and met all the requirements. On the contrary… Nothing was arranged [upon her return]. Reduced working hours because I acquired a disability? Impossible!!! It was as if a bomb had dropped! I was furious! (Alice, physically impaired data analyst)

> Several people asked me 'Why don't you apply for the job [of director]?'. So I went to the [retiring] director and he said: 'Well, you know, with your back and everything, we need to do a lot of moving around, a lot of meetings have to take place, and that's not going to change'. So he told me straight up that they were not going to do any concessions because I happen to have a physical disability. (Betty, physically impaired instructor)

By drawing on alternative discourses, these speakers advance identities that do not reproduce their subordination vis-à-vis able-bodied workers by shifting the focus from the individual and her impairment to the disabling effects of the organization's refusal to grant them reasonable accommodations, even against legal provisions. These speakers are not enjoined into the subordinated subject position offered to them, contesting the equation of the ideal worker with the able-bodied subject.

The analysis of the discourses deployed by EmployOrg to regulate employees' identities unveils how such discourses are underpinned by ableism. The constitution of a desirable able-bodied ideal worker – a worker that is highly flexible, productive and communicative and who can therefore contribute to becoming an efficient semi-public organization – is predicated upon the constitution of an undesired disabled subject, to whom it is opposed and superior. The performativity of these two specific subject positions rests on their relational definition structured as a mutual negation. On the one hand, the ideal worker needs to be upheld by the abject disabled worker embodying what he or she is not. On the other, the disabled worker is primarily defined within these identity regulatory discourses as lacking the characteristics ascribed to the former, her alter ego.

2 REGULATING IDENTITY AT BANKCORP: ABLE-BODIED AND DISABLED AMBITIOUS, SELF-MANAGING WORKERS

According to its website, BankCorp aspires 'to be the reference among European banks with a global reach, the preferred long-term partner to our clients, and a contributor to responsible and sustainable global development'. Issued from a takeover by a larger international bank in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, the organization employs its personnel in a variety of jobs in finance and accounting, marketing, sales, and ICT. Various respondents describe BankCorp as a rapid changing environment, one in which digitalization and automation have eliminated many 'simple' jobs.

> We have less and less paper work, we're turning to web based jobs. We're evolving and learning new techniques. On the other hand, our team has got smaller, but this is a trend in the entire bank. We are still doing some things on paper, even it if is less, so there is still work for everyone. (Chelsey, able-bodied manager)

They also stress that the organization is a competitive, meritocratic environment, in which internal mobility is valued and wages are individually negotiated. Employees are classified along the Hay-grading scale and their performance is frequently assessed.

Against the background of this specific organizational scene, the ideal BankCorp worker was depicted as somebody having, next to formal qualifications, '*brains, heart and guts*', a slogan capturing a broad range of skills including reasoning ability, such as speed of reasoning and accuracy; empathy to understand clients; and negotiating skills, dealing with stress, and competitive (Kate, able-bodied diversity manager). Job advertisements similarly represented suitable candidates as ambitious, assertive, hardworking and dynamic, echoing what respondents told us:

> Everyone is responsible for his own work. I have total confidence in my team, I only demand two things: quality and a respect for deadlines. (Laura, able-bodied manager)

> You have to be able to think one step ahead, take charge of things, be reflective and not just follow the crowd… […] They [the organization] looked for a certain, what do you call this? An extra factor and I think those were predominantly people who were positive, motivated and wanted to get somewhere in their lives… (Charlotte, able-bodied manager)

Managers' constructed the ideal worker as an 'unencumbered' worker who is fully productive and who can compete in BankCorp's meritocratic environment, which rewards performance.

Interestingly, and contrary to what we could observe in EmployOrg, most fragments defined disabled people as competent workers along the characteristics of the ideal worker. The diversity manager told us: 'the best people are chosen, and statistically now and then one of those best people has a disability'. More generally, socio-demographic identities such as disability, gender and ethnic background, were often constructed as unimportant, as long as workers were qualified and able to function in the work context. The following quotes are illustrative:

> The quality and expertise of people, that is the number one thing around here. And if those people happen to have a disability or not, that is less important. (Cody, able-bodied manager)
>
> There are people without a disability here in my team that need a lot more time to adapt to changes [than disabled team member] […] She is someone who is really cheerful, easy-going, and pleasant. (Maddy, able-bodied manager)

A focus on one's abilities entailed that disabled workers were not excluded from fulfilling the ideal projected by identity regulatory discourses. On the contrary, they were even occasionally constructed as embodying the ideal worker:

> I'd be happy to take on 10 more Dieters [disabled worker], just because he's so good and positive. They can have all kinds of disabilities, I don't care, as long as people are positive and want to achieve something. People who complain the whole day, I can't do this or that, that I would really struggle with. People are allowed to be unable to do things but then I want to immediately hear the solutions. (Charlotte, able-bodied manager)

This subject is discursively achieved by stressing the disabled worker's responsibility for his professional success by solving potential problems posed by his impairment. In this case, BankCorp's identity regulation rests on an ableist dichotomy that names the other yet at once denies it and subsumes it into the self. There is no representation of the disabled worker as distinct from and inferior to the ideal worker, as in EmployOrg, but rather individuals are considered as able to 'neutralize' the effects.

Aligned with this conceptualization, the organizational policy on disability was centred on providing reasonable accommodations, removing as much as possible barriers for individuals to be productive and competitive. The process to obtain accommodations was highly depersonalized to ensure that disabled individuals did not depend on the goodwill of line managers taking their disability to heart. The policy assumed and rested on a self-managing disabled subject who autonomously requested material adaptations from a list through an intranet application called 'my disability'. An able-bodied union representative told us:

> They first look at whether the person has the skills they need, and whether they fit the system. Then they will look at how they can integrate them in the business, at the possibilities to minimalize the impact of the disability. […] The bank takes care of all technology, phones, adapted software… (Walter, able-bodied union representative)

This construction of the disabled worker as a competent individual bearing the responsibility for his or her own success further rests on disability policies attempting to also reduce symbolic barriers, by combating stereotypes and discrimination by managers and recruiters. Anti-discrimination training was given to all line managers and HR managers and a periodical systematic random test was used to investigate applications over the previous month to check whether discrimination on any ground occurred. These efforts were clearly reflected in managers' narratives, which stressed how treating disabled colleagues in a condescending or patronizing manner was unacceptable:

> In the beginning there were […] people who pitied him [disabled worker] and still do perhaps. Even managers did so! A colleague of mine came to me and said: 'Isn't that an odd situation, with that guy'. While for me, I was like: 'But hey, it's okay, he'll get there, you don't have to be bothered with it. He'll come and tell you if he can't see something'. (Charlotte, able-bodied manager)
>
> It's vital not to patronize people and that we make a couple of arrangement so he can perform his job. Of course an adapted guidance is necessary but the 'one size fits all' era is over anyways. There is no need to make it worse than it is. It's just someone with differences, there are downsides and there are upsides. But that's the same for everyone working here really. (Cody, able-bodied manager)

The first fragments normalizes disability by attributing to a disabled worker the autonomous, self-managing subjectivity that is desired in the organization. The second rather does so by constructing disabled workers as a manifestation of human heterogeneity, downplaying the able-bodied/disabled dichotomy. In both cases, the stress is on similarity between the able-bodied and the disabled as difference would entail the able-bodied worker taking on a superior, patronizing role, limiting the disabled workers' subjectivity.

BankCorp's disability policy was, at the time of the study, evolving in two ways. On the one hand, an internal accounting rule had recently been introduced that counted employees receiving a wage subsidy from the state as half-time equivalents on the budget of their department. The diversity manager presented this policy as fostering disabled workers' internal mobility by making them financially attractive to other departments. On the other hand, the organization was evolving towards the recognition and valorization of disabled workers' unique competences, along the business case:

> We've changed from using diversity as a tool for soft HR to seeing diversity as a real business case. We started with an investment in making our local offices accessible to less mobile clients. […] Our [blind] colleague who is responsible for customer satisfaction for clients with disabilities now has proposed a new card reader for home banking with larger keys and speech function. […] We have had two meetings now with about 30 associations for all sorts of disabilities to better understand their biggest concerns when using our services and products. (Kate, able-bodied diversity manager)

Clearly, both these policies rest on alternative discursive constructions of disabled workers, which do not simply subsume them into the ideal worker. Difference is here named and related to the ideal workers negatively as an organizational cost to be allocated or positively as an asset to be deployed in the development of the business. Likely due to the recent introduction of these policies, we could not observe identity regulatory discursive practices drawing on the distinct understandings of disabled workers on which they rested in BankCorp.

Indeed, it was above all the identity regulatory discourse of a competent, autonomous subject 'making it happen for him- or herself' that featured prominently in disabled workers' identity work. The following respondents construct identities engaging with this discourse and aligned with the ideal it produces, paying tribute to individual merit:

> The bar was set high there. For me that was a good thing. […] Yes, at BankCorp they are open to diversity, but a manager still does not know how to deal with it, what can be expected of you. But once you prove yourself, you

> will have extra credibility, because they know it's not self-evident. They will never ask me questions about it [the disability] though, because it's taboo. (Dieter, visually impaired campaign evaluator and former graduate management trainee)
>
> I've always acted like everybody else. I've never wanted to be part of that, all whining and complaining. I know I have to work hard, sometimes harder than someone else. But that is the only option for me. I don't talk about it [my disability] to other people. (Tom, hearing impaired sales advisor for professional clients).

While the first speaker takes the perspective of able-bodied colleagues, and the second his own, both stress that disability is a taboo in the context of BankCorp. In this organization, disabled workers are offered a subject position of ideal employees. Some of those we interviewed build identities aligned with it, although the cost of their assimilation into the highly performing ideal is the erasure of their impairment and disability.

Other disabled employees rather constructed identities which were aligned with the characteristics of the ideal worker as ambitious, hardworking and capable, yet which at once pointed to how discrimination had curbed their careers:

> Before I became ill, I was promised an advancement. When I came back they told me the advancement deal was off, because I no longer had the potential. That was one person's judgment and it has been engraved into my memory ever since. […]. I now no longer expect anything from the bank. But they don't have to expect anything of me either, I'll do my hours and that's that. (Maarten, visually and mobility impaired officer business loans)
>
> Because I had been looking for a job for so long, I accepted this job here although it was below my qualifications and desires. […] Day in, day out, I had to push two buttons on my keyboard to sort out incoming papers into two different categories. Truly a job that did not match my abilities. In my team there was another deaf woman. And they afterwards admitted to me that they had put me there for that reason [because I am also deaf]. I took this placement very badly. I had attended various universities for so long and gathered multiple diplomas, I worked so hard for them. And then I ended up there, in that job. After three days I wanted to quit because I could not accept such treatment. (Julie, hearing impaired social media marketer).

In these cases, speakers do not construct preferred identities by drawing on discourses offering alternative subject positions, but rather re-appropriate the discourse of the ideal worker to denounce the inconsistency between such norms and the organizational practices they experienced.

The analysis of identity regulatory discourses of BankCorp to regulate employees' identities unveils how ableism informs it in a distinct way compared to our first case. The constitution of a desirable able-bodied (ideal) subject – a worker that is highly competent, self-managing and unencumbered – is achieved through the assimilation of all workers into it. Workers with impairments are discursively constructed as desirable as far as the impairment does not disable them. Although this representation might, at first sight, appear to do away with the disabled/able-bodied binary, upon closer scrutiny it rather rests on the overemphasis of able-bodiedness at the expense of disability within such binary. The performativity of this subject position rests on the individual worker's ability to negate the impairment, overcome her disability and herself embody the ideal worker.

3 REGULATING IDENTITY AT LOCGOV: ABLE-BODIED EMPLOYEES CARING FOR DISABLED ONES

LocGov is a young organization issued from the division of a previous region into two smaller regional areas in the mid-nineties (organization's website). Employees are mainly in administrative jobs or project coordination, and, as it is the case in the public administration, careers are bound to one's formal educational qualifications and wages are collectively negotiated. In recent years, LocGov has seen an increased focus on management by numbers, with budgetary cuts resulting in the lay-off of about 100 employees in 2014. Despite this, the organization's manifesto states that: 'the organization cares about the well-being and motivation of employees and believes in the philosophy that every person carries out his or her motivation, enthusiasm and appreciation to one another'. Employing a diverse workforce that 'reflects the region's population' is one of the core goals of the organization (organization's manifesto), a goal that is reflected in the diversity policy, which sets for itself the target of 4% disabled workers, although public organizations are expected to attain 3%.

In the interviews with us, various respondents talked about the organization as 'wanting to be an example to society' (Ted, able-bodied labor union representative) and diversity as 'good for everyone' and 'adding a new and valuable perspective to things' (Heleen, able-bodied manager). In this organizational discursive context, the ideal employee was commonly constructed as someone 'who is sensitive to social issues' and 'has respect for co-workers and clients', with an emphasis on relations skills:

> I have 30 employees, they're all different, they all have their weaknesses and strengths. Some employees might physically be well able or very intelligent but then relationally cause troubles, and that is a lot worse than someone who takes up a few more days of sick leave. (Marie, able-bodied manager)

These words echo the expectation that LocGov employees 'want to make a valuable contribution to society and to do this through cooperation and respect' and 'strive for open communication with partners and stakeholders in order to realize valuable projects together' (organization's manifesto).

Fragments in which managers talked about particular disabled employees and disabled people often discursively constructed disability as an organizational responsibility to offer equal opportunities and be inclusive. In contrast to EmployOrg, where managers constructed disabled workers as lacking relevant competences to embody the ideal worker, in LocGov managers constructed themselves and other managers as unable to offer equal opportunities to disabled individuals, due to bias, and therefore as themselves not living up to the ideal LocGov worker:

> If you take a few candidates, and put them next to a disabled candidate, he [sic] will very rarely get picked. People will focus on what a person cannot do, and the others will be more successful in hiding what they cannot do. However, when you assemble a line of all disabled applicants, then people will focus on the qualities and positive characteristics of the persons. (Wim, able-bodied diversity expert)
>
> It's just the reality. You can look at it any way you want, and wrap it up in a bunch of nice words, but the reality remains harsh. […]. If you have to choose between two candidates and one is in a wheelchair and the other is not, then

> I think that in 99.9% of the cases, the person without the wheelchair will get picked. It's as simple as that. (Patrick, physically impaired manager)
>
> One of my colleagues once told me: 'The day that I have to hire a disabled person, will be the worst day of my life'. I replied: 'Why the hell would you say that?'[…] That mentality has to go! […] People should do a mind switch here and say: 'Why would someone with a disability work differently?'. (Annelies, able-bodied manager).

At the same time, the ideal worker is also someone who is openly proud to work for LocGov and helps build its image of inclusive organization, for instance by sharing her positive experience as a disabled employee with the wider public:

> Ellis [disabled worker] did absolutely not want to be a token. She did not want to publically speak about how the organization is open to hiring disabled people. Harry [disabled worker], on the other hand, is really amazing. He really likes talking about it. He is proud to proclaim working here. I do understand her point of view, not willing to stand out and all… but on the other hand it really opens up people's eyes, also other disabled people who then feel like 'Ow hey, what a cool job I could have there'. (Helen, able-bodied manager)

Disabled workers were not only crucial in promoting caring and inclusive subjectivities inside the organization, but also in its broader environment, among citizens, as well illustrated by following words of another manager:

> I noticed that he [disabled worker] took on additional tasks when someone was absent. And so I asked him if he wanted to also take on calls, and he said 'okay'. He's slower, but he really explains things clearly and I think people have to learn to deal with such differences anyways. The outside world has to know that there are people in our society who have a disability and that these too are employed in certain places. (Nancy, able-bodied manager)

The disabled employee is seen in this case as fulfilling a key role in the education of the broader public, in line with the mission of the organization to promote diversity and inclusion.

LocGov identity regulatory discourses were sustained by and themselves in turn informed progressive disability practices including a reserved job system, a targeted recruitment measure through which a number of vacancies are exclusively reserved for applicants with an officially recognized disability. Although managers who planned to hire could choose whether or not they open up their vacancy as a designated job, those who refused were sometimes obliged to wait an additional six months before hiring.

Tellingly, narratives about unsuccessful employment experiences with disabled individuals in the past were framed as organizational failures to stay true to the organizational goal of diversity and inclusion, rather than attributed to the characteristics of disabled employees. The following quote is illustrative:

> We hired her [disabled candidate] with the best intentions really. But then [after she resigned] we realized that we need more feedback, more exchange of experiences with certain impairments, and more specialized coaches who can step in at times when situations become difficult, so that we can correct the situation and open up communication lines with supervisors (Helen, able-bodied manager).

Following the resignation of this employee, LocGov started using wage subsidies that the organization receives for its disabled employees by the state to contract an external disability expert organization for guidance, so that 'LocGov can quickly offer support when problems emerge' (Wim, able-bodied diversity expert) and before they escalate.

In their identity work, disabled employees engaged with the identity regulatory discourses of the ideal employee as embodying an inclusive organization. Drawing on these discourses, many constructed themselves as needing and receiving opportunities, support and care from their organizational environment:

> There is a place for me in this department with my disability. It is taken into account in the tasks that are given to me, in the evaluations that I get, so I'm really happy here. I really feel as if there is space for who I am… (Robin, psycho-socially administrative worker)

> Actually, I also had a conflict with a colleague and I relapsed… I was confined to the psychiatric hospital, again, but I have to admit, my line manager then visited me there twice! I thought I would certainly lose my job again, but instead he said: 'Your desk is still there, it will be ready for you for when you return'. And that actually really gave me a boost. I can always go see him when I have a question or when I, […] become nervous and anxious… (Katherine, psycho-socially impaired administrative worker)

Clearly, within the discursive context of LocGov, disability is neither erased to assimilate to an able-bodied norm, as in BankCorp, nor seen as synonymous of lack, as in EmployOrg. Rather, the able-bodied worker and the disabled worker stand in a mutually constitutive relation whereby the former provides care and inclusion to the latter, who is herself in need of such care and inclusion.

Disabled respondents occasionally subtly rejected the subject position offered to them by the organization as 'needing care':

> They have tried to give me tasks as much as possible in line with my knowledge and talents. They are indeed very flexible in that regard. I can't complain about that really. But I have to admit, I have been very flexible towards them too in the past and do believe I reap the benefits of that now. (Ann, physically impaired product designer)

> I would also have been selected through the normal application procedures, but I think, because for me I don't really have a disability but when I look at others who participated in the reserved job selection with serious disabilities, they don't stand a chance in normal procedures. (Brigitte, psycho-socially impaired personnel staff worker)

Whereas these fragments do not openly contest the discourses constructing them as in need of care or the able-bodied workers as providing that care, in their identity work, they construct identities that are not aligned with these discourses. The first respondent stresses that she has earned the accommodation offered by the organization through her own commitment, the second suggests that she was hired because of her skills rather than due to the reserved job system.

The analysis of identity regulatory discourses at LocGov unveils how ableism informs the constitution of a desirable able-bodied (ideal) caring subject which is predicated upon the constitution of a desirable disabled (ideal) subject in need of care. It is by virtue

of its relation to the disabled worker that the able-bodied worker acquires the ability to care, an ability which is defining of the ideal worker in the light of the organizational mission. This specific manifestation of the ableist binary is informative as it performs hierarchically related subjectivities which both inherently rest on relationality and mutual dependency. In this sense, both are at odds with the modernist ideal of autonomous subjects and, more specifically, its neo-liberal variant as the self-managing, highly productive, adaptable subject, which underpins the ideal subject in the other two organizations under study.

3.6 Discussion

Reconnecting the notion of ableism to the tradition of literature on socio-ideological control, this study examined how the able-bodied/disabled binary at the core of ableism informs identity regulatory discourses in three organizational settings. A focus on ableism shifts the analytical focus away from deconstructing representations of disabled workers as subordinate towards its constitutive relation with the superordinate identity of the 'ideal' worker (Calás, 1992; Davis, 2006; Goodley, 2014). It allowed us to gain a deeper understanding of how ableism is discursively deployed as a principle of organizing underpinning managerial control over the workforce by ruling in and out certain ways of being (Foucault, 1977).

Our empirical analysis has revealed how the disabled/able-bodied binary is used by organizations to normalize an ideal able-bodied subject through its constitutive relation to the disabled subject. Specifically, our comparative approach highlighted the organization-specific modalities through which such processes of normalization occur. At EmployOrg, the constitution of an ideal, able-bodied worker as flexible, productive and communicative is predicated upon the constitution of an undesired disabled subject embodying its negation. Such mutually constitutive, negative construction is sustained through bureaucratic procedures which attempt to objectify the disability and measure the 'lack' in productivity and flexibility. At BankCorp, the highly competent and self-managing ideal worker subsumes all workers. Workers with impairments are discursively constructed as highly competent, productive and self-managing ideal workers, on condition that their impairment does not affect their ability to compete with able-bodied workers. In this subsumption into the category of ideal worker, both the impairment and the disability are completely erased and made meaningless. Such erasure, an erasure that is named by disabled workers, is sustained through a system of accommodations that individual workers can access in their attempt to attain the ideal of able-bodied hyperproductivity. Finally, at LocGov, the constitution of a desirable able-bodied ideal worker who cares for others is predicated upon the relationally constituted disabled worker embodying such need for care. Such construction is sustained through a reserved jobs system to avoid competition between disabled and able-bodied workers, training for able-bodied managers and insourcing of support shifting responsibility for inclusion onto the organization. Despite the uniqueness of the subject positions each organization's identity regulatory discourses and the policies sustaining them offer to able-bodied workers and disabled workers, all do leverage the disabled/able-bodied binary as a meaningful marker of hierarchized difference. Whereas our analysis mainly focused on identity regulatory discourses, future research might want to retie the discursive dimension of identity regulation more systematically into social practice and space (Langley, et al., 2012) or mundane materialities (Corlett and Williams, 2016) that co-shape the (im)possibilities at work for disabled people (cf. Hardy and Thomas, 2015).

Applying an ableism lens to organizational processes of control advances a more fine-grained understanding of how ableism structures contemporary workplaces in ways that subordinate specific forms of embodiment relative to others (e.g. Foster and Wass, 2013; Jammaers, et al., 2016). Whereas ableism theory tends to highlight how ableism is performative of an *overall* state of 'lesser humanity' (Campbell, 2009), our empirical analysis suggests that the subordination attached to the able-bodied/disability binary in specific social and discursive contexts, such as organizations, is always qualified, related to specific 'preferred sets of abilities' (Wolbring, 2008; 2012) constituting a 'locally embedded' ideal subject. In this sense, while the function of ableism in processes of normalization and disciplining seems diffuse, its specific organizational manifestations appear less universalistic and more heterogeneous than the theoretical literature on ableism would lead us to imagine. Such heterogeneity likely reflects the dimensions of reality that the adopted theoretical approach can capture. In order to become empirically observable, the universal understanding of disability as a state of lesser humanity requires theoretical approaches which dig deeper than language and discursive deconstruction. Other theoretical and methodological approaches providing a vocabulary for emotions and affect, might be required to unveil how the performativity of disabled people's embodied selfhood 'lays bare the psychosocial imaginary that sustains [our] modernist understandings of what is to be properly human' (Shildrick, 2012: 31; see also Goodley, 2011; 2014).

Further building on the emergent discursive studies on disability in the workplace (e.g. Elraz, 2013; Jammaers, et al., 2016; Mik-Meyer, 2015; 2016a, 2016b; Woodhams and Danieli, 2000) and on the labor market (e.g. Garsten and Jacobsson, 2013; Holmqvist, et al., 2013, Vandekinderen, et al., 2012), this study generates news insights into the articulation between ableism on the one hand and neo-liberal subjectivity primarily conceived in terms of its relation to paid work (Goodley, 2014) and emphasizing individual's rational, entrepreneurial responsible management of one's human capital, on the other. Whereas the extant literature tends to conceptualize ableism as functional to the production of the neo-liberal subject, an analysis of ableist identity regulatory discourses qualifies this relation, showing how the disabled/able-bodied binary can inform various types of ideal subjects, who do not always (fully) align with the neo-liberal subject. Whereas BankCorp's ideal worker is indeed prototypical of a neo-liberal ideal 'hyperperformative' worker who takes individual responsibility for her own career and the ideal worker in EmployOrg approximates such ideal, albeit within the important limitations of bureaucracy, the ideal worker produced in LocGov is defined in terms of her caring relation to (disabled) others and the collective ethical norms underlying care (cf. Gilligan, 1982). Such subject is at odds with a neo-liberal subject and even, more fundamentally, with a modernist subject centered on cognition, autonomy, and mastery (Campbell, 2009; Goodley, 2014). Not only, the organization seems to deploy its disabled workers in the education of citizens towards a broader understanding of the human subject that is more inclusive of human variety, although in its own identity regulatory discourses the ableist binary remains foundational. The limitations posed by our research design do not allow us to evaluate in how far this (public) organization and its performativity of able-bodied and disabled workers are 'exceptional'. Nonetheless, they show that the relation between ableism and neo-liberal subjectivities should not be taken for granted and deserves further empirical investigation to be adequately captured and theorized. Further research might want to investigate a broader variety of work contexts to gain more insights in the contextual conditions which favor alternative meanings of ableism that are not aligned with neo-liberalism next to the abandonment of ableism classifications as principles of organizing.

Taking an ableism-centred lens, our study further also talks to the organizational literature on socio-ideological control in organizations (e.g. Alvesson and Kärreman, 2004; Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Kärreman and Alvesson, 2004; Zanoni and Janssens, 2007). The investigation of processes of managerial subjection relying on representations of disability/able-bodiedness for their operation, highlights the structural similarity between disability and other key social identities such as gender and race, as widely recognizable binary-structured vocabularies to be deployed in the governance of the workforce through the normalization of the ideal worker (cf. Zanoni, 2010). In all cases, social identities function as organizing principles whereby 'the abnormal other' is necessary for the reiteration of the normalized self, disciplining individuals into specific subjectivities (Goodley, 2014). Distinct from prior studies, however, our findings show how disabled subjects often construct identities aligned with the subject positions offered by managerial identity regulatory discourses even if this alignment does not provide them with a sense of the self, imbued with worth (Brown, 2015; Fine, 1996). This is an important insight, given that the identity regulation literature has tended to assume that individuals are enjoined in the offered discourses in the attempt to secure stable and/or positive identities. This finding further echoes current debates in disability studies on the relevance of self-limiting behavior (Kulkarni and Gopakumar, 2014), internalized ableism (Campbell, 2008; Loja, et al., 2012) or psycho-emotional disablism (Goodley and Runswick-Cole, 2011; Reeve, 2002; Watermeyer and Swartz, 2008) and their effects on what individuals can be, making them feel worthless and unattractive and undermining their well-being.

In the light of the broader literature on the dynamics of control and resistance in organizations, we observe that, even when respondents constructed less complacent and even resistant identities, these latter were generally achieved by relating to the offered subject positions, thus largely within the discursive-ideological contours delineated by the hegemonic identity regulatory discourses for subjects to speak and come into being (Thomas and Davies, 2005). In this sense, our results show that resistance often occurs within, rather than outside such discursive space, reflecting the ambiguity and limitations of individuals' agency and the possibility of (discursive) resistance. Humor and cynical distance, which have been advanced as contemporary forms of individual resistance (Costas and Fleming, 2009; Fleming and Spicer, 2003), were negligible in our data, perhaps due to our methodology based on interviews, which can only provide glimpses of discursive resistance, or perhaps due to a more limited representational space for ambiguity and subversion in discourses of disability. To capture the broader dynamics of resistance, future research might consider adopting longitudinal methodologies and participant observation to reconnect subjects' discursive practices to non-discursive ones (cf. Fairclough, 1992).

3.7 Conclusion

This article aimed at showing the key role of ableism in the operation of socio-ideological control in organization, shifting the analytical focus from the representation of disabled workers to the disabled/able-bodied binary as a principle of organizing akin to patriarchy and whiteness. Such approach builds on the emerging literature on disability that adopts a post-structuralist approach to unveil how processes of classification and normalization play in the constitutions of specific forms of subjectivity. It productively complements and rebalances the historical focus of the social model of disability literature on social and material structures. Broadening the theoretical lenses adopted to understand the mechanisms of subordination is theoretically and politically timely (Shildrick, 2009; 2012).

Theoretically, it is warranted because it offers a productive way of thinking about the workings of power, which can advance established ways of thinking about disability by complementing and/or challenging them. Politically, it is useful because it helps grasp the complexity of the processes through which contemporary subjectivities of both disabled and able-bodied individuals emerge in work settings, a complexity which needs to be taken into account in any attempt to understand and foster (potential) forms of individual and collective resistance for social change. More research is warranted that further examines how discursive regimes come to establish the specific terms on which disabled people come to exist (or not) in workplaces.

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4 ABLEISM IN THE WORKPLACE THROUGH A BOURDIEUAN PERSPECTIVE: ENABLING/DISABLING SOCIAL PRACTICE IN A FINANCIAL SERVICES COMPANY[3]

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Ableism has recently been advanced as a new lens to conceptualize the marginalization of disabled people at work (Williams and Mavin, 2012). Defined as 'a network of beliefs, processes and practices that produces a particular kind of self and body (the corporeal standard) that is projected as the perfect, species-typical and therefore essential and fully human' (Campbell, 2001: 44), ableism draws attention to the discursive practices through which disabled people are sorted out, categorized and labeled as 'unemployable' or confined to lower-rank positions in workplaces and on the labor market (e.g. Foster and Wass, 2013; Garsten and Jacobsson, 2013; Holmqvist, et al., 2013; Jammaers, et al., 2016; Vandekinderen, et al., 2012). Drawing on post-structuralist theory and, specifically, the work of Foucault, this emergent literature has examined the disciplinary role of language structured along a binary reaffirming the primacy of able-bodiedness over disability. It has advanced the prior research on disability at work, which highlighted the disabling effects of a social context made for able-bodied individuals (Abberley, 2002; Barnes and Mercer, 2005), by proposing an alternative understanding of power as occurring through the constitution of specific forms of subjectivity and workplace identities.

Although the focus on the power of language has generated important novel theoretical insights, it has also entailed that the social practices and behaviors constitutive of ableism have to date largely remained unattended (Campbell, 2009). With a few exceptions (e.g. Foster and Wass, 2013; Harlan and Robert, 2006; Corlett and Williams, 2011), analyses have focused on the meaning produced through discourses rather than on how such meaning shapes workplace social practices that reproduce inequality. Conceptualizations of ableism as ableist discourse tend to obscure that power effects do not only ensue directly from normalization effects and ableist identity categories which come be taken for granted but also – crucially – from how such categories come to be enacted by individuals in social practices (Bourdieu, 1990; Fairclough, 1998) constitutive of social structures privileging able-bodiedness over disability.

Accordingly, in this study, I draw on Bourdieuan theory to advance an understanding of ableism as an organizing principle *of social practice* in the workplace, an approach which conceives the discursive as exerting power by mediating everyday life and relations of domination (Everett, 2002). Bourdieuan theory is particularly helpful to this aim because it locates power in the practices and interactions in which people engage collectively (Bourdieu, 1977; Wacquant, 1993) to struggle for various forms of capital within a given field (Tatli and Özbilgin, 2012), capturing next to symbolic, also economic, social and cultural inequality (Townley, 2014). In this perspective, practices reflect the interaction between structural forces of the field and individuals' habitus, a system of durable dispositions they acquire through socialization (Robinson and Kerr, 2009; Emirbayer and Johnson, 2008). To understand practice, the regularities of social fields must be related to the 'practical logic' of actors originating in their habitus and shaping their 'feel for the game' for these regularities

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(Maton, 2008: 53) and ultimately affecting their ability to accrue various forms of capital in that specific field. Bourdieu's approach to power can thus help understand how dis/ability comes into being through daily social practices in specific work settings. Departing from prior conceptualizations focused on the binary structure of ableism as a discourse (Jammaers, et al., 2016; Williams and Mavin, 2012), I envision ableism here as a power-laden and deeply socially embedded process of interconnected practices that are produced in the relation between the rules of the game in a particular field and individual workers' habitus guiding their practical logic to navigate the field and acquire capital.

Empirically, I analyze the case study of BankCorp, a Belgian bank and insurance company employing workers with an impairment in various jobs. Based on interviews with organizational actors including disabled employees, supervisors, union representatives and HR staff members as well as a variety of company documents (such as internal PowerPoint presentations, job vacancies, diversity reports and brochures on disability), I reconstruct the rules of the field in the organization and examine how disabled workers navigate this field through social practices guided by their habitus, evaluating their ability to acquire various types of capital.

This study contributes to critical disability studies by advancing our understanding of ableism in the workplace first of all by showing how social practices which are often left undiscussed in post-structuralist accounts, constitute ableism. It deepens our understanding of ableism as an organizing principle by moving beyond the discursive, by shifting the object of analysis from discursive constructions to the embedding of these constructions in social practice. Secondly, by bringing in a more nuanced picture of ableism than the assumed binary distinction between able-bodied workers and disabled workers, we get a more complex idea of the mechanism of ableism and how it unfolds differently in the workplace experience of different disabled workers in the same social space. Thirdly, this approach grants another type of agency to workers, as focusing on their micro social practices, informed by practical strategies, allows us to move beyond their shared experience of oppression by ableist structures. And lastly, this approach allows to include material rewards into the analysis, providing a more complete account of how inequality and disability are related.

4.2 ABLEISM AND ITS APPLICATION TO WORK CONTEXTS

Ableism privileges able-bodiedness, as it casts those selves and bodies that are seen as functioning differently from the standard as lesser human. Consequently, ableism equates able-bodiedness to normalcy and devalues what diverts from this norm (Ho, 2008). In ableist ideas, practices, institutions or social relations, able-bodiedness is thus presumed and disabled people are constructed as inferior and invisible 'others' (Chouinard, 1997). Impairments are understood as inherently and naturally horrible and seen as the sole cause of the problems experienced by the people who have them (Amundson and Taira, 2005). An ableist society then can be described as a society that promotes 'the species-typical individual citizen' (Campbell, 2009), 'a citizen that is ready and able to work and contribute' (Goodley, 2014: xi). The ableist worldview upholds that people should either strive to embody this norm or keep their distance (Kumar, 2012). Those who do not have the certain sets of preferred capabilities, or are seen as not having them, are discriminated against (Wolbring, 2008). Because ableism is so ingrained into our collective subjectivity, this discrimination becomes largely invisible and the equation of disability to inferiority comes to be seen as a 'natural' reaction to an aberration (Campbell, 2009).

Most of the recent studies on disability at work from an ableism lens have de-constructed how ableist discursive practices marginalize disabled people by categorizing them along the disabled/able-bodied binary to define them as lesser than able-bodied individuals (e.g. Garsten and Jacobsson, 2013; Holmqvist, et al., 2013; Jammaers, et al. 2016; Vandekinderen, et al., 2012; Mik-Meyer, 2015a; 2015b; 2016). In these studies, powerful negative discourses in society, informed by neo-liberalism, shape the subjectivity of disabled employees, classifying them in certain categories and ultimately leading to self-government and the reproduction of ableist assumptions. For instance, by equating disabled people to 'unemployable' or 'less productive' people. Discursive analyses of ableism have been prioritized in explaining the workings of ableism inside the workplace (e.g. Jammaers, et al., 2016). Power accordingly has been conceptualized as resulting from the binary structure of disability/able-bodiedness. Power is exercised through the structure of discourses and the hierarchization through the binary, in which one is given preference over the other. Other aspects that involve power, such as social practices, are left out of the analysis.

Only a few studies have approached discursive practices as infusing social practices with meaning, adversely affecting disabled workers' workplace experience and professional outcomes. For instance, Foster and Wass' (2013) study documents on how employees were dismissed after acquiring an impairment, without any real efforts of their organizations for accommodating them in a new job. This was legitimized by job descriptions designed around ableism, requiring multiple-tasking, inter-changeability and teamwork, reproducing an ideology of candidates with an impairment as unfit. Harlan and Robert (2006) observed that the meritocratic rules of the promotion system in one organization were repeatedly circumvented in order to promote able-bodied employees over disabled ones, regardless of skills. In their study about an exploitative manufacturing company in India, Kumar and colleagues (2014) showed how the business owner prioritized economic rationality and efficiency over workers' health, social justice and equality, engaging in a long list of ableist practices to keep costs as low as possible, such as, assigning disabled people only to repetitive tasks or paying them far below minimum wage. Further, a study by Williams and Mavin (2015) demonstrated how disabled academic staff were refused small changes to working practices (such as A4 binders rather than box files) merely because that was 'the way things were done' and changes to accommodate an impairment were considered unacceptable. These studies have made clear how social practices and the discursive practices legitimizing them work to exclude disabled people from the workplace. They have been limited in showing how disability works as an organizing principle, exerting control over the entire workforce. Nor have they fully highlighted how disabled people themselves navigate these practices.

4.3 Power through social practice: A Bourdieuan approach

Over the past two decades, the turn to practice in the social sciences has led to a renewed interest in Bourdieu's work across disparate areas of research ranging from strategic management, organizational learning and institutional change (De Clercq and Voronov, 2009; Townley, 2014; Sieweke, 2014). For Bourdieu, practice results from the relation between one's dispositions or habitus and one's position in a field (Townley, 2014: 47). Practice is structured within a field of 'possibles'. Indeed, habitus alone cannot explain the practices of actors, 'the nature of the fields they are active within is equally crucial' (Maton, 2008: 51). This relation is summarized in the following equation:

[(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice

For Bourdieu, society is divided into social fields and a '*field*' is to be understood as a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions anchored in certain forms of power or capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). A field is made up of historical, specific practices and practices that are also the specific actions of agents within it. It is a social space in which individuals, with possibly different upbringing and background, interact within the boundaries of the particular rules of the game that regulate the ways they behave and interact in that social space (Bourdieu, 1991). To hint the active nature of practices, Bourdieu uses the analogy of the game (Townley, 2014). In the field agents compete for the same scarce goods (capital and legitimate authority). Fields are however also based on distinction as agents try to differentiate themselves in order to reduce competition and establish a monopoly over a particular sub-sector of the field (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Townley, 2014). This leads us to our research questions: *What are the rules of the game in the field of BankCorp?*

Important for understanding how individuals navigate in a social space with success, is the concept of habitus (Bourdieu, 2000). Habitus consists of a set of historical relations located within individual bodies in the form of mental and corporal schematic perception, appreciation and action (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). People acquire their habitus both by the (class) conditions surrounding their early lives and by the organizational settings in which they are active later in life (Emirbayer and Johnson, 2008). According to Bourdieu, one's habitus affects to a certain degree whether one is accepted and integrated into a particular field. A habitus thus allows to 'fit in' (or not) within a particular field, with specific regard to its conventions and regulations (Bourdieu, 1977). An agent whose habitus is perfectly adapted to the field possesses a *sens pratique*, or a 'feel for the game', rendering his/her habitus 'invisible' (Bourdieu, 1980: 117). In all fields, there are graduations between those who exhibit the 'well-formed habitus', and those who do not (Moore, 2008). Endowed with higher cultural capital, the former can, by virtue of their habitus, pass judgment on the latter and make that judgment count. The habitus also shapes the parameters of people's sense of agency and possibility. It influences one's perception of future possible positions, given one's current location within a social space (Edgerton and Roberts, 2014). Furthermore 'habitus are profoundly social, they carry the traces of the lines of division and distinction along which the social is organized' (Lawler, 2004: 112). Mental schemata are thus the embodiment of social divisions and so the social and cognitive are genetically linked through the habitus (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Hierarchical social distinctions such as class, gender and disability are marked within the habitus, making some habitus worth more than others, normalizing some while problematizing others (Lawler, 2004).

For individuals to successfully manage in a social space and attain certain positions, various forms of *capital* need to be accumulated (Kerr and Robinson, 2009). Economic capital (money and other material possessions) is not the only kind of capital that functions in the social world. Bourdieu makes it clear that other types of capital, for example social capital (the networks a person can draw on as a resource) and cultural capital (embodied in the form of knowledge, skills, language abilities, and institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications or professional credentials) are also significant in navigating the field (Robinson and Kerr, 2009). Cultural capital comprises both technical ability (cognitive skills such as verbal, reading, writing, mathematics, and analytical reasoning skills) and social competence (social-behavioral skills such as motivation to achieve, self-regulation, and delay of gratification), obtained through familial transmission and trainings (Edgerton and Roberts, 2014). In the context of work, a 'right' sense of which kind of culture to use in

which situation offers social advantages including enhanced opportunities for employment and promotion in many occupations (Edgerton and Roberts, 2014).

Finally, symbolic capital denotes reputation, honor and professional prestige and is generally conferred upon those who have successfully accumulated those forms of capital that are the most highly valued by the surrounding field (Spence, et al., 2016). Those who hold symbolic power, hold the capacity to represent, define and legitimize what is recognized as prestigious in a field (Bourdieu, 1985; Townley, 2015) or to impose a vision of legitimate division (Bourdieu, 1989). They set 'the frontier between the sacred and the profane, good and evil, the vulgar and the distinguished' (Bourdieu 1985: 735). Symbolic capital is intimately linked to power as it renders domination and its reproduction invisible (Townley, 2015). Career patterns are no simple outcomes of merit-based criteria of human capital, rather they are the result of differential access to valuable and legitimized capitals (Tatli and Özbilgin, 2012). A recent study showed how high-ranked male sports managers held the symbolic power to keep women largely out of the profession, despite women's higher cultural and social capital (Karaçam and Koca, 2015). Being male automatically granted a form of symbolic capital in this particular field of sports management (see also Huppatz, 2009). According to Dick (2008), the degree to which people are invested in playing the rules of the game depends on how much they are invested in the game and its stakes – for example career progression. This brings us to our second research question: *How do disabled workers with specific habitus and capitals navigate this field through social practices?*

4.4 METHOD

1 RESEARCH DESIGN

In management and origination research, various previous studies have made use of Bourdieu's concept of field (Sieweke, 2014), conceptualizing it on various levels, ranging from sector (e.g. Huppatz, 2009; Townley, 2015) to profession (e.g. Dick, 2008; Spence, et al., 2016; Spence and Carter, 2014; Tatli, 2011; Vershinina, et al., 2011; Karaçam and Koca, 2015) and organization (e.g. Doherty and Dickmann, 2009; Kerr and Robinson, 2009; Robinson and Kerr, 2009). In this study, we similarly conceptualize BankCorp as an 'organization-as-field' (Bourdieu, 2000; Emirbayer and Johnson, 2008). Understood as a field, BankCorp is a space in which a game takes place, a field of relations between individuals who are competing for personal advantage (Everett, 2002). Investigating this field will enable the systematic investigation of the given social order within BankCorp (Dick, 2008) and whether that order is informed by ableism. In order to get a good picture of the rules within the field and their relation to ableist principles, we interviewed multiple actors and used multiple data to reconstruct it. The data were collected within a larger, publicly funded project for the Flemish Policy Centre for Equal Opportunities Policies 2012-2015, which also included two other case studies: a public regional organization and a public local organization. The three organizations were selected through purposive sampling (Jupp, 2006) because they employed sufficient numbers of people with an officially recognized impairment, defined according to Flemish government administration: 'every long-term substantial problem of participation in work due to an interplay of functional limitations of mental, psychological, physical, bodily or sensorial nature, limitations in performing activities, and personal and external factors' (Samoy, 2014: 6, own translation).

2 DATA COLLECTION

At BankCorp, 22 in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine disabled employees, nine supervisors, two union representatives and two HR staff members in one large private bank and insurance company. Additional information on the company was gathered through the internet, internal documents and other publicly available documents. Multiple types of respondents and data sources were thus used in order to be able to reconstruct the field in a thorough manner and obtain an in-depth case study analysis. The first author contacted the human resources department of the private bank and insurance company, providing information on the objectives and the methodology of the study. They agreed to participate in the study and subsequently launched an open call to recruit disabled employees and later also other organizational actors as interviewees. Common ethical guidelines concerning informed consent were followed (Creswell, 2013) and anonymity was stressed in all communication. All names included in this text are pseudonyms. The disabled participants in the study, who are the focal research subjects, were six men and three women, had a broad range of chronic illnesses and impairments, covered a broad age range and were employed in a variety of jobs.

Table 9. *Overview of the Interviewees*

Name	Impairment (acquired at age)	Age range	Hay grade	Educational level	Years of service	Job title	Manager of
Eric	Mobility (16)	30-35	18	Bachelor ICT	3	Security manager	/
Dieter	Visual (0)	20-25	16	Master Business Economics + Business School	2	Trainee	/
Ella	Mobility (18)	30-35	15	Post-Academic Education (dr. Financial Accounting)	5	Financial accountant	/
Peter	Visual (40)	45-50	15	Bachelor ICT	25	Web support manager	/
Tom	Hearing (1)	25-30	13	Master Business Economics	3	Financial advisor	/
Mark	Hearing (0)	50-55	13	Secondary Education (special)	35	Graphic designer	/
Julie	Hearing (6)	20-25	11	Master Language + Master in London	1	Marketer	/
Marten	Mobility (25)	50-55	11	Secondary Education	30	Financial advisor	/
Karo	Mobility (29)	30-35	11	Master Communication management	16	Welcome desk officer	/
Katerin	/	50-55		Master in Law	25	Diversity manager	/
Willem	/	50-55	20	Industrial Engineer	30	Head internal service for prevention	/

Wout	/	50-55				Union Rep	/
Gerty	/	45-50	12	Master in the Political Sciences	24	Union Rep	/
Charlot	/	30-35		Master in Commercial Engineering	8	Head of marketing	Dieter
Vicky	/	30-35	16	Post Academic Education (dr. Statistics / Psychology)	5	Project manager finance	Ella
Cody	/	50-55	20	Master	27	Head of Customer Satisfact-ion	Peter
Chelsy	/	25-30	16	Master in Marketing	4	Head of Design	Mark
Nicole	/	35-40	17	Bachelor Social Work	12	Head Digital Channel	Peter (ex)
Cécile	/	35-40	16	Master in the Political Sciences	14	Bank Director local office	Karolien
Nicolas	/	35-40	13	Master in the Arts	10	Team leader Digitaliza-tion and Mail Services	person with autism & person with hearing impairment
Maddy	/	40-45	16	Master in Chemistry	15	Team leader Accounting	person with hearing impairment
Steve	/	55-60	16	Industrial Engineer	28	Credit Manager	person with hearing impairment

The semi-structured interviews with disabled participants were carried out following a questionnaire of open questions organized in five main sections: the nature of the impairment, the professional trajectory, the current job, social relations at work, and policy-related issues. The semi-structured interviews for other organizational actors were structured as follows: own professional trajectory, experience with disability, support by managers, support for manager, policy-related issues. During the interview, the interviewer allowed the order to be altered by respondents to not disrupt the flow of the conversation and to pursue emerging themes based on the respondent's answers. The interviews lasted between half an hour and an hour and a half, were all audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The analysis of the data was conducted on the transcripts in the original language (Dutch), translating only the excerpts that were included in the findings sections once the interpretation had been written down.

3 DATA ANALYSIS

In the first step of the data analysis**,** each author separately read a sample of interviews to get acquainted with the specific organizational field under study, to then jointly discuss their first impressions in an exploratory discussion. At first sight, this organization stood out

(especially compared to the other cases included in the broader study) as a field characterized by high levels of competitiveness and an ideology of meritocracy.

In a second phase, to address the first research question **–** *What are the rules of the game in the field of BankCorp?* – the first author read through nine interview transcripts of supervisors, HR staff and trade union representatives as well as all the complementary data sources on BankCorp (online job page, individual job advertisements, newspaper articles, hearing college by the diversity manager at the University, guidelines for hiring and integrating people with disabilities, courtesy guide, internal PowerPoint on how to make their accessibility policies more visible, diversity annual reports…) to get an idea of the valued dispositions (habitus) and capital within the organization and its rules of the game. To truly understand a field, an empirical attention is required to 'the institutionalized interests, rules and barriers to entry that operate in this field and construct it as a distinct social space' (Tatli, 2011: 240). The capitals and dispositions deemed valuable by those in power, endowed with symbolic capital, thus here by managers, have to therefor be analyzed (Spence, et al., 2016; Tatli and Özbilgin, 2012). To do so, s/he specifically looked for fragments that depicted the ideal 'way of acting and being'. S/he coded all material along the various forms of capital and the habitus, as defined in the literature section (see Table 8, column 3). To do this, narrative analysis was used, as this is seen as an insightful technique for investigating and understanding a field's rules and habitus (Everett, 2002). The coding was subsequently discussed with the co-authors.

In a third phase, to address the second research question – *How do disabled workers with specific habitus and capitals navigate this field through social practices?* – the first author coded the interviews with nine disabled workers along the forms of capital (cultural, economic, social and symbolic) and the habitus (see Table 10, column 4). The 'capital portfolio's' and dispositions of each participant were then compared to one another. This allowed us to have an idea of the social position of each participant within the field of BankCorp. Especially participants' Hay Grade gave a good indication of their respective value in the field.

Table 10. *Overview of the Codes*

Code	Description	Example of first phase (other organizational actors interviews and additional data)	Example of second phase (disabled employees interview)
Economic capital	*The revenue an employee generates for his/her employer, for which he/she in return receives a salary (Spence, et al., 2016).*		
	Hay grade as indication for the economic capital an employee generates	Eric: The Hay grade here goes up to 23. The average person has about 13 or 14. Managers are at 23.	Maarten: Someone like me with 30 years of service has a rating of 11 on the Hay-scale. It makes me feel…. You know, someone who has worked here for only 6 months and sits at the counter with a similar degree also has an 11 on the scale. […]I actually feel underappreciated.
Social capital	*The social networks one possesses and the capital owned by those connections, both in- and outside of work (Townley, 2014).*		
	Membership of prestigious alumni networks, close ties with management, being part of a disability advocacy group, …	Chelsey: [My ideal employee] is someone who works together well, communicates well with many different kinds of people…	Dieter: In my previous function I got a lot of exposure. People in high places know me now. […] I choose that function specifically for that reason. I knew I would get a lot of exposure and that this would be crucial to my career.
Cultural capital	*The different sorts of human capital one possesses such as knowledge, skills and other cultural acquisitions (Spence, et al., 2016).*		
	Embodied: technological skills, language competence, client management skills, …	Job advertisement: You are an analytical spirit. You fluently master both French and Dutch (written and spoken).	Dieter: I did not take up the commercial side of the job that much because it is difficult for me [due to my impairment]. But I rather helped the business unit with telling them where and how they could improve their numbers. I am pretty strong analytically and I knew where to look to give them useful feedback.

	Institutionalized: educational qualifications, professional credentials, trainings and courses at work	Job advertisement: You have a master's degree in ICT hanging at your wall.	Peter: I don't do trainings anymore because they are not accessible and when they take place outside the bank, it's hard for me to travel there. It demands a great deal of effort on the organizer's part and especially when its abroad, I fall off the wagon.
Symbolic capital	*It is the combination of other forms of capital, that is, social and cultural capital are converted into symbolic capital and this facilitates the conversion of social and cultural capital into economic capital (Bourdieu, 1989; Spence, et al., 2016).*		
	Embodied in prestige, renown, reputation and personal authority.	Charlotte: When I got into the graduate management traineeship, it was reserved for the very few	Tom: I've earned my spot here, I am valued deeply. If I would have to integrate somewhere else all over again, it would be a big effort because I have to be so alert all the time.
Habitus	*Cognitive schemas that structure someone's perception of the world. They can also be described as long-lasting dispositions that influence choice-making and action-taking. These can be informed by early familial and socialization processes or developed within particular spheres or activity or fields (Bourdieu, 1980, 1990; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992)..*		
	Schemas of perception, appreciation and action.	Online job site: Employees that share in the organization's key values of creativity, vision, engagement and ambition will fare well at BankCorp. Vicky: What we need is people with vision, people who think outside of the box and don't just follow the crowd.	Tom: I've always acted like any other person. I've chosen to not be part of all that, whining and complaining. I know I have to work hard, sometimes harder than someone else to reach the same thing. But that is the only option for me. I will never mention my disability to others.

In a fourth and last phase, we reconnected the empirical findings of disabled individuals' social practices as enacted in the field to the notion of ableism by evaluating the extent to which and how the rules of the game in the field reflect and reproduce an assumption of able-bodiedness, limiting the opportunities for disabled people to play the game well, that is to accrue various forms of capital. The focus was on meaning and lived experience of social agents, categories of perception and appreciation (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Everett, 2002).

4.5 FINDINGS

BankCorp is a large private banking and insurance company which knows a long history of fusions and mergers. A few years ago, it became part of a large international network and today it is in the top six most established banks in the world. BankCorp offers banking services to both individuals and professionals. Most jobs at BankCorp are commercial and located in local offices. The head quarter offices offer a wide range of jobs in marketing, finance and accounting, ICT, etc.

BankCorp employs over 15 000 people in Belgium. Although half of the employees are women, only one fourth are in higher echelons. The organization is culturally diverse, with over 50 different nationalities working within the bank. In terms of age distribution 12,6% are younger than 30 years, 43,8% are older than 45 years and 29,9% are older than 50 years (diversity annual report). The average age of the organization was 42.7 years in 2012. Since a couple years, the percentage of disabled staff is monitored. Despite the investment in a diversity and inclusion policy, the percentage of people with an official impairment was only 0.39% in 2012, representing a total of 68 people (personal email from diversity manager). This percentage is low, especially if compared to the 19.3% Belgians with 'a chronic health problem or illness and/or difficulties in executing daily tasks' who are currently active on the labor market (Belgian Federal Government, 2011). In 2009, a diversity manager was installed in charge of developing a diversity plan, which was welcomed with skepticism at first since the bank had already tried a likewise initiative in 2006 to promote gender equality that turned out to be '*nothing but an empty shell*'. Nevertheless, it seemed to become successful in bringing down structural constraints for women, as indicated by 50% all of the newly appointed local banking directors being female.

Overall, BankCorp is a very competitive environment in which employees are expected to compete for the same scarce employment and career progress. BankCorp has historically been characterized by a great deal of job insecurity and precariousness, due to subsequent mergers and fusions, leading to several recruitment stops and layoffs over the past years. Employees are regularly evaluated on their performance and graded on a Hay-grade scale. This HR instrument is used to stimulate employees to advance on the organizational ladder and ranges from 9 to 23 (CEO-level), with the average in the organization at 14 and management levels starting at 17. One's Hay grade is a good indication of one's economic capital (the wage and benefits) as well as one's symbolic capital

(prestige and ability to set the rules of the game) and thus a key indicator of one's social position within the organizational field.

1 THE RULES OF THE GAME: BRAINS, HEARTS AND GUTS

In order to determine who can stay, the HR staff evaluates current staff (but also the potentiality of job seekers) by scoring them on three criteria: brains, heart and guts. This metaphor of brains, heart and guts translates into the valued habitus and forms of capital in the field. Each of these criteria include a number of dispositions ('the well-formed habitus') as well as many forms of cultural and social capital that function as valuable assets in the field and can be converted into symbolic and economic capital by actors.

With brains, the HR staff and supervisors envisage multiple sort of cultural capital such as fast, accurate and critical reasoning, problem solving, communication skills and language knowledge. For instance, job vacancies often refer to the ideal candidate as someone with a critical, analytical spirit. And the skill of problem-solving is also highly regarded:

> My people need to have expertise. In this department we tell other departments what they are doing wrong. And so the people who work here have built up some credibility and are usually a bit older. They should not be afraid of holding on to some things. When a manager says 'No, we're not going to follow up on that advice' my people have to persist, be problem-solving and abide. Not say by default 'Okay, I understand, we will leave you to it then'. No, they have to dare ask critical questions and be reflexive (Joost, manager).

Also language skills such as presentation skills and multilingualism are considered essential. With headquarters being located in a multilingual city, there was an unwritten rule of answering a colleague in the other person's mother tongue. So Dutch-speaking colleagues would talk to their French-speaking colleagues in French, and vice versa. In reality however, much of the chat time occurs in French. Power point presentations are often written in English. So extensive cultural capital is required for many jobs.

Employees are expected to constantly improve their cultural capital. The bank offers an extensive 'learning and development program' here for, comprising many different trainings and courses aimed at enhancing technical, communicative and commercial skills (organization's job page). In this field employees have to take own initiative to follow trainings and education, as it is not a formal requirement. Professional development is nevertheless deeply valued:

> I have to personally be able to progress and grow and I expect the same from my team. I select and evaluate them on the basis of that. When people don't grow, they decline in my eyes. I am like that myself too. (Eric, manager with a disability).

The second criterion, heart, refers to a number of people skills, including for instance empathy towards clients, social skills to manage staff or to work together with colleagues within the department and from other departments. Job vacancies often refer to being a team player, whilst also being able to work autonomously. The following quotes illustrate the importance of social capital:

> [My ideal employee] is someone who works together well, communicates well with many different kinds of people (Chelsey, manager).

> Of course each function requires different skills, there are differences between reception desk workers and investment advisors. But overall, in any job, I value kindness and helpfulness towards customers and knowing the customers well (Cécile, manager).

Soft skills have gained more and more value over the years, illustrating how the relative value of capital is continually brought into question and reassessed in this specific field.

> I am under the impression that lately there is a lot of emphasis put on people management skills. In order to become a manager, I had that too, you have to have people management training. You have to be able to define objectives for your staff, know how to evaluate staff and learn how to build up a job interview. That sort of stuff. (Vicky, manager).

Besides social capital, heart also refers to a willingness to work hard. According to the organization's web page, 'employees that share in the organization's key values of creativity, vision, commitment and ambition' are likely to thrive within the field. A manager explained in more detail:

> For any job here really, you have to be extremely motivated. If you're not, it will immediately show. I have some people in my team who are ten years away from retirement and they say 'I'm already counting the days'. If that's your attitude... well then… Even people with low Hay Grading in very repetitive jobs need to show motivation and not be afraid of social contact because we work closely together with other departments (Steve, manager).

Besides showing your motivation every morning, a highly valued disposition or 'way of acting' in the field is working very long hours. Although formally people could recuperate additional hours, to demonstrate their good will and a hard drive, workers often did not request additional holidays in return.

Finally, with guts, BankCorp envisages negotiating skills, but also dispositions such as being self-confident and assertive. Other essential dispositions in line with this were the motivation to achieve and a high level of self-regulation and autonomy. The expectation of self-reliance was also expressed through the freedom that managers allowed their staff in terms of how and when tasks were performed, focusing on work outcomes:

> Autonomy is really sacred around here. Everyone is responsible for his own work. I have total confidence in my team I only demand two things: quality and a respect for deadlines. (Chelsey, manager).

In order to climb up the ranks of the organization and play the game right, international mobility was highly recommended and regarded as an asset extending employees' cultural capital. As the bank is located in 80 different countries, moving abroad is a possible career move and most management positions require crossing borders on occasion.

Also mobility between jobs is deeply valued, seen as 'positive and stimulating' (organization's web page). People were known to change jobs internally every three to four years, as the bank offered an extensive internal job market to stimulate gaining experience with various aspects of the business. Some managers even went as far as suggesting it

would look good on one's CV to leave the bank for a couple of years and then come back for faster career progression. Internal mobility is especially key to the position of 'the graduate management scheme'. This job is based upon the merits of changing businesses every three months. After 15 months, participants are ready to start their career at full speed in the business and they are immediately graded 15 on the Hay-scale, a reasonably high grade. Such positions were only granted to the best, most promising candidates, those embodying the ultimate BankCorp worker:

> To work here [in the graduate management scheme], you have to have a university degree, be able to think one step ahead, be able to take charge of things, be reflective and not just follow the crowd… When I got into the graduate management traineeship, it was reserved for the very few, there were university degrees in psychology, biology, commercial engineering… They looked for a certain, what do you call this? An extra factor and I think those were predominantly people who were positive, motivated and wanted to get somewhere in their lives… (Charlotte, manager).

The importance of scoring well on the brains, heart and guts criteria in order to secure one's spot at the bank was recently reaffirmed by the announcement of a major restructuration forecasting the loss of 2,500 jobs by 2018. A plan was drafted by the company to arm itself against 'fast digitalization, weak economy, increasing regulations and competition, and the changing needs of customers' (national newspaper).

2 A FIELD IN EVOLUTION

The evolving nature of the banking and insurance sector is rapidly affecting the valued capital and dispositions making BankCorp increasingly exclusive. Both managers and union representatives were adamant:

> I'm afraid that, because of the politics of the bank to be as ecological as possible, which I support, that the job of preparing documents for digitalization will disappear. And in that case, we will have a huge problem for internally relocating my two [disabled] employees. [...]. Within the bank they demand more and more flexibility and knowledge from everybody and so in that sense, it could be problematic for those persons in the future. (Nicolas, manager).

> The problem is that the simple manual jobs are disappearing. […]. Paper is disappearing and so the jobs where disabled people could be located in, and were good at, are disappearing. However, maybe in ICT there will be new functions for instance (Wout, union representative).

> Manual labor is disappearing within the financial sector. Now, it's or ICT people that program sophisticated software or sales people we need. A long time ago, we had our own maintenance staff, our own catering staff, that was all done by people from the bank. And then it was easier to find jobs for those people [disabled people] […]. Maybe in the future, new jobs [for disabled people] can be created in ICT for instance, for programming stupid things [...]. Say a program needs to be written and all 't's need to be removed, I'm just saying, you don't have to be an IT programmer to do that. (Wout, union representative).

These quotes suggest how evolving structures in the field are likely to make it increasingly difficult for disabled players to obtain favorable positions.

At the same time, the company has made some efforts in the last couple of years however to improve the career opportunities of disabled players as part of the management of broader diversity and inclusion. Actors responsible for recruitment received awareness-raising training to increase their sensitiveness to reasonable adaptations during selection and recruitment processes, to learn to focus on the abilities of disabled people and avoid 'being trapped in pity' (diversity manager). Line managers were asked to attend a similar e-learning course focusing on discrimination. Lastly, a brochure was also printed and distributed among colleagues on how to interact with people with various impairments.

Although commendable, these initiatives did not fundamentally change the rules of the game in the field. Indeed, their lack of coherence with such rules might explain some actors' astonishment:

> Of course we are a 'for profit' organization that needs to remain on target. We have to keep our shareholders satisfied. Say tomorrow we would hire 50% disabled staff, causing our profits to drop back to one third… Well our shareholders would speak up. We're prepared to engage ourselves a little bit to a social cause, but it has to be in balance. Did you know that the bank now even pays for private transport services for wheelchair users…? The bank pays for that!!! They get picked up from their houses and are dropped off here… […] So all I want to say is that, the bank really invests in that, consciously, it wants to give opportunities to those people, as a conscious act. […] But there have to be limits. We're not a care institution. (Wout, union representative).

Furthermore, some respondents indicated a lack of support to disabled employees in departments outside the diversity hub, suggesting that higher management seems not to prioritize diversity and inclusion as part of the valued habitus:

> I needed a beeper, a simple beeper. It should have been fairly easy to get. But it took me 4 months to get it. There is no structure here or maybe the diversity management is not authorized to give instructions to facility. I don't know. I'm really unsure whether management offers enough support to diversity projects. (Vicky, manager of Ella).

> She was at home for a year and then the question arose whether she was able to come back and then I personally made it my project to ensure she could come back, we really wanted her to be allowed to come back, we were always fond of her. I contacted the unions, the social assistant, … It was not an easy task. You need to really use your network you know, contact the right people… For this region there is a lady called Marie, she does 'change' things and I knew she was behind diversity so I thought I'd give her a call. (Cécile, manager of Karolien).

The difficulty to implement a diversity and inclusion policy suggests tension between this latter and the rules of the game in the field, as accommodations attempt to alter the existing rules of the game.

3 DISABLED EMPLOYEES' SOCIAL PRACTICE IN BANKCORP

Having reconstructed the ideal capitals and the 'well-formed' habitus reflecting the rules of the game at BankCorp has enabled us to show how workers are expected to act and look like (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). In this section, we turn to the social practices of disabled workers within this field. Our analysis draws on the rich narratives of five respondents, which we organize in three types. We start with Dieter's social practices, whose exceptionally well formed habitus and high capitals allow him to be 'a fish in the water'. We then analyze Julie and Peter, who are rather 'stranded fish', and conclude with Maarten and Mark, 'fish out of water'.

4.5.3.1 Dieter: a fish in the water

Dieter is a young (24 years old) yet already highly valued player in the field. His impairment is of a visual nature and although he was advised by his doctor to use a walking stick he chooses not to. Dieter's primary habitus in which he was socialized and brought up, seemed to match well with the habitus at BankCorp.

> I was raised in a farmer family, the agrarian way of life. "You shall work, you shall work well and you shall work hard! And if you work hard, then you'll get to do whatever it is you like, but you have to work hard." And I appreciate that myself too.

At his desk, he uses an impressive arsenal of high technological aids for reading, referring to himself as 'Inspector Gadget'. Dispostions such as self-reliance and assertivenss, were also part of his habitus:

> I choose to arrange my adaptations myself and not have BankCorp bothered with it. That way I could decide for myself what to buy and take it with me if I left for another employer. I figured I would be more efficient in finding out what to buy anyway and so I handled things on my own.

He started off his career in the 'graduate management scheme' and has been moving forward at a quick pace ever since, leading up to a current Hay grade of 16. Starting off his career with a negative distinction like disability could only be neutralized through the acquirement of extensive forms of capital:

> The fact is, if you want to find a good job and you have a visual impairment, you have to come up with something extra. It's as simple as that. That's the way things work. It will never be said out loud though. And that is why, besides my very theoretical education I wanted some additional practical knowledge. And so I did an additional master at a top Business School.

By participating in the graduate management scheme, Dieter has met many different managers, and has started to mimic the actions of other individuals' practices. By imitating the practices of more experienced individuals in a field, he has learned the practices and meanings associated with the practices (Bourdieu 1977). The quote illustrates Dieter's excellent 'feel for the game', being aware of how one should act in order to gain symbolic capital. Besides this high doses of institutionalized cultural capital, Dieter also possessed good linguistic abilities and was keen on giving Power Point presentations:

> I've given a lot of Power Point presentations when I was in that particular function. It comes as a surprise to many actually. But I really enjoy giving presentations. And I must say, I am quite good at it, without wanting to brag.

Although he already had gained experience abroad during his internship within the Business School, Dieter grabbed the opportunity to go work overseas for BankCorp with open arms:

> I've also worked in London for three months. […] I wanted to see what is was like in the organization in London. In Brussels they are really soft. For instance, here they thought my Excel [software program] skills were 'excellent' while in London they said 'they could use some improvement'. And they were right! […] They're more straightforward in London and I like that, also when it comes to my disability. In Belgium they would ask me 'Will you be able to handle everything?' while in London it is just expected that I will be able to do everything. Anyone who takes on a job, is expected to be able to handle every aspect.

Dieter further also actively worked on extending his social capital:

> In my previous function I got a lot of exposure. People in high places know me now. That is very important. I'll be honest with you, I chose that function specifically for that reason. I knew I would get a lot of exposure and that this would be crucial to my career. If you want a career in the long run, you have to be known. And also known for the work you deliver. […]. Especially for me, with my disability, knowing the management is important. That way they become aware that it is not an obvious situation for me and I get a lot of positive feedback.

In line with the valued disposition of working hard, Dieter makes very long hours in the office every day. The following quote nicely illustratetes how an external structure of the field became interiorized corporeally, showcasing 'the practical operation of the habitus' (Wacquant 1993:5).

> I know, you're free to request your extra hours. But I've never asked them for two reasons: first of all, I know I work a little slower than others and I don't think I should be compensated for that, not at all! And second, when you ask for your extra hours, you're not reimbursed financially but in terms of holidays. And in my company, we already get a large amount of holidays, I don't need more, I already don't have the time to take up the ones I have now.

Hard work being part of his primary habitus, Dieter experiences it as 'normal' to work over time, definitely in the case where you had an impairment that potentially impacted your speed of reading. Dieter's habitus is well-formed in that his practice corresponds to the shared conception of the proper way of doing and being in the organization.

A very career-minded person, Dieter seems caught up in the game and takes the stakes very seriously (Bourdieu, 1998), as he wants to reach the highest possible position available in the social space:

> I've had a lot of talks with people in high management and they usually say well, you're 24 now and we can see you reach a managing position one day, but you're going to have to wait until you're 30. But I don't want to wait that long.

This first account of Dieter shows how individuals equipped with certain habitus and forms of capital can develop a fine sense of the rules of the game and learn to enact social practices in the field, allowing to accrue more symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 2000; Sieweke, 2014). It seems that Dieter managed to pass as able-bodied and conceal his impairment by proactively minimizing his disability and acting 'as normal as possible', while possessing exceptional social and cultural capitals. Like a fish, Dieter does not feel the weight of the water (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992), as he appreciates the game at play and its stakes, that is a career of climbing the hierarchal stairs and attaining high Hay grades.

4.5.3.2 Julie and Peter: stranded fish

The following two accounts illustrate how other disabled employees were unable to fully have their capitals recognized and converted into symbolic capital. Despite being socialized into a primary habitus of working hard and dispositions showing career ambition, their accounts highlight the constraints posed by the field to their social practice, leading them to 'strand'.

Julie

After a difficult job search, Julie finally obtained her first job after graduating thanks to her father who also worked at BankCorp. Despite her hearing impairment, Julie could speak fluently and relied on lip reading to understand others. As the following quote illustrate, she was consciously brought up among 'the normal':

> Both of my parents are deaf. […] But I was brought up normally, because it was important for my life at school. I understand everything, yet maybe sometimes a bit slower. My partner is hearing as well. And most of my friends are hearing.

Despite holding great institutionalized cultural capital, as she holds an academic masters' degree and additionally studied a year in London, Julie's career at BankCorp took a difficult start:

> In the end they told me they thought the 'graduate management scheme' would not be such a good idea. But they did have an open spot within tax reclaim as an administrative worker. […]. My first three days in the administrative job, I had to push two buttons.

Julie however did not sit around waiting, but took action to have her cultural capital recognized:

> I said to myself "no, I did not study 5 years and work this hard to sit here and accept such a stupid job". So I went to my manager and said I would quit. And then they started looking for a decent job, and I became social media marketer.

Later Julie heard that managers had assumed the position of administrative worker would suit her well since there was another deaf lady working there, doing a similar job. Her new job with social media was more in line with Julie's institutionalized cultural capital. Yet, missing 'the ability to decipher and manipulate the complex structures of language' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977: 72-73) still limited the field of 'possibles' for her. Not

disposing of some valued communication skills constrained her social practice in the field and her career:

> Most of my colleagues speak French. I speak French too but, French is hard for me to read lips. […]. Informally, everything is mostly in French. So socially, I'm not always up to date with my colleagues. When something very important is said, my nearest colleague, who started out here together with me, will always inform me. But most things I miss out on. And that is important around here, because a lot of informal things are said that could help you. For instance, there are a lot of social media seminars that could be interesting, but only few available places because the whole team can't be out on training at the same time. Someone has to stay in and take care of the [Facebook] pages. And those things are shared orally. So I miss out on that most of the time.

Moreover, because of the difficulty of lip reading while multiple people were speaking at the same time, she did not often have lunch with her colleagues, which hampered her ability to develop additional social capital in the company.

Clearly, despite her partially well-formed habitus and her capital, Julie experienced difficulties to convert her different forms of capital into economic capital, illustrated by her low grading on the Hay scale (11):

> Because my statute and wage in my current job are much lower compared to other colleagues doing a similar job. It's because I started out in the 'tax reclaim' unit and never got a raise. That's not really fair. I plan on asking for a raise anytime soon and will use the [wage] subsidy as a bargaining chip.

Peter

Peter has worked at the bank for 25 years and acquired his visual impairment during his early years at the bank, gradually worsening over the course of his career, leading up to quasi full blindness and needing the assistence of a guiding dog. Having an ICT job, he relies much on software that reads texts out loud in order to perform his job. Due to his experience within the bank and a strong photographic memory, he manages well.

Although Peter is well aware of the rule of the field requiring employees to work very long hours, he does not, due to technological and social constraints imposed by the field. The following quote is telling:

> The thing I don't do, that other colleagues do, is working after the [official] hours. Well in fact I do, but not as intensively as they do. And that has two reasons, at the end of the day, my energy level is really zero because a whole day of speech technology is exhausting. But secondly and most importantly, because they don't allow here to transfer the software to the server that would enable my speech technology to work from home. I also can't use the card reader to log in because you have to be able to read the screen in order to type in the numbers. […] When I'm in a meeting that exceeds the originally foreseen time, I miss my train. And train company operates with a 24 hour rule for reserving assistance, and so if I miss my train, there is no one assisting me onto the train and so I really have to make sure all the time I get on the train that I originally reserved.

Despite his ambition to occupy a high position within the field and his familiarity with the field, he seems unable to succesfully convert his capital into economic capital:

> I think that job progression opportunities will be more easily offered to other people than me. The budget for pay increases is also limited each year. I think they will more easily reward other colleagues financially than me, because the probability of them leaving the company is higher. (Peter, 49, visually impaired web support manager with a bachelor degree).

He is often denied symbolic capital by the field and its actors:

> When we merged with bank X, the marketing department of that bank was obliged to take over the employees of BankCorp. They never told me who but someone in management had said 'What are we with someone with no sight?' But that person afterwards told the others he was surprised at what I could all do. I suspect that, this happens as well in meetings with external people… A couple of people will always think, what is he doing here?

As illustrated by their accounts, Julie and Peter are not quite fish in the water, yet not fully out of water either. The metaphor of stranded fish, one side drifting in water and the other side on shore, seems more appropriate here. They possess some degree of valued capital and knowledge of the field, yet their social practice did not fully enact the desired behaviour, constraining their ability to take up high positions in the field. The analysis of their accounts unveil how the doxa – the taken-for-granted assumptions and presuppositions in the field (Bourdieu, 1990) – is infused with ableism, acting as an organizing principle informing the rules that need to be followed in order to play the game successfully. For instance, various actors in the field assumed that disabled people would occupy the low-ranked repetitive jobs in the bank, regardless of their actual capital (e.g. Julie's account). Career advancement was often denied to the disabled players because it was assumed they were immobile, unable to go anywhere anyway (e.g. Peter's account). And lastly there was the expectancy of doing overtime, a rule organized around the norm of an ideal, able-bodied worker that does not need any time for recuperation and is not hindered by external structures in the decision to make long hours (e.g. Peter's account).

4.5.3.3 Maarten and Mark: fish out of water

The accounts of the following two respondents tell yet a different story. These players started off playing the game without valuable institutionalized cultural capital, yet with an eager to develop successful careers. These dispositions were however revised after encountering, in their social practice, ableist rules in the field.

Maarten

Maarten has been a loyal employee at the bank for over 35 years now. Ten years back, he acquired multipe sclerosis, causing his sight to decrease to 30% and making him less mobile than before. Altough he did not dispose of much institutionalized cultural capital (as he only held high school degree), he was at one point in the running for obtaining a promotion:

> Before I became ill, I was considered for an accretion of pay, in the form of a nomination. Then in 2004 they told me the nomination was no longer going to happen because of the impairment I had acquired. Because of "the potential

> that I now did not have anymore"! […] Now I'm like, I don't expect anything from the bank anymore, but neither should they expect anything from me. I do my hours and that's that.

Through the confrontation of no longer being valued in the field and the refusal to grant him symbolic capital, Maarten revised his social practice and his dispositions. He gradually lost interest for the stakes at play:

> Someone like me with 30 years of service has a rating of 11 on the Hay-scale. It makes me feel…. You know, someone who has worked here for only 6 months and sits at the counter with a similar degree also has an 11 on the scale. […] I actually feel underappreciated.

Mark

Mark was born as a deaf person with limited speech abilitiy. He went to a specialized school which made his diploma of low value within the particular field of BankCorp.

> I live a good life, I have a wife, car, house, everything, I go on holidays, … But if I had been hearing, I am sure I would have built a successful career. All of my cousins and nephews are university schooled.

Thanks to his father who at the time worked for the company, he started his career 35 years ago within the printing department.

> And then I transferred to photography. We were six there in the beginning. And for every person that retired, no new person was hired. I did the same amount of work as every other colleague there, sometimes even better. And yet each time a person left they did not grant me the nomination. And when the last person left, they had no choice but to give it to me. But I really had to fight for it.

After his struggles to become acknowledged as containing the valued technical skills, despite the missing institutionalized cultural capital in the form of educational credentials, many other struggles persisted. He for instance did not further develop his professional capital during trainings or courses, because these were organized in an ableist way:

> I took on all kinds of trainings during my career. An instructor always gives a presentation with a beamer, and all the other participants can hear him talk and watch the beamer projection at the same time. But for me, I always have to switch between the instructor to read lips and the screen, that's impossible… I don't go to courses anymore because there is no use in going. […]. I only understand 20%. I asked the instructor many times to personally instruct me on the most essential stuff for just a few hours. […].

Due to his impairment, he only possessed limited communication skills, and could not count on much flexibility on other actors' behalf.

> I always have to explain, explain, explain, … They do not understand anything about deafness! Nothing at all! They think, well if you can read lips, you're able to understand things. But imagine you're sitting before the television, and you put it on mute, try reading people's lips. You'll get tired of it after three minutes. For me, that's every day's reality.

Again the expectancy of being a fluent communicator posed constraints on a person's career as he could not always work autonomously and had to rely on colleagues to translate material to his native language. Yet his manager did not always see these communication issues as disability-related, contributing his requests for help of colleagues to laziness.

Both Maarten and Mark seemed to have entered the field with the ambition to progress and a belief in the meritocratic rules of the field, yet after having encountered various struggles to get their capital acknowledged, now developed a social practice and a habitus that clashed with the rules of the field. They seemed not to be in a context where they could thrive, like fish out the water. Like the two previous accounts, the stories of Maarten and Mark illustrate the doxic ableist rules in the field: disabled people were unsuited for leadership positions (e.g. Maarten's account) and communication skills were assumed non-disability related (e.g. Mark's account), leading to missed opportunities for professional development through trainings.

4.6 Discussion and conclusion

Taking a Bourdieuan perspective, this study sought to extend the lens of ableism by showing how it is not only an organizing principle through regulating identities but also informs social practices in the workplace. Ableist rules of the game urged disabled workers to act in particular ways aligned with the ideal way of being and doing, in order to successfully navigate the field. Centered on social practice and reflecting the interaction between field, capital and habitus, the analysis revealed how different disabled employees within the same highly competitive field, were able, through their social practice, to take different positions. Some proved better equipped to deal with the ableist constraints, yet existing power relations between disabled and able-bodied colleagues remained easily acceptable and beyond challenge (Bourdieu, 1977; 1990). This social distinction created in the field, although arbitrary, occurred as natural common sense and disabled people themselves sometimes partook in it. For instance, many disabled interviewees saw no need for the organization to adapt teambuilding activities in order to include them as such efforts were described as 'too demanding'. And some participants mentioned how they assumed promotions were not given to them because of their disability, but never undertook action to have this investigated.

Instead of a binary structure of disability/able-bodiedness, as conceptualized in studies of ableism as organizing principle of discursive structures (Williams and Mavin, 2012; Jammaers, et al., 2016), the analysis revealed how some disabled people, with different histories (habitus) and in different social positions, were better able to 'play the game'. These findings therefore qualify ableism, as they show how within a given field some employees with impairments might be more able-bodied as others, showcasing the need to look beyond the disabled/able-bodied dichotomy to accurately understand the operation of ableist practices and their effects. This analysis thus brings in a more nuanced picture than the binary theorization of ableism suggests (e.g. Campbell, 2009). A strict dichotomization does not do justice to the complexity of social practice, and neither does it do justice to the agency of players in the field.

We could observe some instances of resistant social practice, illustrating the struggles in the field (Emirbayer and Johnson, 2008). For instance, Julie threatened to quit her job and Maarten refused to actively take part in the game. Dieter, on the other hand,

resisted through excelling, blowing everyone's mind with his drive and commitment to success. Different from approaches to ableism that focus on discourse, a Bourdieuan theorization allows to go beyond the power of language through subjection into the power language exerts by providing meaning to social practices through which scarce forms of capital are continuously distributed in a social field. This perspective allows to see how a subject is structurally enabled or disabled to gather valuable material resources through the articulation between field and habitus and capitals.

Ableism informed the field as an organizing principle of social practice, maintaining a broad spectrum ranging from able-bodied to disabled workers based on hegemonic beliefs about the ideal employee. Although open and direct discriminatory practices in the workplace may seem long perished, this research has shown how some ableist power structures stay alive, and continue to devalue many disabled people in various real yet subtle ways. The internal struggles experienced in this field by disabled employees, can be re-connected to broader ableism-based symbolic violence in society, devaluing actors with impairments and making some people accept the limits assigned to them.

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5 EPILOGUE

In this last section of this dissertation, an overview will be given of the three papers presented in the previous chapters. Next some theoretical lessons will be drawn. Then the political implications resulting from this work will be delineated. Following this, some reflections on the social constructionist approach used and my position as a researcher will be drawn. And to end, the methodological and theoretical limitations of this dissertation will be given, together with some directions for future research.

5.1 OVERVIEW OF THE PAPERS

It has been my aim in this dissertation to expand our current knowledge on the mechanisms that lead to the socio-economic disadvantage of disabled people. In line with the lens of ableism, I have conceptualized power as exerted by language and discourse through the definition of who disabled people are, what they can become and which positions they can occupy in an organization. The main goal of this dissertation was to theoretically refine the concept of ableism and extend it in the context of work. I operationalized this aim into three papers that each sought to answer more specific research questions.

The first paper 'Constructing positive identities in ableist workplaces: Disabled employees' discursive practices engaging with the discourse of lower productivity' extended our knowledge of ableism by showing how grant discourses of ableism affect disabled worker's identities, yet not necessarily in totalizing ways. Specifically, this paper offered a localized view on ableism by revealing the ways by which grant ableist ideas of lower productivity were appropriated in the workplace through individual's own identity work. By connecting such macro, societal discourses with their manifestations within individuals own, micro identity work, an agent-centered perspective on ableist discourses was offered. Three broad strategies were identified through which ableism was appropriated by disabled individuals: contesting the discourse of lower productivity, generating alternative meanings of productivity, and refusing individual responsibility for lower productivity. The disabled respondents frequently combined these, resulting in complex, multilayered identities which stand in ambiguous relations to the discourse of lower productivity and to ableism as an organizing principle.

The second paper 'Ableism at work: Disability/able-bodiedness as a principle of organizing subjects in three organizations' refined the concept of ableism through demonstrating how organizations put forward a specific interpretation of the grant discourse of ableism. This paper further contributes to the overall goal of the dissertation by investigating how ableism informs identity regulatory processes in organizations. It connects ableism as a grant discourse putting forward a strong binary between disabled and able-bodied subjects, to organizational level manifestations and to disabled individual's appropriation hereof through their own identity work. The paper shows how organizations play a key role in continuing ableism within company walls, yet do this in particular ways with particular meanings attributed to both sides of the constitutive binary. In the first organization, disability was constructed as a lack and in direct contrast to the ideal worker. In the second organization, disabled workers were constituted as ambitious self-managing workers, able to reach the ideal image of a worker as long as they assimilated and silenced their impairment. While in the third organization, disabled workers were seen as cared-for,

included disabled employees, complementary to the ideal caring, inclusive able-bodied employee. Rather than unproblematically reproducing these constructions, the disabled workers in each organization undertook both conformist and resistant identity work. The dominant identity regulatory discourses informed by ableism were defining yet often not totalizing.

Finally, the third paper 'Ableism in the workplace through a Bourdieuan perspective: Enabling/disabling social practice in a financial services company' advanced our knowledge of ableism by illustrating how ableist practices affect individuals differently in the same organization. More specifically, this paper offers a practice-based interpretation of ableism into one particular organizational setting, bringing along a deeper understanding of the various outcomes ableism provokes for different individuals. Through the use of Bourdieu's framework, this analysis has shown how ableism is not just a discursive organizing principle, but also a principle that informs social practices, posing constraints on the capitals disabled individuals are able to accrue and on their careers. Particular rules within the organizational field disadvantaged certain disabled workers and impeded their efforts to play the game successfully. Disabled people often did not succeed in fully embodying the ideal worker of BankCorp and acquiring high levels of symbolic capital. Yet the analysis has also allowed to nuance the binary traditionally seen as constitutive of ableism, since some disabled players were better equipped with a habitus and capitals that allowed them to navigate the ableist structures of the field more successfully than others. The approach used here was more agentic than in the previous two papers, in the sense that disabled employees were strategically conceptualized as playing a game. Sometimes their accounts also hinted acts of resistance.

5.2 THEORETICAL LESSONS

The contributions of this dissertation can be situated in two fields of study: on the one hand studies on disability in work and on the other hand 'critical management studies' (CMS). In what follows I will shortly define each field and denote the contributions made.

1 CONTRIBUTIONS TO STUDIES ON DISABILITY IN WORK

This dissertation can contribute to disability studies that engage with the issues of work. Disability studies as an academic discipline took off in the 1990's and explores the implications of the social model of disability in an interdisciplinary way (Shakespeare, 1998). The field emerged as a reaction to the 'overly individualized accounts of disability that prevailed in much of the interpretive accounts which then dominated medical sociology' (Vehmas and Watson, 2014: 639).

In the introduction of this dissertation, it became clear that various explanations have been given for the socio-economic disadvantage of disabled people. Through extending our current framework of ableism in the workplace, new knowledge was produced to look at the issue in an alternative fashion. Rather than theorizing individual, material, attitudinal or discursive barriers, the lens developed here has exposed the ableist symbolic structures grounded in a binary constellation of disabled/able-bodied. Marginalization within the workplace is interpreted as the result of grant ableist discourses that penetrate organizations and control employees by impinging upon (disabled) workers own identity and informing

ableist social practices, yet never in totalizing nor uniform ways. The lens reveals how the binary structure of ableism regulates social life through the symbolic, and how this reproduces domination and subordination. The role of the individual in engaging with these discursive structures has also been pointed out, something that is often missing from other 'cultural model'-inspired explanations for the socio-economic disadvantage of disabled people.

This study has shown how ableism as a grant, societal discourse is flexibly practiced by organizations as a powerful tool for controlling disabled and able-bodied workers. This controlling occurred through regulating identities but also through invoking certain social practices. Ableism worked by exerting power on (disabled) workers, by enforcing a certain way of being upon them, more specifically a productive being, consonant with the demands of capitalist organizations. However, rather than working in a universalist way, ableism as a powerful set of ideas, processes and practices played out differently in different contexts. Organizations play a key, proactive role in the production of localized forms of ableism. The inferiority of disability as a state of lesser humanity, characteristic of ableism, was not all-embracing but qualified in each context, limited to specific dimensions such as productivity and flexibility, encumbered potential, or need to be helped and cared for. Moreover, as an organizing principle exerting socio-ideological control, ableism had specific implications in each work context, not only for disabled employees, but also for those labeled able-bodied, sustaining ideologies of desirable and less desirable employees. Deeply embedded within the common sense knowledge and logic of the workplace, ableism defined what a worthy organizational member looked, his or her preferred set of abilities, and what lied outside the scope of acceptability. Masked by a seemingly natural logic of human capital, ability-based discrimination continued on unnoticed. This omnipresence of ableism within the taken-for-granted assumptions in the workplace that were regarded as 'natural', anchored disabled people's inferiority in the power relations inherent in the social space.

The study has also shown how ableism constituted a persistent power structure, in which disabled people themselves partook, both through their identity work and social practices. For disabled workers within the same organization, the consequences, both symbolic and material, of an ableist organizational environment differed, pointing out (limited) possibilities for resistance. Although workplaces in general uphold an understanding of ability and disability as mutually exclusive and fixed categories, an analysis of the social practices constitutive of ableism showed that some disabled bodies were constructed as more able than others. In this sense, ableism seems to indicate the two opposite poles of a broader spectrum rather than a binary, or two sides of the same coin. This spectrum remains constructed through power relations and beliefs about the ideal productive body. Although less dually conceptualized, ableism keeps serving the maintenance of a social order through constructed categories. Capitalism, with its preoccupation for productivity, and neo-liberalism with its urge for a lifelong self-improvement in a 'do it yourself' culture, serve as the background for normalization processes into 'able-bodied' subjectivities.

2 CONTRIBUTIONS TO CRITICAL MANAGEMENT STUDIES

This dissertation can be positioned with the field of critical management studies (CMS). This field aims to provide 'knowledge that questions the wisdom of taking the neutrality or virtue of management as self-evident or unproblematic' (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992: 1). De-

naturalization forms an important part of such undertakings. (Fournier and Grey, 2000). This dissertation adheres to such principle because it documents on ableism, or the naturalized privileging of able-bodied organizational actors over disabled ones. It herewith tries to expose and rethink conventionalist and essentialist understandings of disability, or difference more in general, in the workplace. This dissertation expands the current knowledge framework within the CMS field in several ways.

My analysis revealed that disability, conceptualized as a social construct, holds much in common with other identities (e.g. gender, ethnicity and class) in the workplace. Similar to them, disability works to control individuals by dividing and organizing them, whilst delineating subject positions which enable and constrain specific ways of acting and behaving appropriately (Acker, 2006; Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). As an organizing principle in the workplace, ableism holds implications that move beyond disabled people. By structuring contemporary workplaces in ways that subordinate specific forms of embodiment relative to others, this lens offers a new way of theorizing bodily 'fit' and norms and how they are inscribed within the power relations of the organization. Ableism could for instance explain how certain abilities and bodies become preferred or seen as essential and positive in a particular work context, while those of older workers become devaluated and negative. Wolbring (2012) similarly has argued for expanding the ableism concept beyond how it is used in disability studies at this point. The ableism concept can indeed potentially change the way we think about human embodiment in contemporary workplaces and explain discriminatory practices of all kinds. These are masked by the seemingly innocent and 'natural' preference for certain abilities by managers, but in fact are the result of the misconstruction of historically disadvantaged groups.

Although there is a neglect within CMS to engage with issues of disability to the same extent as with issues of gender, race and even sexuality, CMS can learn from the study of disabled workers. Disabled people represent an 'extreme case': they are believed to be the ultimate modality through which exclusion and resistance can be understood (Davis, 2002) or the 'master trope of human disqualification' (Mitchell and Snyder, 2000: 3). Along the same lines, disabled workers can be understood as 'an oxymoron'. Meaning, the closer an identity touches on the productive potential of an individual human being, the more challenging its integration into paid labor becomes. In the context of employment were capabilities and abilities are the main reference language to decide whether someone will be included or excluded, disabled people are confronted with serious symbolic barriers, providing a magnification from which other social identity scholars can learn. Our hegemonic able societies host a wide range of oppressive practices to all those who cannot live up to the species-typical ideal citizen, who is a rational and autonomous modernist (Goodley, 2014; Shildrick, 2009), including but not limited to disabled people. Individuals who through their specific embodiment threaten the privilege of the 'precariously able-bodied' are assimilated and normalized or segregated into invisible low skilled jobs, or distanced through supported and sheltered employment systems. Ableism denies not only disabled bodies, but all forms of human diversity in the search of a nationwide assimilation and creation of a normative hyper productive workforce. In this sense ableism works as a sort of biopolitics: 'under the skin and across the population' (Goodley, 2014: 32).

In this historic era following industrialization, where people are qualified as human beings on the basis of their capacity to produce, ableism becomes a highly relevant mechanism to understand, touching more lives than just those of disabled people. Previous work had already noted that under influence of the neo-liberal paradigm, paid work has been

positioned unproblematically as the principal mechanism to secure 'social inclusion' and become a 'normal', 'true' citizen (Erevelles, 2002; Vandekinderen, et al., 2012; Wilton and Schuer, 2006). Individual productivity has become the ultimate measure for sorting the worthy citizens from the unworthy. More and more, it has been conceptualised as a sole individual's responsibility. Neoliberalism in this sense 'psychologizes' the conditions of productivity, favouring those constructed as able and minimalizing the socio-political nature of ableist privilege (Goodley, 2014). As a result, the workless are pushed into becoming 'able-laborers', while the welfare state becomes increasingly hostile (Goodley, 2014). State support is being reduced while society is permeated by discourses of meritocracy and entrepreneurship, feeding into a compulsory need for able-bodiedness, independence and autonomy (Goodley, 2014). This has led to a labor market in which the 'able-body/mind' remains a largely unquestioned norm. In this sense, the principles of neo-liberalism and ableism go hand in hand, coined by the term 'neoliberal-ableism' (Goodley, 2014: 33). Such straightforward relationship is however nuanced in this dissertation, as not all interpretations of ableism advance a standard typical neoliberal subject. Nevertheless, we can agree that neoliberal-ableism has turned differences in corporeality and ability into an unquestioned and justificatory ground for exclusion in many organizations today.

5.3 POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

The de-naturalization of ableist discourses and practices in organizations has a number of important political implications. The lens proposed in this dissertation foregrounds a deconstructive strategy that helps unveil the power of meaning in structuring social life. Critique is a first step towards unravelling mechanisms of oppression at the symbolic level. The specific theory developed here also helps understand how mechanisms at the symbolic level are imbricated with the constitution of subjectivity: they give us a language to speak and think about ourselves. In this section, the political implications for disabled individuals will first be outlined and how this relates to the collective goal of emancipation. Next, some implications for organizations are drawn. As a last step, conclusions are made regarding governmental agencies implicated in issues of employment of disabled people.

This dissertation has placed much emphasis on individuals' engagement with ableist symbolic structures. As we have seen, the responsibility for becoming a hyper productive ideal citizen is passed on almost entirely to disabled individuals themselves while the welfare state is further rolled back leading to a neoliberal-ableism (Goodley, 2014). Through small acts of micro-emancipation, disabled individuals can however resist this evolution, by critiquing what is means to be 'able' or 'normal' or by celebrating disability. In the three papers, such forms of 'creativity' sprung up on occasion, indicating that the possibilities for individual agency are wide-ranging and need further encouragement. As has been illustrated, the defining power of ableism can, through the identity work and social practices of individuals, be contested and questioned. These everyday struggles of employees to undo ableist ideas in their own direct environment will help destabilize the cultural 'common-knowledge' of what it means to be 'normal'. By stepping forward as change agents in their own micro-context, disabled workers can try to destabilize the cultural performance of dis/ability and ab/normality. However, we must also at a more collective level contest the neoliberal discourse that only acknowledges a 'do it yourself' citizenship and keep on politicizing the experience of living with impairments. This can be done through disability pride movements (Swain and French, 2000), disability arts, and with regard to employment might best be served through propagating the 'economic value' of disabled workers through

the business case of diversity (e.g. Andreassen, 2012; Värlander, 2012; Jammaers, et al., 2016), without of course resorting to exploitative arguments of cheap labor (Kumar, et al., 2014). However, the business case holds potential dangers as well, as seen in the first paper.

Besides these individual and collective attempts at changing the symbolic ableist structures in workplaces, additional action is needed to bring along the cultural revolution needed. Efforts need to be paralleled by collective movements aiming for changes in the material structures of society. However, there are also limits to what one can achieve based on such collective identity politics alone, despite the great advancement made by disability movements. To obtain full equality, legislation and material advancements have indeed proven insufficient: our understanding of the modernist subject as an autonomous and rational being and our reluctance to accept any compromise also need to change (Shildrick, 2012). A similar conclusion was drawn earlier with regard to the feminist movement who went from pursuing ideals of social equality, or social redistribution, to investing more energy in cultural change or social recognition (Fraser, 2005). Fraser however warns for the repressing of social egalitarian claims and the removal of any association with political economy that accompanied this movement under force of hegemonic neoliberalism (Fraser, 2005). In order to reach successful inclusion of disabled people then, socio-political liberation and symbolic struggles, should be simultaneously aimed for. The lens of ableism, through undermining the binary, questioning 'normalcy' and emphasizing the fluidity of identity categories, can assist the latter cause. To ensure that cutting across binaries and resolving the categories of disabled/able-bodied does not further feed into the neo-liberalist ambition to make people completely individually responsible for their labor market participation and economic valuation, a collective voice from the disabled community needs to remain heard. Being sensitive to individual differences within the community does not necessarily threaten the central political goals of disabled people (Shakespeare and Watson, 1997). Rather, the combining of individual and collective symbolic struggles with more materialist aims of the disability movement together will bring us closer to equal opportunities and a radical transformation of 'the exclusionary structures of modernism that have suppressed the subjectivity of disabled people' (Shildrick, 2009: 171).

Next some implications for organizations can be drawn. My critical approach has allowed to reveal how ableism has important identity regulating effects on disabled people and also impacts the actual social positions people are allowed to occupy within the organization. Examples of how ableism operates as an organizing principle have been outlined that could educate managers and other actors in the organization, including disabled employees, on the different ways ableism constraints the workplace experiences and careers of disabled people and how this can be prevented. It has taken decades to make the operation of gender regimes rendering organizations into male bastions visible (Acker, 2006), and it is very likely that a similar awareness of ableism will not be accomplished overnight. At a bare minimum, managers must start by assessing what the ideal worker in their organization looks like and whether or not disabled workers are constructed as the antithesis of that. At its best, organizations would radically destabilize the disability/able-bodiedness binary and the attached meanings of normal/abnormal. By broadening the norms of what valuable competencies look like, disabled workers would be freed from assumptions of less economic value. Training managers alone will not be enough as discursive structures need to be addressed through organizational practices and processes at the core of the organization as well (Janssens and Zanoni, 2014). This can be achieved by an inclusive diversity management with practices such as job requirements, assessment procedures and work design clear of ableist assumptions (Janssens and Zanoni, 2014).

Ideally, the organization would resemble a 'barrier free utopia' both in terms of physical environment – a design that is aimed at (work)spaces that can be equally used and experienced to the greatest extent possible by individuals of all abilities (Iwarsson and Ståhl, 2003) - and organizational practices and procedures (Shakespeare, 2006a). By radically (re)designing jobs, as opposed to more reactive single reasonable adjustments, disabled employees would be able to perform optimally. The same goes for spatial arrangements within the built environment of the organization: a universal design philosophy should be omnipresent while targeted measures should be exceptions to the rule, rather than easy solutions to failures to a-priori consider the diversity of potential employees (Imrie and Hall, 2001; Van Laer, et al., 2015). By ensuring that the norms and physical/material structures within the organization embrace different bodies and minds, individuals will no longer be required to assimilate to majority standards or be accommodated through segregating and stigmatizing modifications or target group policies (Janssens and Zanoni, 2014; Van Laer, et al., 2015).

And lastly, governmental agencies should try to promote policies that equally destabilize the binary reducing disabled people to devalued others. First of all, as my overview of the literature has proven, all too often, policies are based on an a-theoretical appraisal of particular policies (Roulstone, 2002). Policy makers should be reflexive of how their policies give meaning to disability and if they sufficiently emphasize the rights based paradigm as proclaimed by the CRPD (2006), as opposed to stressing the duties of disabled workers to contribute to society. Secondly, my data illustrated the great differences between disabled people, illustrating their different needs in terms of government support. Aligned with the spirit of the CRPD, policy makers should judge each policy based on the self-determination of disabled people. This principle has to prevail, as they are the best knowers of their own experience and should have a say in the instruments used to support them. Thirdly, it needs to be remarked that although cutting across binaries would be the ultimate and ideal goal of government initiatives, this does not imply that 'disability labels' should not be used anymore to determine who is entitled to financial and other forms of aid. Obviously, even if disabled people are not marginalized anymore, they will still sometimes need various forms of government assistance. Disability can and for this reason should remain 'a difference' to be accounted for. However, 'it need not be a negated difference but could be a difference which is neither valued nor devalued' (Williams and Mavin, 2012: 171). And fourth, this dissertation has illustrated how upholding productivity as the only measure for evaluating citizens is highly problematic. Policies should lower their emphasis on the normative images of individuals as fulltime productive workforces and offer a broader range of possibilities for meaningful participation in our society (Hall and Wilton, 2011). People have to be given the choice on how they see their preferred participation instead of being pushed into an able-laboring identity by neoliberalism.

5.4 Reflections on my position as a researcher

In this dissertation, I have taken a social constructionist approach, meaning I do not claim to have studied absolute truths or objectively lived realities (Alvesson, 2010; Danieli and Woodhams, 2005). Rather, in making this social (discursive) analysis, I have constructed a specific account of the participants and their interrelations which is inevitably selective and partial as it relies on and reflects my own linguistic, analytical and cultural resources. In this sense, it is in itself a construction and not a definitive or correct account warranting self-reflexivity on my own values and assumptions and how they might have influenced the

process of inquiry (Cunliffe, 2003). Before going in deeper on how my presence might have affected the different stages in the research process, I would like to articulate my own identity and privilege as a non-disabled researcher (Goodley, 2011; Zanoni and Van Laer, 2015). I will end this section with a short note on the diffusion of the produced knowledge.

By conducting research about disabled people, I, as a young white, middle-class, Western and able-bodied female, have engaged myself in the imposition of power. I however follow Shildrick (2012) who has made the following comment: 'the responsibility for enquiry and analysis of ableism falls on all those who participate in the relevant structures, both those identified with normative standards and those constructed as excessive to them' (39). Despite my own embodiment, the goal of this dissertation has been to deconstruct the 'truthfulness' of ableism by exposing its 'unnaturalness' and irrationality. Through the challenging of ableist structures, I have shared in the aim for emancipation, of which the importance has been stressed by many eminent disability scholars (e.g. Stone and Priestley, 1996; Goodley, 2011; Danieli and Woodhams, 2005). The act of critiquing, undertaken in this dissertation, can be considered as an important first step in reaching 'the liberation of disabled people from the hostile normativities of contemporary western societies' (Shildrick, 2009: 175).

As a researcher, I remain present in the studies, both in the process of selecting a theoretical lens, collecting the data and co-constructing the narratives, and of subsequently interpreting the results (Hardy, et al., 2001; Zanoni and Van Laer, 2015). For instance, regarding the focus of the research, it could be argued that by presenting the project to the participants from the start as a work-related inquiry, I have preliminary foreclosed the emergence of other important identities that are not work-related yet might have been more essential to the respondents' self-view, downplaying their own voice. A similar remark can be made regarding the theoretical lens: for instance in this project impairment effects have been sidelined, whereas such aspects might have had a more prominent role in the actual identity work undertaken by disabled respondents. So although primacy was given to the perspectives of disabled people themselves, as they are the best knowers of their own experiences, their voices might have been downplayed in various ways.

Furthermore, in the data collection and co-construction process, my able-bodiedness might have led to a withdrawal from disabled respondents' engagement in an open conversation as they could see that I had little understanding of what it meant to have a particular chronic illness or impairment or be disabled by society. On the contrary, it could also have been so that they more vigorously expressed instance of when they were disabled through organizational arrangements. Likewise, it could have been that line managers spoke more freely about the difficulties they encountered when employing someone with an impairment. However, as they knew I was a social scientist interested in 'the experiences of disabled people in the workplace' the opposite might have been true and they might have held back, in an attempt of window dressing. So there are multiple possibilities for how being able-bodied might have had an impact on the conversations produced during the interviews.

And lastly, regarding interpretations of the interviews, I realize that my interpretations might not have always remained close to the intentions of the participants. I acknowledge that there are many different ways of interpreting and understanding the data produced here. In line with my epistemological stance, the authorship of the offered interpretation (as researcher) is mine and my ability as a researcher to capture the complex, interactional and emergent nature of social experience is limited (Cunliffe, 2003). I have

however included two research practices in this analysis that have, to a limited degree, attempted to downplay the effect of my presence in the data. First of all, I have triangulated the data through the research design. Because I interviewed multiple respondent groups in the three organizations, I have several accounts to rely on for instance in order to construct a fairly whole image of the existing disability policies. Sometimes I also spoke to supervisors of disabled employees I had already interviewed earlier (this pairing coincidence occurred in ten of the 30 cases). This too provided me with multiple interpretations of the same interpersonal relation or social event. And secondly, the data were also interpreted by two other authors who did not partake in the collection of the data and therefor can be believed to have taken a more distant stance.

Although critical concepts can help to reveal the meaningful power relations in organizations better and advance a critique necessary to envision alternatives, because they are theoretically dense, they paradoxically also hamper the communication to non-scholarly audiences that might actually want to stimulate change in organizational settings. As this project was funded by the Policy Research Centre on Equal Opportunities by the Flemish Government, more 'hands on' recommendations were sometimes sought after. This led to numerous moments of unease while trying to formulate pieces of advice to employment support professionals, organizations employing disabled workers, policy makers and disabled individuals, which were at the core of my critique in the first place. This approach to disability was conducive to developing a critique of the three organizations under study, that is, in what way they were infused with ableism, rather than conducive to imagining alternatives to ableist organizing. Despite a less straightforward connection to action, I do believe that this dissertation contributes to 'the cause' of disabled people, by providing feedback on the results of the study to participants, and by making more apparent how ableist assumptions, deeply embedded in the sub-consciousness of our societies, can structurally disadvantage those deemed different within the workplace.

5.5 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Despite the rich insights generated in this research project through the design chosen and the theoretical lens applied, some interesting accounts and research questions have also been neglected due to limited time resources and the chosen approach. Therefore, this last part of the dissertation is dedicated to pointing out some methodological and theoretical limitations regarding the following topics: sampling of respondents, sampling of organizations, the absence of coworkers and the low attention to materiality and corporeality. Some suggestions for future research are also made.

A first set of limitations result from the sampling choices made for respondents. First of all, because the disabled participants who answered my email and were willing to participate in the study were selected, a first limitation is the *self-selection bias in respondents.* Despite the heterogeneity of the voices that could be collected, it could be the case that participants' experiences differed from those workers who were not willing to partake in the study. Secondly, the respondents who answered to my call mainly had physical and sensorial impairments. Only three out of thirty participants had *impairments of a more psychological nature*. Research has consistently shown how individuals with such impairments are more often subjected to ill-treatment and bullying (Fevre, et al., 2013; Foster and Scott, 2015). Ableist assumptions and mechanisms might be more pronounced under such circumstances or complicate the relationship when individuals are able to

disclose or 'pass' as able-bodied. This bring me to a third limitation: issues surrounding *visibility and disclosure* of impairments were left unattended in the dissertation. Due to the specific recruitment strategy chosen, participants had disclosed their impairment to at least the HR department. This did of course not mean that all colleagues were informed to the same extent on the specifics of a particular impairment. In the future, research should engage with the effects of disclosure decisions on the identity work undertaken by individuals and differentiate between the attempts at resisting ableist assumptions for workers with visible and invisible impairments. A fourth and last limitation regarding the sampling of respondents is the absence of *people with intellectual disabilities*. These were purposively not included because in order to be asked questions about their impairment and disability, participants needed an awareness about having a disability or being labelled as having one. Also out of concern for a level of uniformity in the experience of oppression by society, and due to the specific research techniques and ethics advised when conducting research on this group (Knox, et al., 2000), I opted to leave out these individuals. Although this choice might be plausible from research design and practical considerations, it might be less defendable from ethical, theoretical and political ones.

A second set of limitations result from the sampling of organizations. First of all, *sheltered and other supported forms of employment* have been neglected in this research project. This was done to ensure the comparability of a limited number of case studies. Notwithstanding this choice, an enquiry of ableist structures in this type of settings holds great potential value. They are likely to look different from those found in the regular labor market, as the imperative of profit is absent and the urge for productivity is softened. Since in sheltered workshops, a large percentage of the workers have an impairment, disabled people constitute the majority and this could alter the power relations between disabled and non-disabled workers and reduce the binary constellation characteristic of ableism. Secondly, due to the difficulty of recruiting organizations willing to take part in the study, the final sample of cases included only one for-profit company and two *public companies*. Although New Public Management which was introduced in both public organizations in recent years tends to align these three organizational settings, future research should investigate further whether and how private and public organizations differ in terms of ableist social and discursive practices and their outcomes for (disabled) employees. And thirdly, sampling occurring in different *national contexts* could have enriched the results. Future research could, beside a comparison of ableism between organizations (chapter 3) and between individuals (chapter 4) compare the mechanism of ableism occurring in different national and institutional contexts. The wage subsidy for instance played an important role within the Belgian context in strengthening the discourse of lower productivity. How this is different from other policy choices made in other settings remains a question to be answered.

Thirdly, although originally planned, it was ultimately decided to not interview colleagues of disabled respondents. For ethical reasons, asking to the disabled employee whether I could interview one or two of his/her direct colleagues was difficult. After having posed the question a couple of times to the first respondents of the project, I decided not to further pursue this group of respondents because the question led to unease and discomfort. In this sense, the meaning able-bodied coworkers attributed to disability could not be captured, nor could the degree to which colleagues help reproduce or contest ableist discourses in the work environment, or control their disabled colleagues by drawing on the disabled/able-bodied binary be reestablished. Despite this failure to include them in the analysis, their role in ableism is important, as ableism requires an investigation of both sides

of the binary. In the future, a research design that can provide both types of information without posing ethical concerns or discomfort for the disabled respondents involved should be carefully considered.

And as a last set of limitations, in this research project, more material aspects of the disabling process of employees with impairments in work settings have been omitted. For instance the built workplace environment remained undiscussed as well as more mundane materiality in the workplace (e.g. Corlett and Williams, 2016). Also impairment effects have not been highlighted. Although social discrimination can be captured without studying these aspects of the workplace experience, disability occupies a unique identity that must navigate the terrain between both social stigma and physical/cognitive difference (Mitchel and Snyder, 2000). Indeed, debates on including the body into a social analysis have gained much attention over the past decades. Several authors now put forward the need for a more embodied epistemology of disability as an attempt to re-socialize impairment (Goodley, 2011; Hughes and Paterson, 1997; Shakespeare, 2006b; Thomas, 1999). The compatibility of ableism with the concept of impairment effects was illustrated by Williams and Mavin (2012). Future research could further investigate how impairment effects and other material practices fit within the ableism lens developed here, centered on discursive and social practices.

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ANNEX: NEDERLANDSTALIGE SAMENVATTING

Het recht van personen met een beperking om te werken wordt onderstreept in het VN-verdrag inzake de Rechten van Personen met een Handicap (2006). Hoewel de landen die dit verdrag mede ondertekenden zijn gewezen op hun verantwoordelijkheden om dit recht te vrijwaren stellen we vast dat de socio-economische achterstelling van personen met een beperking in vele landen een harde realiteit blijft. Talrijke cijfergegevens tonen aan dat de arbeidsmarkten onvoldoende zijn opengesteld voor zij die als 'anders' worden beschouwd. Zo zijn er onder andere vele hiaten in tewerkstellingscijfers, lonen en kwaliteit van het werk.

Een groot aantal studies heeft gezocht naar verklaringen voor de achterstelling op de arbeidsmarkt van personen met een beperking, hierbij zich berustend op verschillende modellen van handicap. Terwijl een individueel model van handicap de oorzaak voor die achterstelling zoekt binnen het individu met een beperking, zoekt een sociaal model van handicap voor verklaringen in de sociale omgeving. Bij het eerste model zijn lichamelijke en cognitieve afwijkingen van de norm de oorzaak van de achterstelling en bij het laatste model zijn de sociale en politieke structuren verantwoordelijk voor het achterstellen van mensen met een beperking. De meest bekende sociale aanpak is het 'sociale barrières model' dat vooral aanhang won vanaf de jaren '70 bij activisten en academici. Men is het overeen eens dat dit model een revolutionaire katalysator was voor de transformatie van het begrip van handicap van medische abnormaliteit en persoonlijke tragedie naar sociaal-politieke onderdrukking (Thomas, 2007). Sinds het begin van deze eeuw zijn er diverse versies van het sociaal model opgedoken als een gevolg van de toenemende kritiek van feministen, postmodernisten en poststructuralisten op het sociale barrière model (b.v. Corker, 1999; Thomas, 2004; Tremain, 2015). Gebaseerd op de discursieve aspecten van handicap, werd een 'cultureel model' naar voren geschoven als een nieuwe manier om over handicap na te denken. Het theoretische kader dat hier zal worden gebruikt, genaamd validisme ('ableism' in het Engels) sluit het meest aan met zulk een model. Het werd recent geïntroduceerd als nieuwe manier om de mechanismen die leiden tot exclusie en onderdrukking op de werkplek te begrijpen.

Validisme werd eerder gedefinieerd als 'een netwerk van overtuigingen, processen en praktijken dat een bepaald type zelf en lichaam (de standaard) naar voor schuift als perfect, essentieel en volwaardig menselijk' (Campbell, 2001: 44). Al wie anders functioneert als deze standaard wordt afgebeeld als minder menselijk. De constitutie van mensen als inferieur ten opzichte van mensen zonder handicap wordt genormaliseerd via taal (Linton, 1998). Als resultaat zorgt validisme voor een wijdverspreide attitude die niet-handicap gelijk stelt aan normaal zijn en alles wat afwijkt hiervan beschouwt als minderwaardig (Ho, 2008). In valdisitische ideeën, praktijken en instituties of sociale relaties wordt niet-handicap verondersteld, en mensen met handicap worden geconstrueerd als inferieure en onzichtbare 'anderen' (Chouinard, 1997). Beperkingen worden gezien als inherent negatief en de enige oorzaak van de problemen die mensen met een handicap ervaren (Amundson en Taira, 2005). Een validistische maatschappij kan worden gezien als een maatschappij die 'de ras-typische individuele burger' bevoordeelt (Campbell, 2009), en dat is een burger die in staat is om te werken en bij te dragen' (Goodley, 2014: xi). Een validistisch wereldbeeld beweert dat mensen moeten streven naar de norm of hun afstand moeten houden van mensen zonder handicap (Kumar, 2012). Zij die de bepaalde geprefereerde set van capaciteiten niet hebben, of worden voorgesteld alsof ze deze niet hebben, worden gediscrimineerd (Wolbring, 2008). Omdat validisme zo zit ingebakken in

ons collectieve denken, wordt de discriminatie bijna volledig onzichtbaar en het gelijk stellen van handicap aan inferioriteit wordt gezien als een natuurlijke reactie op een afwijking (Campbell, 2009).

De alomtegenwoordige binaire opdeling tussen handicap/niet-handicap die de betekenis stuurt die aan personen met een beperking wordt gegeven op negatieve en beperkende manieren wordt hier gezien als dé verklaring voor exclusie. Het doel van deze studie is om het concept van validisme theoretisch te verfijnen en uit te breiden naar de werkomgeving. Empirisch draagt deze thesis bij aan dit doel via drie verschillende studies die zich berusten op data verzameld via verschillende bronnen uit drie organisaties. De drie bedrijven waren een regionale publieke organisatie, een private bank en een lokaal bestuur. Dit leverde 65 interviews op in totaal waarvan 30 bij werknemers met een beperking, en de andere 35 met verschillende actoren binnen de bedrijven waaronder HR managers, vakbondsafgevaardigden en bedrijfsgeneesheren. De data werd vervolgens geanalyseerd door middel van een kritische discourse analyse en een narratieve analyse.

In de eerste studie zagen we hoe grote discoursen van validisme de identiteit van werknemers beïnvloedde, doch niet noodzakelijk op een totaliserende manier. Deze studie liet zien hoe ideeën rond een lagere productiviteit bij mensen met een beperking werden aangewend in het eigen identiteitswerk van de werknemers. Meer bepaald kwamen drie strategieën via dewelke validisme werd toegeëigend aan het licht: tegen het discourse van lagere productiviteit ingaan; alternatieve betekenissen genereren voor productiviteit; weigeren om als enige de verantwoordelijkheid op te nemen voor lagere productiviteit. Werknemers met een beperking maakten vaak een combinatie van de verschillende technieken wat resulteerde in complexe en gelaagde identiteiten die in een ambigue relatie staan tot validistische discoursen.

In de tweede studie, werd het concept van validisme verder uitgewerkt door te tonen hoe organisaties een bepaalde interpretatie van het grote discourse van validisme maakten. Ook werd getoond hoe validisme de identiteit-regulerende processen binnen organisaties stuurt. Er werd hier een verbinding gemaakt tussen validisme als groot discourse dat een sterke binaire opdeling van handicap/niet-handicap naar voor schuift, en de bedrijfsspecifieke manifestaties van dat discourse, en hoe werknemers met een beperking hiermee omgaan in hun eigen identiteitswerk. Bedrijven zetten validisme dus verder binnen hun bedrijf maar wel op een specifieke manier en door specifieke betekenissen toe te kennen aan beide zijden van de handicap/niet-handicap opdeling. In het eerste bedrijf werd handicap gezien als een gebrek, in contrast met het beeld van de ideale werknemer. In het tweede bedrijf werden mensen met een beperking gezien als ambitieuze zelf-managers, in staat om het ideaal te bereiken zolang ze hun handicap wisten te verbergen. En in het derde bedrijf werden de werknemers met een beperking gezien als zorgbehoevend en -verdienend, complementair met de ideale zorgdragende werknemer. Het identiteitswerk van de werknemers vertoonde zowel conformerende als verwerende kenmerken.

In de derde studie werd de kennis rond validisme verder uitgebouwd door te tonen hoe validistische praktijken individuen met een beperking in hetzelfde bedrijf op verschillende manieren treffen. Er werd hier specifiek gefocust op sociale praktijken geïnspireerd door validisme. Via het theoretisch kader van Frans socioloog Pierre Bourdieu werd getoond hoe validisme niet enkel een organiserend principe is van discursieve structuren maar ook van sociale structuren, en zo de kapitalen die mensen met een beperking kunnen vergaren en de carrières die ze kunnen maken inperkt. Bepaalde

spelregels binnen de bank gaven een structureel nadeel aan werknemers met een beperking, waardoor ze niet in staat waren om het spel succesvol te spelen. Vaak sloegen ze er niet in om de ideale werknemer van de bank volledig te belichamen en hoge niveaus van symbolisch kapitaal te verwerven. De analyse stelde ons echter ook in staat om de binaire opdeling die traditioneel werd gezien als kenmerkend voor validisme te nuanceren, aangezien sommige spelers met een beperking beter uitgerust waren als anderen, via hun habitus en kapitaal, om de validistische structuren van het veld te navigeren.