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A PRACTICE-BASED THEORY OF DIVERSITY: RESPECIFYING (IN)EQUALITY IN ORGANIZATIONS

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In this article we turn to practice theory as a new theoretical lens to better understand the complexity of diversity in organizations. Questioning the field's ontological dualism between individualism and societism, we engage with practice theory's relational ontology and its main conceptual and methodological ideas. From this we develop a practice-based theory of diversity, arguing that practices and their connections, not individuals or discourses, are the unit of analysis to best study and understand the social life of a diverse organization. We apply this theoretical lens to (in)equality through two research examples, showing how the practicing of career mentoring is connected to other inequality-(re)producing practices and how the equal social order of a dance organization is accomplished through the situated practice of mixing. In the discussion we highlight the value of a practice theory for diversity. A practice-based theory of diversity renews the research agenda of diversity studies, forwarding post-dualistic forms of theorizing, reconceptualizing diversity practices along the theoretical logic of practice, and conceiving of diversity-related phenomena as the net effect of social order–producing practices.

After almost three decades of research, diversity scholars are increasingly looking for ways to theoretically advance and rejuvenate the field. They formulate new future research directions, aiming to better understand continuing inequality and discrimination at work (Rodriguez, Holvino, Fletcher, & Nkomo, 2016; Zanoni, Janssens, Benschop, & Nkomo, 2010), unravel the complex effects of diversity (Bell, Villado, Lukasik, Belau, & Briggs, 2011; Joshi, Liao, & Roh, 2011), and focus on ways to value diversity (Dwertmann, Nishii, & van Knippenberg, 2016; Shore et al., 2011). Regrettably, these recommendations tend to be formulated without much reference to ontological assumptions, whereas understanding the philosophical assumptions underlying a theory is needed in order to be able to further develop it (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2016).

Revisiting diversity research from an ontological perspective means considering how scholars are approaching the nature and basic structure of social life and social phenomena (Schatzki, 2005). It is our argument that diversity research is characterized by an underlying ontological dualism between individualism and societism—the two camps social theory has been divided into since its conception in the mid-1800s (Schatzki, 2005). An individualist stance holds that diversity as a social phenomenon can be explained by properties of individual people or their relations (Schatzki, 2005); in contrast, a societist stance holds that a full account of diversity requires a turn to "extrapersonal" phenomena (Schatzki, 2005)—discourse in this case. Not only has this ontological dualism stayed implicit, but the dualistic nature of the ontology—partitioning concepts and treating them as opposite entities, such as agency/structure, emotion/cognition, and body/mind (Farjoun, 2010)—prevents, in our view, an effective way of understanding diversity-related phenomena in organizations. It only attends to a few central components of social reality, like cognition and discourse, neglecting other central ones, like body and materiality (Reckwitz, 2002; Sandberg & Dall'Alba, 2009). Also, when aiming to include other components, the dualistic conception itself is not questioned. We thus argue the need for a relational ontology—where social phenomena are ongoingly produced

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and relationally constituted (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011)—which would help diversity researchers better understand how diversity-related phenomena like inequality, racism, discrimination, homophobia, diversity climates, inclusion, and Whiteness are accomplished. Because practice theory is a major social theory that precisely aims to overcome dualisms (Reckwitz, 2002; Sandberg & Dall'Alba, 2009; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2016), we propose bringing practice theory to diversity studies and exploring its value.

Our aim in this article is to develop a domain-specific theory of practice for diversity (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2016) with an application to (in)equality, a critical feature of diverse organizations (Zanoni et al., 2010). First, we outline the general principles of a practice-based theory of diversity, building on the main ontological, conceptual, and methodological ideas of practice theory. While there are many variations of practice theory (Gherardi, 2016; Nicolini, 2013), central is the orientation toward processes—what people do and say in action: "practicing, real-time doing and saying something in a specific place and time" (Nicolini, 2013: 219) and the consequential belief that organizational phenomena like social order, meanings, and identities emerge from practices themselves (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011).

Second, we highlight the novelty and value of a practice lens for understanding (in)equality through two research examples, developed along Nicolini's (2013, 2017) theory-method package. A first example shows how a practice-based theory of diversity offers an in-depth understanding of how diversity management practices reproduce rather than change inequality in an organization. It does so by examining how a specific diversity practice (career mentoring) is connected to other inequality-(re)producing practices. A second example shows how a practice lens can contribute to our understanding of ways to value diversity. Starting from a social order in a dance organization that can be meaningfully understood as equal, a practice-based study can uncover how this is accomplished through situated practice. Both examples indicate how a practice lens contributes to theorizing about the dynamics between diversity, (in)equality, and practicing. In the discussion section we further highlight what diversity studies can gain from a practice-based perspective, emphasizing nondualistic forms of theorizing diversity, reconceptualizing diversity practices along the theoretical logic of practice, and conceiving of diversity-related phenomena as the net effect of social order–producing practices. From this we identify new research directions, as well as the challenges that emerge from using a practice-based theory of diversity.

Whereas feminist gender studies (Bruni, Gherardi, & Poggio, 2004; West & Zimmerman, 1987) as well as other domains in management and organization studies (MOS), like knowledge (Gherardi, 2000; Nicolini, 2011), strategy (Jarzabkowski, 2003; Vaara & Whittington, 2012), and technology (Orlikowski, 2000; Suchman, Blomberg, Orr, & Trigg, 1999), have moved in this direction for some time, diversity researchers have yet to take the practice turn (with notable exceptions, such as O'Leary & Sandberg, 2017, and Tatli & Özbilgin, 2012). One possible explanation is that notions like "practice" and "best practice" feature highly already. Unfortunately, they are often taken for granted, reflecting what Sandberg and Tsoukas (2016: 187) call a "commonsensical" approach of practice, which is largely atheoretical. We believe, however, that much is to be gained for diversity studies if scholars consider the theoretical logic of practice. By bringing practice theory as a new theoretical lens to diversity scholars, we hope to capture their interest in the great promise of the practice lens, which lies in explaining the complexity of diversity-related phenomena in a processual way.

THE INHERENT DUALISM WITHIN DIVERSITY STUDIES

Reviewing the diversity literature, we identify two underlying ontological perspectives—individualism and societism (Schatzki, 2002, 2005)—which inform how diversity and, in particular, (in)equality are currently understood and studied. Table 1 presents the basic differences between the two ontological stances, as well as the main assumptions of practice theory that we will forward in the remainder of this article as a promising alternative perspective.

The Ontologies Underlying Diversity Research: Individualism Versus Societism

To study how diversity or categories of social difference, such as race, gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality, (dis)ability, and nationality, are manifested in organizations, diversity researchers have primarily opted for an individualist stance. Taking individual and interpersonal behavior as

TABLE 1
Ontological Assumptions of Dominant Diversity Theoretical Approaches and Practice Theory

Characteristics	Organizational Behavior Theory–Based Diversity Research	Discourse Theory–Based Diversity Research	Practice Theory–Based Research
Social ontology	Individualism	Societism	Relational ontology
Unit of analysis	Individual and interpersonal behavior	Discourses	Practices and their associations
Components of unit of analysis	Cognitions, traits, and competences	Grand discourses and small discourses	Bodily, material, and discursive resources
Theoretical aim	Formulate abstract propositions and processes	Conduct a critical analysis of hegemony	Rearticulate a social phenomenon in terms of practices and their associations
Methodological choice	Data collection through surveys, experiments, and interviews	Data analysis of public texts and interview transcripts	Observation of the here and now in a range of scenes of action
Ways of overcoming dualisms	Incorporate context in the research design	Attend to agentic capability of engaging with discourses	Attend to the process of mutual constitution
Theoretical challenges	Context is a container of variables; new micro/macro divide	Little attention to the sociomateriality of human action; agency/discourse divide remains	Relational vocabulary; practice architecturism; persistent asymmetries

the unit of analysis (Harrison & Klein, 2007; Harrison, Price, & Bell, 1998), scholars assume that diversity as "a social phenomenon can be explained by properties of individual people or of their relations" (Schatzki, 2005: 466). As indicated in Table 1, this individualist stance underpins social psychology theories, such as social identity theory, social categorization theory, and the attraction-selection-attrition framework that diversity research heavily relies on (Roberson, 2013). The dominance of psychological approaches has resulted in organizational behavior theory–based diversity research that typically highlights cognition, such as cognitive bias (Konrad & Linnehan, 1995) and stereotyping (Leslie, Mayer, & Kravitz, 2014), or motivation and traits, such as need for belongingness and uniqueness (Shore et al., 2011). From this, diversity-related phenomena like inequality and discrimination, but also inclusion, tend to be seen as resulting from intrapersonal and interpersonal cognitive processes. This ontological stance further comes with an understanding that theory implies the formulation of abstract propositions and a methodological focus on data *collection* through surveys, experiments, and interviews.

The downside of an individualistic stance is that social phenomena are reduced to personal properties (Schatzki, 2005). Theorizing takes the form of *mentalism,* where the social is located in the human mind (Reckwitz, 2002; Sandberg & Dall'Alba, 2009). By relying on the aforementioned psychological theories, one foregrounds universal cognitive processes such as negative in/outgroup dynamics, cognitive bias, and homophily patterns. Thus, in most diversity research the "social can be found, so to speak, in the 'head' of human beings" (Reckwitz, 2002: 247), without attending to other central components of social reality, such as body, things, discourse, and structure (Sandberg & Dall'Alba, 2009).

This downside closely resembles the critique of critical diversity scholars, who argue that in order to fully understand inequality in organizations, one needs to attend to historically determined structural power asymmetries between sociodemographic groups (Prasad, Pringle, & Konrad, 2006; Zanoni et al., 2010). As indicated in Table 1, critical scholars consequently favor an ontological societist stance holding that a full account of social phenomena requires more than "personal" features; it requires a turn to extrapersonal phenomena (Schatzki, 2005). Possibilities for these extrapersonal phenomena include modes of production, discourses, abstract structures, and societies (Schatzki, 2005). From among these, critical diversity scholars have primarily taken discourse (Foucault, 1976) as the unit of analysis, developing discourse theory–based diversity research to understand how diversity within organizations is influenced by structural features. Discourses refer to structured collections of texts that infuse objects with particular kinds of meanings and

constitute particular subject positions (Fairclough, 1995; Hardy & Phillips, 2004).

Scholarly interest in discourse as an important extrapersonal element emerged as the rhetorical shift from equal opportunities to "the business case of diversity" foregrounded the capacity of language to constitute social reality. In particular, analyzing the latter, discourse scholars emphasized its capacity to obscure unequal power relations in organizations (Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000; Prasad & Mills, 1997); other studies have illustrated how (diversity) managers' use of certain discourses—both grand discourses and small discourses—relegates minority employees to subordinate positions (Dick & Cassell, 2002; Zanoni & Janssens, 2004). Inequality is thus understood through discourses since they exert power by both infusing objects with particular kinds of meaning so that certain possibilities and outcomes become more likely to be realized than others and by endorsing certain subject positions so that certain actors can speak authoritatively (du Gay, 1996; Maguire & Hardy, 2009). Together with discourse as unit of analysis, this ontology comes with a different understanding of theory and methodological focus. Discursive diversity scholars aim to uncover hegemonic processes within organizations and society by focusing on data *analysis* of publicly available texts and interview transcripts.

Yet, from this societist view, theorizing takes the form of *textualism,* where the social is limited to the level of discourse (Reckwitz, 2002; Sandberg & Dall'Alba, 2009). For discursive scholars, social orders have their place "outside," on the level of signs and texts. In contrast, practice theory questions the privilege that communicative action receives over other forms of action, and it does not remain on the extramental and extracorporal level of discourses, texts, and symbols (Reckwitz, 2002). As Reckwitz (2002: 254) remarks, "Discourse and language lose their omnipotent status" that they often receive in textual and social constructionist approaches. Instead, practice theory will reopen the realm of the social beyond discourses, texts, and communication.

Recommendations to Advance Diversity Research: The Dualism Remains

The need to overcome the dualism between an individualist and societist stance becomes even more urgent when reviewing diversity scholars' current recommendations to advance the field. Examining the latter, we note that each ontological stance seems to recognize its own potential shortfall and is implicitly acknowledging the need for the other one. Yet by not reflecting on the ontological premise of the recommendations, the dualistic conception itself is not questioned, thereby still conceiving of diversity-related phenomena like (in)equality in a limited way.

Individualists are calling for a more "contextual" approach to capture the complexity of diversity and explain the field's conflictual findings (Joshi & Roh, 2009; see Table 1). They propose studying contextual factors such as fairness systems, demographic representation, or industry setting (Johns, 2006; Joshi et al., 2011) since they are "seen as part of the environment that provide stimuli to individuals and are used to interpret information at work" (Shore et al., 2011: 1257). However, while an attempt is made to overcome a purely individualist and psychological stance, context is conceived of as pregiven rather than emergent (Fox, 1997). It resembles a container of variables that are "out there," while no attempts are made to unpack this box (Felski, 2011) and theorize about how context may be "in here" (Steyaert, 2016), coconstitutive with individual actions. Even more, in thinking about contextual variables in this way, scholars call for multilevel research (Dwertmann et al., 2016; Joshi et al., 2011), and this introduces a new dualism: the micro-macro divide, where, despite all research strategies to study the interstices of multiple levels, individuals remain the central unit of analysis. Also, scholars within intersectionality research, who increasingly call for a focus on "the interplay of subjectivities, micro-level encounters, structures and institutional arrangements" (Rodriguez et al., 2016: 204), forward multilevel and cross-level research, still conceiving of the individual and structure as a priori given separate entities.

Societists are calling for agentic strategies (of minority individuals) that are capable of dealing with the discursive structural constraints (see Table 1). Acknowledging that a discursive approach entails the danger of determinism (Hardy & Phillips, 2004), diversity scholars increasingly have brought human action into their discursive analyses to nuance the power of discourse. Investigating minorities and diversity practitioners' active engagement with discourses of diversity, they highlight discursive struggle and show how discourses, while powerful, never fully determine

the meaning of diversity at the workplace (e.g., Ahmed, 2007a; Essers & Benschop, 2007; Van Laer & Janssens, 2017). Yet while agency is emphasized, its conception tends to be limited to discursive ways of resisting like rhetorical strategies. As do individualists, societists, too, hold onto their unit of analysis—discourse—to then conceive of the other pole in discursive terms. Nondiscursive components like the embodied and material nature of agency or emotions tend not to be part of the investigation, although their relevance is increasingly acknowledged in debates on the relationship between discourse and materiality (Hardy & Thomas, 2015; Orlikowski & Scott, 2015; Putnam, 2015).

Our argument is that for diversity research to really advance and to better understand (in)equality (and other diversity-related phenomena), a different—relational—ontology is needed that allows for theorizing about the overcoming of the various dualisms, such as agency/structure, subject/object, mind/body, inner/outer, and emotion/cognition. Practice theory offers such a line of reasoning, which we explain in the next section.

PRACTICE THEORY: ONTOLOGICAL, CONCEPTUAL, AND METHODOLOGICAL PREMISES

Practice theory is "not a full-blown grand theory" (Reckwitz, 2002: 257) but instead consists of a rather broad family of theoretical approaches (Nicolini, 2013; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2016) that adhere to a postdualistic ontology, sharing the assumption that social reality is fundamentally made up of practices (Nicolini, 2013) and emphasizing each in its own way the importance of a coherent theory-method package. We sketch here the main set of practice theory's ideas—ontological, conceptual, and methodological—as well as its internal variety related to the field's evolution (Gherardi, 2016).

The Relational Ontology of Practice Theories

Practice theories start with an ontological reflection to overcome dualities ingrained in current social theory and to move to a postdualistic ontology, which is increasingly called a "relational ontology" (Gherardi, 2016, 2017; Nicolini, 2009a; Nicolini & Monteiro, 2017). They all question the cognitive, rationalist perspective of Western intellectual tradition and critique its entitative, disconnected, and dualistic logic of scientific rationality (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011). Instead, practice theories share the idea that phenomena are always conceived of in relation to each other, produced through a process of mutual constitution. The recognition of the practice as a postdual and relational concept is an ontological choice, offering a remedy for the problems left unresolved by mentalism and textualism (Reckwitz, 2002) and their ways of describing a research object in terms of unnecessary dualisms like actor/structure, body/mind, or theory/action (Nicolini, 2017).

Practice theories differ though in how they specify the relational nature of practice, depending on the specific duality and philosophical resources. The so-called first generation of practice theories, such as those by Bourdieu and Giddens, are rooted in a number of philosophical traditions, including the work of Marx, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, and the North American pragmatist tradition (Nicolini, 2013; Sandberg & Dall'Alba, 2009). For instance, Anthony Giddens (1976), influenced not only by Heidegger's existential ontology but also by Garfinkel's (1967) ethnomethodology (Gherardi, 2018), is well known for theorizing about the inherent recursiveness between agency and structure through his notion of structuration (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2016).

Second-generation practice theorists, such as Schatzki (2002), Nicolini (2013), and Gherardi (2006), have further developed practice theory, in terms of both ontological and social-theoretical articulation. Theodore Schatzki (1996, 2001, 2002, 2005), a philosopher, draws upon Heidegger's existential ontology and Wittgenstein's later philosophy to theorize about the circularity and coemergence between human affairs and the contexts in which they occur, proposing the notion of "site ontology." Davide Nicolini (2011, 2017) further develops this notion of site by turning to relational sociology (Emirbayer, 1997) and Latour's (2005) actor-network theory. He emphasizes a processual and site-based ontology of practice theory and follows a posthuman approach, granting equal agency to material things as necessary and active elements of human practice. Silvia Gherardi (2015, 2016, 2018) also takes a posthumanist approach, which she further develops into an onto-epistemology of relational materialism. Drawing upon feminist philosophy and theory by Haraway (1991), Butler (1993), and Barad (2003), Gherardi theorizes the connections among matter, language, and bodies, proposing the notion of sociomateriality.

The Conceptual Understanding of Practice

Because practice has ontological primacy, the basic unit of analysis for understanding social and organizational phenomena is practices and their nexus with other practices (Nicolini, 2013). Practice theory "locates the social in 'practices'" (Sandberg & Dall'Alba, 2009: 1352): practices come first, and if one wants to understand social life, one needs to turn to the accomplishment of real-time practices. Think, for example, of various everyday practices, such as greeting, parenting, and driving, or work-related practices, such as teaching, nursing, and managing, that make up social life (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2016).

While different definitions of a practice exist, a practice is conceived of as simultaneously discursive, embodied, and material (Nicolini, 2017; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2016). Practice theory emphasizes that a practice cannot be reduced to only words and foregrounds as well the role of the body and artifacts in all human affairs. Think, for instance, of how the practice of teaching is embodied—standing firm, speaking aloud—and how the feminized body may not always be tuned to such practice of teaching, which paradoxically is seen as disembodied rationality. Also, material things are inherently part of a practice theory, and, therefore, a practice study attends to how tools, objects, and artifacts contribute to how the practice is carried out and made possible (Orlikowski, 2000). Teaching a class, investigating accidents, and cooking a meal are always accomplished with, and amid, material things (Nicolini, 2013). Important here is that tools, discourse, and our bodies are knotted together in how practice is accomplished.

Further, a practice never comes in isolation but is related to other practices. Teaching depends on its alignment with other practices, for instance, such as enrolling students, opening the school, and keeping it clean (Nicolini & Monteiro, 2017). The social world is therefore a vast nexus of practices, also referred to as knots, networks, sites, configurations, assemblages, and textures (Czarniawska, 2007; Gherardi, 2006; Latour, 2005; Nicolini, 2011), that creates a particular social order. Important here is that power, conflict, and politics are constitutive elements of social reality (Nicolini, 2013). As Gherardi remarked, ordering social life through practices is "achieved within a plurality of discourses, unequal power relations among stakeholders, and through the redistribution of power" (2016: 685). Practices are thus never neutral activities but serve certain interests at the expense of others (Nicolini, 2013) and fit differently into the system (Ortner, 1984), impacting the distribution of power and privileges.

The Methodological Orientation of Practice Theory

Together with a distinct ontological commitment and conceptual understanding of practice, the methodological element takes a central place in practice theory (Nicolini, 2017). In fact, reducing it to pure theory would be contradictory, since practice theory should be conceived of as "the pragmatic effort to *re-specify* the study and representation of social phenomena in terms of networks, assemblages and textures of mediated practices" (Nicolini, 2017: 19, emphasis added). It requires an empirical study that is "ethnographic in its sensibility" (Miettinen, Samra-Fredericks, & Yanow, 2009: 1312), a witnessing of real-time practicing that allows scholars to understand how the social phenomenon under study transpires amid and through practices. Studying the social in this way further qualifies the nature and role of theory. Whereas theorizing on diversity has until now been understood as either formulating abstract notions and generalizable propositions or uncovering the hegemonic nature of diversity discourses (see Table 1), practice theory emphasizes that "good science should be articulative" (Nicolini, 2017: 30). This does not mean that a practice lens is simply an invitation for empirical cases that provide long and close-up micro descriptions; rather, it is a mode of theorizing where social phenomena are respecified in terms of practice and their associations, creating "enlightening texts" (Nicolini, 2017: 24).

As a package of theory, method, and vocabulary (Gherardi, 2012; Nicolini, 2013), practice theory thus also attends to how practice-based studies can be conducted. To realize the idea of internal coherence, Nicolini (2017; see also Nicolini & Monteiro, 2017) has developed four research strategies that are processual in nature. These are (1) a situational strategy—focusing on the practice itself through studying "the concerted accomplishment of orderly scenes of action" (2017: 26); (2) a configurational strategy—focusing on the connections in space or "how concerted accomplishments and performances hang together to form constellations or larger assemblages" (2017:

29); (3) a genealogical strategy—attending to time or "how individual practices emerge and disappear" (2017: 26); and (4) a conflict-sensitive strategy—focusing on the tensions between practices by attending to "the co-evolution, conflict and interference of two or more practices" (2017: 30). While each research strategy has its own focus, they all contribute to the effort of respecifying a social phenomenon.

A PRACTICE-BASED THEORY OF DIVERSITY

From the above main set of ideas, we forward five principles of a practice-based theory of diversity that guide diversity scholars in studying and understanding the complexity of diversity in a novel way. Table 2 captures the five principles and their key descriptions.

Postdualistic Ontological Articulation

A first principle is oriented at a postdualistic ontological articulation. A practice-based theory of diversity follows a relational ontology, conceiving of diversity as a social phenomenon that is relationally constituted. It rejects the predominant view that the social world can be nicely divided into dualisms such as agency/structure, mind/body, and social/material (Reckwitz, 2002) and, instead, is oriented toward the mutually constituted nature of social life. Theorizing diversity implies that researchers adopt a postdualistic ontology to overcome traditional dichotomies and to emphasize the relationality among body, mind, things, knowledge, discourse, structure, and agent, coming together in a "practice" (Nicolini, 2013; Reckwitz, 2002). Such ontological reorientation can be realized through different relational ontologies, as discussed in the previous section (see also Sandberg & Dall'Alba, 2009). In the remainder of this article, we follow both Nicolini's (2011) understanding of a processual, site-based ontology, to emphasize the coemergence of a diversity practice and its site, and Gherardi's (2016, 2018) relational-materialist ontology, to emphasize the entanglement of meaning and matter in a diversity practice.

Unit of Analysis Is a Practice

Second, the study of the social life in diverse organizations starts with practice. Because diversity researchers no longer assume that the social is located in the human mind or in texts but, rather, in practices, the unit of analysis shifts (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011; Nicolini, 2013). Instead of studying properties of minority and majority individuals, or diversity-related discourses, diversity scholars orient toward practice to understand the complexities associated with diversity in organizations. Importantly, the practices that produce social life in diverse organizations are not only diversity management practices but also all other management practices, such as decision-making practices, strategy-making practices, leadership practices, and team work practices that produce the social order of a diverse organization. Taking a practice lens transforms diversity scholars' view on diversity practices, broadening it to all social order–producing activities within the realm of diversity.

Entanglement of Body, Materiality, and Discourse

Third, understanding a practice further requires the study of how this practice is accomplished through the connection between bodies,

TABLE 2
A Practice-Based Theory of Diversity

Principles	Key Description
Postdualistic ontological articulation	Diversity as a social phenomenon is relationally constituted
Unit of analysis is practice	Social life in a diverse organization is produced through practices, not only diversity management practices but also other management practices
Entanglement of body, materiality, and discourse	A diversity practice is accomplished through connecting bodies, tools and artifacts, and discursive resources
Practices are connected in time and space	A diversity practice is situated in time and space since actions and practices are connected in a nexus
Explanations are grounded in what is empirically observable	The social order of a diverse organization is explained through observing and witnessing the practices in action

tools and artifacts, and discursive resources. Practices that (re)produce a particular social order in a diverse organization are inscribed in the body, through learning and repeated injunctions, being partially routinized and partially improvised (Nicolini & Monteiro, 2017; Reckwitz, 2002). Further, these practices are inherently material in nature as, within a practice, tools and artifacts shape their meaning (Gherardi, 2016). And, finally, discursive practices or language in action is central to the accomplishment of a practice, without reducing the latter purely to discourses (Nicolini, 2013). Looking at the embodied, material, and discursive entanglement and its accomplishment is thus required to understand how a diversity practice becomes a social order–producing practice.

Practices Are Connected in Space and Time

Fourth, a practice-based theory of diversity focuses on connections in space and time. Because a practice is always situated in space and time, with "connectedness in action" (Gherardi, 2006), a practice-based diversity study brings to the fore the wider site or texture that a diversity practice is part of (Nicolini & Monteiro, 2017). By tracing practices and their connections that continually move into each other (Gherardi, 2017), it will become visible how diversity-related phenomena like inequality and discrimination are locked into a nexus of practices, but also how a positive diversity climate or inclusion can emerge from intertwined practices. This focus on connections is in line with the emerging critique within diversity research that the focus on stand-alone diversity practices is incompatible with organizations relying "upon a group, or bundle, of complementary and mutually reinforcing practices to achieve positive diversity outcomes" (Roberson, 2013: 467).

Explanations Are Grounded in What Is Empirically Observable

A fifth and final principle is to understand diversity-related phenomena through real-time accomplishment of practices. This requires a processual focus that is committed to an observational orientation and the adoption of methods that allow an appreciation of practice as it happens (Nicolini, 2013: 14). Aiming to be articulative, diversity scholars need to go to the real-time practicing, in the midst of the action through ethnographic observation (Nicolini, 2013), shadowing, (Bruni et al., 2004), and participative research. These observational methods can possibly be complemented by archival data and adapted forms of interviews, such as the "interview to the double"—a projective technique that aims to capture the actual (not people's versions) doings and sayings by asking interviewees to provide the necessary detailed instructions to a double who will show up the next day at work (Nicolini, 2009b).

Jointly, these five principles form a domain-specific practice theory of diversity that promises a better understanding of social life in diverse organizations through practices and their connections. Importantly, we remark that the object of a practice-based theory of diversity is not diversity practices as such but, rather, diversity-related phenomena, such as inequality, discrimination, gender relations, or inclusion, that are respecified in terms of practices (Nicolini, 2017). A practice-based theory of diversity is therefore a mode of theorizing that is focused on rearticulation, a theoretical practice that keeps close to the empirical work of the diversity researcher in order to allow "the phenomenon to bite back" (Nicolini, 2017: 25). Such a conception of theory consequently asks diversity scholars to be open to exploring less positivistic, functionalist orientations, as well as to move beyond purely discursive analyses.

TWO RESEARCH EXAMPLES: RESPECIFYING (IN)EQUALITY IN AN ORGANIZATION

Within the logic of practice theory, theorizing cannot be disconnected from what is empirically observable (Nicolini, 2013, 2017). Following this idea, we discuss two research examples to show the value of a practice lens for diversity research. The first example takes on the crucial question of how to understand the persistent inequality in a diverse organization, despite the implementation of a formal, traditional diversity management practice (Janssens & Zanoni, 2014; Kalev, Dobbin, & Kelly, 2006). The second example starts from a social order of a diverse organization, which can be meaningfully understood as equal, and then proceeds to investigate how equality is accomplished through situated practice. Both examples follow the principles of a practice-based theory of diversity to develop a better understanding of inequality and equality, respectively, in the organizations under study.

The Reproduction of Inequality Through the Practice of Career Mentoring

In this first example we show how a practice-based theory of diversity informs research on persistent inequality through a fictionally developed example of career mentoring in a technological organization, hypothetically integrating the results of various studies on career mentoring (Blake-Beard, 1999; Ragins, 1997; Thomas, 1989). Career mentoring refers to a developmental relationship through which a more experienced individual (the mentor) shares skills and information in an effort to support another individual's (the protégé's) personal and professional growth, which is supposed to reduce discrimination and create a more equitable workplace (Blake-Beard, Kram, & Murrell, 2017; Dawson, Thomas, & Goren, 2013). Imagine that this practice was introduced two years ago in an organization in the technological sector to advance the career mobility of Black women and men, yet without any major results.

Site-based ontology. Following the first principle of explicitly articulating the ontological premise, our example follows a "relationist ontology," as developed by Nicolini (2011) in his use of the concept of site. This notion brings "to the fore the wider relational scene of which the phenomenon is part" (Nicolini, 2011: 604), depicting social life "in relational terms (not levels) as being composed by and transpiring through, a bundle or network of practices" (Nicolini, 2013: 8). It emphasizes understanding a particular phenomenon as and via interrelated practice-arrangement bundles and seeing the phenomenon and its conditions as always coevolving and mutually implicated. This ontological choice aligns well with the nature of careers, being dynamic, boundaryless, and multidirectional trajectories of movements (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006).

Observing career mentoring in situ. Aiming to understand how career mentoring is related to inequality, the empirical study takes practice as the unit of analysis. It would start by taking a situational research strategy, zooming in on the practice and observing a series of career mentoring sessions (Nicolini, 2009a; 2017) to see how career mentoring is accomplished in an embodied, material, and discursive way. Employing insights from previous studies (Giscombe, 2017; Ragins, 1997), we imagine that a diversity scholar possibly would observe that primarily White men are mentoring Black women and men and that the mentoring sessions take place in the mentors' high-status offices. The scholar might further notice how White men, in an impersonal manner, with stiff body gestures and a formal, loud tone of voice, limit their mentoring to fixing "their problems," giving advice in terms of being more visible or taking on a line assignment instead of a staff assignment (Blake-Beard, 1999; Ragins & Cotton, 1999), while not engaging in the psychosocial functions of mentoring, like acceptance, confirmation, and friendship (Kram, 1985), as well as not discussing issues that are related to mentees' race (Thomas, 1993, 2001).

The diversity scholar might further observe how Black women, nervously sitting at the other side of the impressive office desk, refrain from establishing a warm and open relationship, later explaining in an interview how they aim to keep a distance from White men, being afraid of "being seen with White men"—going back to the historical dynamics of slavery where White men appropriated Black women (Thomas, 1989)—and of "not being a competent professional" (Bell, 1990). Most of the embodied doings and sayings of career mentoring would thus be hierarchical, racialized, and male gendered, with minorities at the receiving end.

Tracing connections. Having a first understanding of the situated practice of career mentoring, the diversity scholar then would take a configurational research strategy, "zooming out" to look for other practices and performances that are connected with career mentoring. Tracing the configuration of practices in which career mentoring is sited, one can see "the connection between the here-and-now of the situated practicing and the elsewhere-and-then of other practices" (Nicolini, 2009a: 1392). For example, the researcher might follow material artifacts (Latour, 2005; Nicolini, 2009b) such as career mentoring reports and observe committee meetings where these reports are discussed and promotions are decided. There, the researcher might, for instance, notice how Black employees still face a tough time. White male employees are promoted upon simple recommendation of their supervisor, whereas promotion of Black employees is heavily debated. Committee members, for example, express concerns that a Black male candidate did not volunteer enough for challenging assignments, questioning the impact of career mentoring or stating that he was not being "tough

enough." Only when the candidacy of a Black person is discussed ahead of time, in personal conversations among supervisors or mentors, is there a chance for promotion (Thomas, 1989).

In addition, the researcher might follow women and minority employees to their project team, observing the team interactions there. In line with feminist technology research (Faulkner, 2001; Kelan, 2007), the researcher would notice how aggressive humor is used to distance the few women present in the team and how men are making the key decisions on technology development. Also, the leadership of such teams would highlight women's "otherness," asking women to take minutes of the meeting and excluding them in discussions. In this organization, career mentoring is then locked into a larger configuration of other inequality-producing practices like decision making and leadership practices.

Theorizing the reproduction of inequality. Taken together, this study explains how, in this organization, the enduring unequal position of Black women and men is the result of a particular kind of accomplishment of career mentoring, connected to decision making and leadership practices that together coconstitute a site of a hierarchical, masculine, and racialized realm. Taking a practice lens, one can understand how the set of mediated, embodied doings and sayings of career mentoring that produce majority mentors as competent and worthy of privileged positions versus minority mentees as incompetent other belongs to a nexus of practices that in a circular way coaccomplish each other, keeping inequality in existence.

This explanation of inequality implies a very different view on the question whether and how a diversity management practice like career mentoring is effective or not. It moves away from relating career mentoring to properties of individuals and of their relations, highlighting skills of mentors and the quality of the mentoring relationship (Dawson et al., 2013; Ragins, Cotton, & Miller, 2000). Instead, a practice lens makes the reinforcing mechanisms of related practices visible. Career mentoring is a situated and interconnected practice, and to understand the effects of career mentoring, diversity scholars need to trace its site or the context that this practice is inherently tied to; the practice of career mentoring can only be studied relationally and, thus, can "only be understood as a part of a nexus of connections" (Nicolini, 2013: 229). Identifying such a nexus of connections, then, is crucial for seeing through the dynamics of inequality-producing practices. Further, it may offer diversity practitioners inspiration to stop the reproduction cycle by bringing in new activities that would change the connections between the practices, making another kind of social order possible.

Uncovering a Situated Practice Through Studying an Equal Social Order

Our second example has a different point of departure. Rather than examining how a diversity practice reproduces inequality, it starts from a social order that can be meaningfully understood as equal and then proceeds to a study of how this order is accomplished through a nexus of daily actions and activities. This example identifies a different diversity practice—the practice of mixing—that we uncovered in the internationally renowned dance company Ultima Vez, which, since its start more than thirty years ago, is experimenting with all kinds of differences. In contrast to most organizations in the creative industries (Eikhof, 2017; Finkel, Jones, Sang, & Stoyanova, 2017), this organization does not limit professional dance to an elite group of young, ideal-bodied performers. It works with men and women of all ages, different abilities (blindness, Down syndrome, physical disability), races, ethnicities, and languages. Even more, being located in Molenbeek, one of the most impoverished neighborhoods of Brussels, it aims to actively engage with the local challenges of inequality and discrimination.

While based on our empirical work of two dance productions choreographed by Seppe Baeyens, the following is not meant as an empirical case but as an illustration to show the value of taking a practice lens in uncovering a situated practice that accomplishes an equal social order.

Ontology of relational materialism. This study is inspired by the onto-epistemology of relational materialism, which assumes an "ecological model in which agency is distributed between human and non-humans and in which sociomaterial relationships can be subjected to inquiry" (Gherardi, 2015: 684). The term *sociomateriality*, derived from Barad's (2003) feminist onto-epistemology, focuses on the "generative entanglement" of meaning and matter, the social and the technological that are inseparable (Gherardi, 2017: 40). Such ontological focus on the sociomateriality

of practice aligns well with the nature of a dance performance, since the latter is enacted through the entanglement of ideas, bodies, spaces, music, costumes, and aesthetic styles. Also, the discursive and nondiscursive are seen as symmetrical (Gherardi, 2016), which is again relevant for dance, a (nonverbal) language of its own that rebalances embodied sayings and doings. The ontological commitment, thus, is to analyze how "within a practice, bodies, matter and discourses are expressions of the same sociomaterial world" (Gherardi, 2017: 42).

Observing actions in situ. Identifying an emerging practice within an equal social order requires a situational strategy, focusing "on the concerted accomplishment of orderly scenes of action" (Nicolini, 2017: 27) and tracing their bodily, material, and discursive components. Guided by the idea that "studying a new or unfamiliar practice without familiarizing ourselves with it would be logically impossible" (Nicolini, 2017: 27), one needs to start with zooming in on the here and now of the situated practicing to witness the doings and sayings in a specific time and place.

In this study we started with observing open dance workshops and rehearsals during summer holidays, witnessing a very diverse range of participants of all ages, abilities, gender, and ethnicity engaged in movement exercises. We noticed how their activity of rehearsing altered the concept of embodiment that usually figures in the world of artistic dance. While lifting a person is a core element of dance, it typically assumes that everyone is equally able to do this—even if, for instance, women never lift men in classical ballet. In this case, small-group combinations were created so that a male adult could be carried by children, supporting a new imagination that everyone can be(come) a dancer, or a woman in a wheelchair initiated a group dance, inviting other participants to follow, imitate, and contrast her movements.

Tracing connections. Informed by what Nicolini calls relational or connected situationalism, the basic unit of observation and analysis is "not a single scene of action, but rather a chain, sequence or combination of performances *plus* their relationships—what keeps them connected in space and time" (2017: 101). Therefore, we traced connections by zooming out to other activities, outside the dance rehearsal and performance spaces. For instance, we noticed the importance of the activity of inviting—continuously contacting not-for-profit organizations and schools and convincing them to encourage their members to take part in dance. The involvement of a network of local partners implied also establishing and maintaining social-material arrangements. For example, the care home of the dancers with Down syndrome had to plan transportation and (in the beginning) accompany them during the workshop, or a buddy system was needed where each performer was assigned to care for another colleague during meals, dress rehearsals, or restroom breaks.

Additionally, we noticed how the activity of rehearsing in the case of a diverse group not only altered the concept of embodiment but also enacted a new "mix" of the discursive and nondiscursive. Observing the feedback session after a general repetition, we noted how the presence of a blind dancer reordered the balance between sayings and doings. Not being able to take note of the suggested improvements by the choreographer, this dancer engaged in repeated paraphrasing and question asking, requesting the choreographer to be as precise as possible, which also benefited the other dancers.

Finally, we noted how the sociomateriality of the performance and its creation was altered. For example, the safety and orientation of the blind dancer required the spanning of dark ropes over the scene. Or, in the case of a dancer with Down syndrome who regulated his anxieties through focusing on a few straws, straws became integrated in the performance: in the final scene the dancer hands over the straws to a member of the audience and then goes into a dance of trance, inviting his colleague dancers and the audience members to join him in a very moving collective apotheosis. Thus, by tracing a chain of interrelated actions, we could understand how the activities of rehearsing, inviting, and performing bundled together into a practice of mixing, enabling the accomplishment of an equal social order.

Theorizing the accomplishment of equality. Together, this situational orientation of focusing on a variety of local accomplishments was helpful in articulating a range of activities as an unfamiliar diversity practice—which we called "mixing" here through "reverse-engineering" (Nicolini, 2017: 28). In our theoretical understanding we propose that the effect of the practice of mixing on equality is enabled through the heterogeneous mixture of discursive, bodily, and

material forces that come together in a specific configuration that changes normativities with regard to age, ability, or ethnicity (Riach, Rumens, & Tyler, 2014). Including a blind dancer, mentally disabled person, or elder woman in a dance performance is not a matter of adapting the dancing practice to their "weaknesses" and, thus, attaching these differences as individual or structural features to them. Instead, diverse dancing is enabled through creating new connections among their bodies, other dancers, and the affective-material dance space so that the dance performance itself is altered and colored by the mix of differences. The practice of mixing therefore contributes to an understanding of how inclusion can be accomplished where the importance of high belongingness and high uniqueness theoretically has been emphasized (Shore et al., 2011). However, in contrast to the model of Shore et al. (2011), these features are not seen as individual needs but, rather, are ingrained in the embodied, habitual, and relational practice of mixing where the unique differences (Ostendorp & Steyaert, 2009) become incorporated and unfolded in the activities of the group.

Therefore, this coming together of differences in a "network of connections-in-action" (Gherardi, 2016: 685) can be called a "choreography of becomings," as suggested by Gherardi (2017: 44). The ontological stance of sociomateriality thus offers diversity studies a powerful lens to see how intertwined normativities with respect to age, disability, ethnicity, or sexuality can become interrupted through the ways in which the discursive, bodily, and material dimensions within a practice are entangled. The invitation to diversity studies, hence, is to appreciate "practicing diversity" as a bodily, material, and discursive choreography.

DISCUSSION: THE VALUE OF PRACTICE THEORY FOR DIVERSITY

While several MOS domains have already invested in practice theory–based research, diversity research has yet to take "the practice turn." In this article we have developed a practice-based theory of diversity and applied it to (in)equality, showing how a practice lens understands and studies this phenomenon differently. We now highlight three main gains of a practice-based theory for diversity, forwarding theorizing within a postdualistic realm and reconceptualizing diversity practices as well as diversity-related phenomena.

Launching Diversity Theory Into a Postdualistic Realm Through a Relational Ontology

Throughout this article we have emphasized the importance of ontological reflection for retheorizing diversity in organizations. Practice theory comes with its own "ontological commitments" (Watson, 2017: 169), necessitating a reconsideration of philosophical assumptions regarding core notions of social life, such as agency, body, materiality, and structure.

Taking the practice turn in diversity research thus implies a fundamental alternative view of social reality where, in contrast to the traditional structural-mechanistic and functional-systemic views, a diverse organization needs to be thought of as a "fluid scene that unfolds in front of us in terms of multiple practices carried out at the same time" (Nicolini, 2013: 2). At the center of analysis is no longer a static entity—such as in individualism (persons) or societism (structures)—but the foregrounding of activity in the creation and continuation of all aspects of diverse organizational life. Therefore, any (reified) dualism would be dismantled, such as, for instance, the dualistic conceptualization of micro/macro level, a principal duality in the diversity literature. Instead of treating the macro as a form of externality that is detached from individual or organizational action and that afterward needs to be bridged, diversity research would focus on the recursive relationship between specific instances of situated action and the diverse organization in which the action takes place (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011). It would understand micro and macro as processually and recursively produced through practices, never "outside" practice. Or, as Schatzki pointed out, "Practice theory as social ontology holds that the realm of the social is entirely laid out on a single level (or rather, on no level)" (2016: 28). A practice-based theory of diversity thus promises the overcoming of "unhelpful dualisms" (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2016), which currently infuse most diversity research.

Commitment to a relational ontology then directs diversity research toward studying recursive relations, thereby relying on theories within a postdualistic realm. At the same time, though, the move to a postdualistic realm goes

against diversity research's theoretical habitus to install a priori distinctions between entities and levels. Thus, a crucial challenge (see Table 1) will be the development of a vocabulary that adequately expresses the processual and relational nature of practice theory's conceptions (Gherardi, 2016)—a new relational language and logic that allow scholars to transcend dualistic divisions and levels and to express the recurrent nature of everyday practices (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011; Miettinen et al., 2009). This is an extraordinary challenge, since diversity scholars, like other MOS scholars, are familiar with dealing with entities rather than performances (Nicolini & Monteiro, 2017).

In our research examples we have engaged with the notion of "site" to refer to the recursive relationship between a social phenomenon and the context in which it transpires, and with "sociomateriality" to refer to the inseparability of meaning and matter, the social and the technological. But many other vocabularies from practice theory can inspire future research to adequately express the processual and nondualistic orientation of "practicing diversity." To start with the most obvious example, even if "practice" is a commonsense word, we should not forget that it is proposed as a different relational concept to overcome in "one" notion the dual referencing to individuals and systems or to agency and structures.

Other processual notions that concern the central role of bodies in practice are, for instance, "entwinement" (Sandberg & Dall'Alba, 2009) and "embodiment" (Gherardi, 2018). Entwinement, referring to Merleau-Ponty's notion of the "lived body," may help diversity scholars overcome the mind-body dualism and study how the work of diversity practitioners is an entwinement of particular activities, knowledge, equipment, and relations with others. Gherardi (2018: 42) proposed embodiment to express "how the nature/culture division is blurred in the materiality of bodies encountering a material-semiotic environment" and may infuse future diversity research to incorporate the sensual and bodily experience of practice.

Diversity scholars may also turn to the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1990), who developed maybe one of the most inventive vocabularies to overcome the objectivist/subjectivist dualism. Reflecting on how to theorize practice theory in a processual way, Bourdieu spoke of the need to attend to "dialectical" relations in order to

> construct the theory of practice, or, more precisely, the theory of the mode of generation of practices, which is the precondition for establishing an experimental science of the *dialectic of the internalization of the externality and the externalization of internality*, or, more simply of incorporation and objectification (1977: 72).

This theoretical task has resulted in a refined series of intertwined notions, such as habitus, field, capital, doxa, hysteresis, conatus, and reflexivity (Grenfell, 2012), not only making Bourdieu's practice theory complex but often misappropriated (Townley, 2014) and also underrepresented in diversity studies (Tatli, 2011; Tatli & Özbilgin, 2012).

Reconceptualizing Diversity Practice Along the Theoretical Logic of Practice

Currently, diversity scholarship tends to approach the notion of practice in an atheoretical, commonsensical way (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2016). It equates diversity practices with particular types of practices—selection, training, mentoring, and networking—which, when defined, are understood in terms of their purpose: "formalized organizational system, process, or practice developed and implemented for the purpose of effectively managing a diverse workforce" (Yang & Konrad, 2011: 7). From a practice lens, however, diversity research would aim to capture the theoretical logic of practice, no longer glossing over the meaning of practice or reducing it to simply what people do (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2016).

Adopting this theoretical logic, we endorse the idea that a diversity practice consists of a set of real-time doings and sayings, mediated by the way discourse, materiality, and our bodies are entangled (Nicolini, 2017). Such conception opens up a much richer understanding of how things actually happen, attending to crucial aspects of activity, performance, and work that have been overlooked by diversity research. It implies that the focus is no longer on the substance of a practice but on *a way* of selecting, *a way* of training, *a way* of career mentoring. The strength of a theoretical logic of practice then resides, as Nicolini and Monteiro nicely put it, "in grounding explanations in what is empirically observable, patiently tracing back phenomena to arrangements of concrete elements that produce the state of affairs under investigation—instead of analytically hiding in vague notions or mechanisms" (2017: 123).

The potential reward for diversity research is not only more interesting and effective ways of understanding how a diversity practice is accomplished but also new ways of connecting research with practice (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011). Practice theory puts forward a rationale of a different ontological-epistemological stance (Gherardi, 2016; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011): what is most relevant for practice and, thus, what is most "practical" for diversity practitioners is understanding their everyday practices through relating them to the concept of "social practice." Bringing in concrete examples and thick representations of practices may, in fact, help practitioners see through conventional ways of doing and explore new ways of practicing (Nicolini & Monteiro, 2017).

The theoretical conception of practice opens up a range of new research directions. Until now, diversity research has not paid much attention to the elements of embodiment and materiality. Encouragingly, studies have started to explore the embodied nature of diversity, considering, for example, inclusion through the lens of embodied ethics (Tyler, 2019) and, under the impulse of performative studies of gender and sexuality (Butler, 1993), bringing in materiality such as space to explore the (re)construction of inequality regimes (Wasserman & Frenkel, 2015) and dominant gender norms (Tyler & Cohen, 2010). Much more can be done, however, to fully understand how practicing diversity is a situated, embodied activity and how this activity transpires and travels amid material arrangements. It is important for future research to consider not only the different elements that are part of a practice but also, and crucially, the entanglement of those embodied, material, and discursive resources. As our example of the situated practice of mixing indicates, it is through focusing on the particular sociomaterial entanglement—how these elements hang together and prevent or reproduce normativities—that diversity scholars will be able to better understand how a particular practice accomplishes a particular social order.

Further, a theoretically informed understanding of practice may especially be relevant to uncover practices that value diversity, which is an increasingly evolving research stream (Dwertmann et al., 2016; Shore et al., 2011). We envision that future research may benefit in particular by looking for cases where new bodily, affective, and discursive choreographies are expected to be found and that accomplish equality and inclusion in new ways. We therefore encourage diversity scholars to find positive, affirmative examples where such situated practices can be uncovered. We can imagine that inspiring everyday practices of managing diversity can be found in "caring and compassionate organizations" (Rynes, Bartunek, Dutton, & Margolis, 2012) or "organizations with purpose" (Hollensbe, Wookey, Hickey, George, & Nichols, 2014), as well as in particular industries, like the creative industries in our illustration, or in social movements that value principles that are also relevant to diversity research, such as plurality and human dignity.

While the theoretical logic of practice thus promises better insights into how diversity is accomplished, bringing it also closer to a practice logic, the challenge (see Table 1) is to not fall into "practice architecturism" (Nicolini, 2017: 32). Observing the social life of diversity, scholars need to be aware that several practices happen at the same time: "empirically, we always encounter multiplicities or arrays of activities" (Nicolini, 2017: 27). Scenes of actions are nexuses where several practices intersect (Schatzki, 2005; Scollon, 2001), which means that empirical researchers are exposed to a variety of actions belonging to several distinct practices rather than a single one. This complexity then raises the challenge for diversity scholars to find out which practices are relevant before they can proceed to study them in detail (Nicolini & Monteiro, 2017). Further, scholars need to be careful not to reify practices when analyzing the empirical material. Nicolini (2017) reminds scholars that the theorization in practice-based research is rearticulating social phenomena, not the practice itself. So, when studying diversity practices, its connections, and its effects, diversity scholars should not fall into the trap of a form of practice architecturism where the goal is to create abstract processes rather than understand how practitioners do it for real. Similarly, aiming to identify situated practices that accomplish a more equal social order, the focus should be on the localized performances, not on the practice as an entity.

Reconceptualizing Diversity-Related Phenomena As Effects of Order-Producing Practices

Finally, a practice-based theory of diversity conceives of diversity-related phenomena differently. As our two research examples showed, inequality and equality need to be seen as the result

of net effects produced and reproduced through practices and their associations. They are a particular social order in a diverse organization, being the result of meaning-making, identity-forming, and order-producing practices (Chia & Holt, 2008; Nicolini, 2013). Such practice-based reconceptualization is not only applicable to (in)equality but also to other diversity-related phenomena. Racism, discrimination, homophobia, inclusion, diversity climate, or Whiteness can similarly be seen as seemingly stable features of a social organizational order, transpiring amid and through practices and their associations. In general, we forward the idea that diversity-related phenomena are to be reconceptualized as "the result of vast action nets kept together by the unremitting work of both human and nonhuman entities (Czarniawska, 2004)" (Nicolini & Monteiro, 2017: 121).

Such reconceptualization requires diversity scholars to uncover those practices and their associations that produce the effect under study—or, as Bourdieu (1977: 43) indicated, uncovering the "structuring structures" (see Poggio, 2006). The four research strategies as developed by Nicolini (2017) might be helpful here, since each strategy has its own focus in respecifying the phenomenon under study. Diversity scholars interested in uncovering the persistence of a social order may best turn to a configurational strategy, since this investigates how practices are connected to form a bundle, which keeps the social order locked in. A genealogical strategy is very complementary in this regard and allows diversity scholars to investigate the historical emergence and stabilization of practice(s) and bundle(s). Diversity scholars interested in the concrete accomplishment of a situated practice should turn to a situational strategy. This is particularly relevant when they are aiming to understand in depth how the practicing happens, as in the case of more equal and inclusive social orders. Finally, diversity scholars may adopt a conflict-sensitive strategy when interested in the tensions and contradictions between practices. This will allow the scholars to gain insight into how a practice gains superiority over a competing one, relevant when, for instance, a new diversity initiative is introduced.

Additionally, the critical dimension of a practice-based approach reminds diversity scholars that uncovering the spatially and temporally situated production and reproduction of a phenomenon should be done from a "political angle" (Ortner, 1984: 149). This requires asking critical questions to make the effects visible. Questions may concern the alignment (as in our example of career mentoring) or contradictions of the practice under study with other practices, as well as into the effects this hanging together of practices has on those who reside within the nexus of practices (Nicolini, 2017; Nicolini & Monteiro, 2017). As Gherardi and Rodeschini remarked, "It is when the researchers interrogate the consequences of practices being practiced . . . that a critical gaze . . . opens up" (2016: 279).

To suggest further conceptual routes into renewing the research agenda of diversity studies, we briefly reconceptualize the diversity-related phenomena of diversity climate and Whiteness along these lines. Diversity climate is focused on employees' perceptions about the extent to which an organization successfully promotes fairness and the elimination of discrimination, as well as expressing, listening to, actively valuing, and integrating diverse perspectives. It is currently seen as having multiple predictors: inclusive HR practices, the demographic composition of one's group, the broader communities in which it is embedded, and formally established diversity programs (Dwertmann et al., 2016). While we do not doubt the relevance of the content of the definition and the predictors, a practice-based theory of diversity would emphasize the performative nature of these "predictors," aiming to uncover how, in a particular situation and time, inclusive HR, community, and diversity practices hang together and produce a particular diversity climate. The latter is then no longer a personal perception but the net effect of climate-producing practices, which can be examined through critical questions related to empowerment, scope for agency, and voice, as suggested by Nicolini (2017). Or other questions that may be relevant can refer to the valorization of competences and the legitimatization of identities. Such practice theory–based diversity research on diversity climate would enrich our understanding of the dynamics through which a diversity climate is created.

Similarly, the notion of Whiteness, an understudied yet critical notion in diversity studies, will be differently understood and studied. While its definition—"the production and reproduction of dominance rather than subordination, normativity rather than marginality, and privilege rather than disadvantage" (Frankenberg, 1993, cited in Nkomo

& Al Ariss, 2014: 390)—already indicates a performative nature, a practice theory–based diversity study would further aim to uncover how the dominance of Whiteness becomes unacknowledged. Possibly using a genealogical research strategy (Nicolini, 2017), longitudinal studies would be able to trace how, over time, certain practices produce in situ the emergence and stabilization of certain norms and privileges. Scholars could use questions like the following: How did a norm originate and become embodied? How did we get where we are? And through which sociomaterial arrangements did the practice travel in space and time? (Nicolini, 2013; 2017). Such research would complement current research focusing on Black and White agency, White ignorance, and White listening (Ahmed, 2007b; Swan, 2017), shedding new light on how Whiteness and dominance emerge and become legitimized as they transpire and materialize amid and through practices.

Finally, and crucially, a practice-based theory of diversity may contribute to a better understanding of the continuing and persistent asymmetries that characterize diverse organizations. Starting from the assumption that behind all the apparently durable features of organizations (like horizontal and vertical segregation) there is some type of productive and reproductive work (Martin, 2003; Nicolini, 2013), a practice-based theory questions the "natural" order of things. Practices that produce order will not be taken for granted; on the contrary, practice-based diversity studies carefully examine those practices and their associations that produce and reproduce the very resilient discriminatory, unequal social order of an organization. A practice-based theory of diversity thus promises a better understanding of how a "natural" order of things is locked into a configuration of practices.

We acknowledge, however, that this is a difficult promise. Also, practice theorists themselves struggle with the challenge (see Table 1) of how practice theory can better contribute to our understanding of power and social phenomena that reflect enduring asymmetries (Watson, 2017). In this regard, Watson's proposal to especially focus on how practices are related to each other across different sites is extremely relevant to diversity, as is his plea that questions about connections between practices must take on "a sharper edge when the problem is that of explaining how some actors and sites come to be loci of a disproportionate capacity of shaping action elsewhere" (2017: 181). Much then might be gained if practice scholars and diversity scholars would join forces in understanding and conceptualizing the connections and nature of relationships between practices that produce stabilized patterns of power and reproduce inequalities within and across organizations (Nicolini, 2013; Watson, 2017). In this sense, the application of a practice approach within diversity studies may also benefit the further development of practice theory.

CONCLUSION

Our proposal for rejuvenating diversity research is to turn to practice theory and its rich theoretical approaches. From its relational ontology, we understand the mutually constitutive nature of social life, which directs diversity scholars to attend to recursive relations, not dualisms. From its conceptual ideas, we take away the idea that the particular social order of a diverse organization is constantly accomplished through the enactment of practices. From its empirical project, we understand that diversity-related phenomena are to be explained through respecifying them in terms of practices and their connections in space and time.

Taking on this form of theorizing is, as Feldman and Orlikowski remind us, in itself a practice that produces "particular kinds of consequences in the world, for which we as theoretical producers are responsible" (2011: 1250). In today's world, where diverse organizations continue to be characterized by discrimination and segregation, further fueled by extreme resistance and highly emotional reactions to migrants, refugees, and globalization, diversity scholarship faces an immense responsibility. Theories that reduce social life to only a few elements are unlikely to explain the persistent inequality, complexity, and sensitivity of diversity within and across organizations. A practice-based theory of diversity, with its emphasis on critically uncovering the taken-for-granted practices that produce problematic social orders but also its affirmative potential to identify situated practices that value diversity, can hopefully make this contribution.

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