Chapter 6

Discussion and conclusion
“Successful” professionals of second-generation Turkish-Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch descent play a central role throughout the chapters in this thesis. These professionals are labeled “successful” because they occupy high-status jobs and because they have obtained steep social mobility when compared to their low-educated, working-class parents (see also Crul, Keskiner & Lelie, 2017, p. 215). However, being successful through occupying a high-level professional position in an organization doesn’t automatically mean that second-generation professionals always feel included or are overall accepted in the workplace (Van Laer & Janssens, 2017). In spite of their success, second-generation professionals experience exclusionary practices and instances of “Othering” in the workplace (see also Slootman, 2014; Ossenkop, 2015; Van der Raad, 2015). The social boundaries in organizations that lead to these exclusionary practices and instances of “Othering” are important to identify and understand as they are taken for granted in organizational processes by all organizational members (Ossenkop 2015, p. 279) and therefore often remain unchallenged despite the presence of second-generation professionals in organizations (cf. Puwar, 2004; Van der Raad, 2015, p. 283). And indeed, as succinctly described by the second-generation Turkish-Dutch female lawyer at the beginning of the introductory chapter of this thesis, she has found a way around or reluctantly accepts barriers that she clearly sees in her organization. Nevertheless, the same lawyer continues by stating that she only accepts things to a certain extent. She and many other interviewees in this thesis have found ways to actively engage with and possibly change the social boundaries they experience in the workplace.

In this concluding chapter, I will discuss and tie together the workplace experiences of second-generation Turkish-Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch professionals with social boundaries on the one hand, and their agency on the other hand through the Boundary Sensitivity Model, which I have constructed in order to answer the main research question of this thesis: How are social

11 Professionals of second-generation Turkish-Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch descent will be called second-generation professionals for the remainder of this chapter.
boundaries in the workplace opening up for and being opened up by second-generation professionals?

The Upward Mobility Boundary Sensitivity Model, as shown in figure 1, portrays both the impact of and the strategies towards social boundaries in the workplace on/by second-generation professionals.
Based on the empirical findings in chapters 2 to 5 and starting from the bottom of the model, I will focus on how second-generation professionals experience social boundaries in their organization. Going one step up in the model, I will subsequently reflect on the status and the newcomer position of these professionals. It is through their status that I will then explore the upper parts of
the model. In these upper parts, I will concentrate on how being positioned as the descendants of migrants gives these second-generation professionals a high level of sensitivity of boundaries. This boundary sensitivity enables second-generation professionals to concurrently use various boundary strategies to establish their own position in the organization, as well as to advocate for the interests of other stakeholders (e.g. migrant children or parents in the education sector) in their professional field, in order to strategically open up social boundaries in the workplace.

After connecting the empirical findings, I will answer the main research question and discuss the theoretical framework of this thesis. This chapter ends with recommendations for research to come.

**Boundary making in organizations: explicit equality, implicit exclusion**

An important feature of the way in which social boundaries in organizations are experienced by second-generation professionals, is that they are seldom explicit. What these social boundaries have in common is that they appear to be built-in parts of organizational systems, meaning that they are based on normalized organizational rules, codes and behaviours which are explicitly equal for all employees. However, implicitly, they can act to exclude second-generation professionals in various ways, during various stages in their careers and in various organizational relationships.

We found implicit exclusion, as the empirical findings in chapter 2 show, when second-generation professionals enter the labour market for the first time after finishing their education. They experience more difficulties in finding their first professional job than do professionals of ethnic-Dutch descent. The reasons for this strained transition from education to the labour market could almost never be exactly pinned down to their ethnicity by the second-generation professionals themselves in this study, because they were never explicitly
rejected on the basis of their ethnic or religious background. However, the second-generation professionals do speculate in the interviews that the negative public images in the Netherlands that surround ethnic minorities -and those with a Muslim background in particular-, and the bright and impermeable social boundaries that have been drawn in Dutch society between the ethnic-majority and ethnic minorities, could have percolated into opinions of people in these organizations. This seeping through and reproduction of societal boundaries into organizations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 150) could have played a role in the (sometimes many) rejections they have had to face and the strenuous transition from education to work these rejections resulted in.

Having tackled the critical moment of gaining entrance to organizations, second-generation professionals encounter further social boundaries in organizations on their way up the career ladder. In chapters 2 and 3 the empirical findings show that many of the second-generation professionals in this study have obtained promotions, but they have also missed out on promotions that they felt entitled to, either based on their performance or on their career trajectory. As with entering the labour market for the first time, obtaining promotions explicitly entails a trajectory equal to all employees. Simultaneously, it is also frequently a fuzzy trajectory in which the parameters aren’t always clear, decisions about who gets promoted and who doesn’t are made behind closed doors and ethnic-Dutch co-workers seem more likely to become promoted. These aspects leave second-generation professionals wondering whether the missed promotions had anything to do with their ethnic background. These doubts are fueled by the fact that most of the second-generation professionals, whether missing out on a promotion or not, feel that they have to work twice as hard as co-workers of ethnic-Dutch descent to be awarded the same esteem and opportunities within their organizations (cf. Siebers, 2009, p. 78). They feel that climbing the organizational ladder is more difficult and takes more time for them to accomplish than for ethnic-Dutch co-
Ossenkop, Vinkenburg, Jansen & Ghorashi indicate that ethnic-minority professionals can indeed experience barriers in their career development because of the fact that they deviate from, and in line with this deviation are considered inferior to, taken-for-granted and implicit organizational norms and corresponding behaviours that are modelled on the “dominant ethnic (masculine) image” (2015, p. 519). Yet, because this normative modelling is based on an implicit hierarchy, whereas career trajectories are explicitly the same for all employees, it is difficult to substantiate a complaint about a missed promotion.

Getting in an organization and going up the organizational ladder involves questions for second-generation professionals about the importance of their ethnic background. Other experiences in the workplace by second-generation professionals, including day-to-day contact with co-workers, can bring up the same type of uncertainties about implicit exclusion. In chapters 2, 3 and 5, second-generation professionals reflect on their acceptance in the workplace. This acceptance by supervisors, same-level colleagues and subordinates isn’t a given for second-generation professionals as they come across situations in which their ethnic or religious background receives more attention than their professional position by co-workers in the form of questions, challenges and mockery. It is in these situations that second-generation professionals experience implicit exclusion in the workplace in particular: when their professional position is overruled by co-workers and they are set apart as ethnically and religiously different. Moreover, the “subtle” ways in which second-generation professionals are set apart, meaning that the questions, comments and jokes aren’t explicit rejections and are sometimes even brought to the fore as compliments (see also Van Laer & Janssens, 2011), makes it difficult for second-generation professionals to openly confront co-workers about their exclusive and hurtful effects. These “subtle” instances of “Othering” expose the implicit and built-in nature of social boundaries in organizations:
jokes, questions or comments can be directed towards all organizational members and are therefore explicitly part of normal, day-to-day organizational life. However, implicitly, these jokes, questions and comments appear to befall second-generation professionals in a particular way: that is pointing to certain parts of their identity which make them different from, and often seen as inferior to, other organizational members (cf. Ghorashi, 2014; Ossenkop et al. 2015).

Second-generation professionals as “newcomers”

That social boundaries in organizations are experienced by many second-generation professionals can be linked to their “newcomer” status. In chapter 5, this “newcomer” status is mainly related to the fact that the second-generation professionals featured in this thesis, hail from ethnic groups that are new to higher-level professional settings in the Netherlands (Crul, Keskiner, & Lelie, 2017). Moreover, the ethnic -and in its slipstream religious- groups they are associated with, are among the most marginalized throughout Europe (Heath, Rothon & Kilpi, 2008; Foner & Alba, 2008) and experience stigmatization based on their Muslim faith (cf. Eijberts & Roggeband, 2016). This association with a stigmatized group can lead to a stigmatized professional identity for the second generation (Slay & Smith, 2011, p. 86; Van Laer & Janssens, 2014), which also comes to the fore in chapters 2 and 3. Chapters 2, 3 and 5 show that the ethnic and religious stereotypes that are persistent in Dutch society and that revolve around ethnic minorities with an Islamic background especially (Vasta, 2007), reverberate in conversations and interactions in the workplace (cf. Van Laer & Janssens, 2011) between second-generation professionals and co-workers of ethnic-Dutch descent from all organizational levels. The sharp and impermeable boundary lines that are thus drawn in the Netherlands between the ethnic majority and ethnic minorities (Alba, 2005) are reflected in social boundaries in
organizations. What’s more, the ways in which ethnic stereotypes oftentimes penetrate organizations is also a reflection of how stereotypes are presented in many Western societies, including the Dutch one, and that is mostly in a “subtle” and implicit way (Meertens & Pettigrew, 1997; Coenders, Scheepers, Sniderman & Verberk, 2001; Deitch, Barsky, Butz, Chan, Brief & Bradley, 2003), leading to implicit boundary making in organizations as described in the previous paragraph.

On top of being confronted with social boundaries in organizations on the basis of their ethnic and religious background, the second-generation professionals we interviewed all come from a lower working-class background with parents who were low-educated when they came to the Netherlands to do lower-level labour. This lower-class background intersects with their experiences as ethnic and religious newcomers in organizations. This is in line with findings of Van der Raad, who states that “class background appears to be inseparably linked with the experiences of minority professionals who are not being considered a full-fledged professional” (2015, p. 273). Second-generation professionals have thus, on the one hand, experienced steep upward mobility in terms of their education level and their professional position in the labour market and are in that sense prototypical social climbers. On the other hand, due to this steep upward mobility these second-generation professionals are among the first from their ethnic group in the Netherlands to hold professional positions. This also implies that they are among the first second-generation professionals in organizations. And consequently, they are often solitary frontrunners in the predominantly ethnic-majority upper echelons of Dutch organizations. Being solitary frontrunners can make second-generation professionals vulnerable in terms of experiencing forms of social boundaries, because their lower-class background can easily place them in the position as “different from the rest” in the organization (see also Schneider, Crul & Van Praag, 2014). And being considered “different from the rest” is what these
second-generation professionals already experience in terms of their ethnic and religious backgrounds. As is shown in chapters 2, 3 and 5, being considered “different” is predominantly related to ethnicity. However, class -and sometimes also gender and age- plays a role too, making the second-generation professionals newcomers in multiple ways who oftentimes have to adapt and develop various forms of social and cultural capital (cf. Keskiner & Crul, 2017, p. 297) in order to resemble the so-called “ideal” employee, or norm employee, who is still oftentimes ethnic-Dutch, male, middle-aged and from a middle class or upper class background (Acker, 1992; Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998; Gowricharn, 2002; Van der Raad, 2015).

The “newcomer” position of these second-generation upwardly mobile professionals can thus cause them to experience social boundaries in organizations. However, socially mobile second-generation professionals have found ways to engage with these social boundaries in organizations (see also Keskiner & Crul, 2017; Van Laer & Janssens, 2017). Moreover, when engaging with social boundaries, second-generation professionals, as all empirical chapters show, actually make use of their positionality as second generation. Growing up in the Netherlands in an ethnic-minority family has given these second-generation professionals access to multiple and divergent cultural repertoires: throughout their educational trajectory and in everyday life they have been socialized in the Dutch context, while they also have cultural knowledge of their parental countries. Juggling these diverse cultural repertoires can be, and sometimes has been, a challenge for these second-generation professionals. Yet, in return, as chapters 4 and 5 show, these cultural repertoires offer second-generation professionals the advantage of knowing their way around various settings (Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, Waters and Holdaway, 2008; Levitt, 2009), enabling them to successfully engage with diverse stakeholders (ranging from pupils to parents, and from co-workers to educational networks in the specific context of the education sector around
which these chapters revolve) in the workplace. Moreover, having multiple cultural repertoires at their disposal, also offers second-generation professionals the ability to deal with different – and sometimes even competing – roles within the workplace. These different and competing roles come to the fore in chapter 3 in which second-generation professionals in leadership positions are faced with subtle discrimination in the workplace. The chapter shows how second-generation professionals simultaneously take into consideration and deal with hegemonic, “hidden” power, which is at the root of subtle discrimination in organizations, and with “open” power which is reflected in organizational hierarchies. Second-generation professionals are capable of juggling these competing forms of power because they are quick to discover, understand and adapt to the “rules of the game” in organizations (Keskiner & Crul, 2017; Rezai, 2017), allowing them to deal with forms of implicit social boundaries by portraying various constellations of “sameness” and “difference”.

“Sameness”: circumventing and playing along with implicit boundaries

The ways in which second-generation professionals show an understanding of and adapt to the organizational rules of the game, comes to the fore in various ways when they face the consequences of implicit boundary making in organizations. In the case of the strenuous transition from education to work, as shown in chapter 2, second-generation professionals acted upon the speculation that their ethnic and religious background could have played a role in their numerous rejections by actively engaging their social capital, in the form of a network contact putting in a good word for them. Or they used the same cover letter that failed to land them a job, to obtain an extra and unpaid internship. These alternative routes are approved and more generally used professional strategies, whereby organizations rely on vouching figures or the provisional, temporary nature of internships, and they offered a way into
organizations for second-generation professionals. These evasive maneuvers are based on knowledge of how to act as a starting professional, and they are therefore valuable individual boundary strategies. But in actuality, these evasive maneuvers based on circumventing social boundaries, leave the social boundaries in organizations intact (cf. Boogaard & Roggeband, 2010; Van der Raad, 2015).

Knowing how to act as a professional and using this as a strategy to circumvent implicit social boundaries in organizations also comes to the fore when second-generation professionals are engaged in their trajectory up the organizational ladder. Second-generation professionals have doubts about whether their chances of getting promoted are equal to those of ethnic-Dutch colleagues. They feel that that they have to work twice as hard to get the same chances in their organizations as ethnic-majority co-workers (Siebers, 2009a, p. 78). However, because this is just a feeling, and because the explicit rules of the game are that organizations offer the same career options for all employees, it can be difficult to openly discuss, let alone substantiate. In chapters 2 and 3 second-generation professionals describe their strategy towards this implicit social boundary: knowing that they have to work twice as hard for the same chances as their ethnic-Dutch co-workers, they indeed just work twice as hard. And they thereby indeed obtain promotions. Again, knowing what is expected of them, both explicitly and implicitly, second-generation professionals use a suitable individual boundary strategy to climb the career ladder. And again, by employing this strategy, the implicit underlying mechanisms leading to social boundaries in the workplace are kept in place.

The successful individual strategies of second-generation professionals to gain entrance to organizations and high-level positions by circumventing and playing along with social boundaries, are based on portraying “sameness”. “Sameness” can be seen as a strategy through which second-generation professionals present themselves as knowledgeable professionals and good
And although “sameness” is a strategy, second-generation professionals actually in many ways feel the same as their co-workers of ethnic-Dutch descent because of their sense and sensibility of how things work in organizations. Through emphasizing “sameness”, second-generation professionals accentuate the common ground instead of the differences with co-workers of ethnic-Dutch descent. However, portraying “sameness” doesn’t necessarily lead to acceptance in organizations for second-generation professionals as the implicit social boundaries in organizations are left intact. In fact, second-generation professionals oftentimes face “subtle” lack of acceptance in the workplace on all organizational levels, ranging from their supervisors to same-level colleagues and their subordinates. This lack of acceptance runs contrary to what second-generation professionals are trying to accomplish by portraying “sameness”, which is to secure recognition by ethnic-Dutch co-workers in an organizational context dominated by the frame of reference and practices of the ethnic-Dutch majority (Siebers, 2009a, p. 83).

Comparable contradictions with “sameness” and lack of acceptance are found among ethnic-minority professionals in Flanders (Van Laer & Janssens, 2017). The authors argue that the strategies employed by ethnic-minority professionals “do not simply disrupt relations of power but are simultaneously reproducing them” (Ibid., p. 210; cf. Boogaard & Roggeband, 2010, p. 63). Van Laer and Janssens (2017) furthermore state that the strategies themselves are inherently contradictory and filled with tensions, because ethnic-minority professionals employ these strategies - sometimes simultaneously - on three levels. These levels are related to identity, career and social change motives, and because the levels are intertwined, to engage with one level is to sometimes make a trade-off with another one.

Employing “sameness”, as described above, can be seen as a career-level strategy by second-generation professionals, revolving around the question how second-generation professionals might “advance their careers in the face of
processes of power denying them access to labour market rewards such as jobs or promotions” (Van Laer & Janssens, 2017, p. 212). Yet, once second-generation professionals have gained entrance to and have established themselves in their organization, their “socially advanced position (...) creates the opportunity to more ‘safely’ assert one’s ethnicity” (Slootman, 2014, p. 200). Second-generation professionals can hereby opt to engage with implicit boundary making in organizations on the identity-level through the use of “difference”.

“Difference”: staying true by questioning implicit boundaries

Opting for “difference” on the identity-level by second-generation professionals can be a hazardous strategy, since they are already seen as different by ethnic-Dutch co-workers and it therefore confirms this viewpoint. Still, it is occasionally, yet actively used by second-generation professionals featured in this thesis. In certain situations and under certain conditions taking into consideration power relations, second-generation professionals portray their “difference” on the individual identity-level in order to “construct, maintain and display a specific sense of self at work in the face of processes of subjectification and power tying them to a particular identity in a constraining way” (Van Laer & Janssens, 2017, p. 212). Chapters 2 and 3 show that second-generation professionals highlight their “difference” in situations in which they feel that co-workers cross a line with their lack of acceptance of second-generation professionals. One of these situations concerns ethnic-Dutch co-workers commenting on and criticizing the ethnic or religious background of second-generation professionals in the form of jokes.

Jokes are tricky things to deal with, as they are explicitly considered innocent and fun, while they implicitly can hurt and exclude. Understanding that implicit exclusion is a part of normalized organizational life, second-generation
professionals act upon the fact that jokes are tied up with organizational power structures. In cases where these power structures are explicit, that is with supervisors and subordinates, second-generation professionals mostly avoid an open power play and refrain from explicitly portraying their “difference”. They therefore often decide to deal with jokes, even with those that cross the line, based on “sameness”. This requires second-generation professionals to react upon jokes as normal organizational behaviour that can either be ignored or reciprocated by “subtly” joking back. In both instances, the social boundaries underlying the “subtle” and implicit exclusion remain undiscussed and intact, and thus a part of organizational life.

However, second-generation professionals sometimes opt for “difference” when dealing with jokes that cross the line, despite the fact that this can make them look overly sensitive, thin-skinned and even unprofessional. This decision is made when second-generation professionals deal with same-level colleagues and organizational power is much less of an issue than with supervisors or subordinates. Jokes that cross the line are jokes that make second-generation professionals feel that if they wouldn’t respond to the implicit exclusion packaged in the joke, they wouldn’t be staying true to themselves. In other words, second-generation professionals feel that under these circumstances in which a co-worker with an equal power relationship crosses the line, it is more important for them emotionally to explicitly defend and protect their ethnic and religious background than emphasizing “sameness” through being a good professional and colleagues.

Displaying “difference” in order to stay true to oneself emotionally reveals that second-generation professionals make calculated decisions about whether and how to act upon implicit boundary making in organizations. When these calculated decisions amount to showing “difference”, second-generation professionals attempt to defend and protect their ethnic and religious identity, which is exactly the identity regulation that makes up “micro-emancipation”, a
term coined by Alvesson & Willmott (1992). Micro-emancipation entails “partial, temporal movements breaking away from diverse forms of oppression” (Ibid., p. 447) and it is an individual identity-level strategy of resistance for second-generation professionals against the isomorphic pull of and in organizations that encourages assimilation and adjustment (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Ghorashi & Sabelis, 2013).

This individual strategy of resistance on an identity-level can have broader consequences, as chapter 3 shows. Through “difference”, second-generation professionals explicitly discuss taken-for-granted assumptions and exclusionary behaviours by and with same-level colleagues. They hereby attempt to create more awareness about and understanding for their experiences with implicit exclusion. Moreover, they also attempt to show how their experiences are embedded in the broader context of stereotypes in society and how these stereotypes soak through the organization and organizational relationships, and can consequently affect others in the workplace who might be considered “different”.

Through exposing the structural and embedded nature of implicit boundary making in organizations, second-generation professionals could potentially stretch the individual identity effects of micro-emancipation by setting in motion a broader realization and questioning of implicit boundaries in organizations (cf. Zanoni & Janssens, 2007, pp. 1394-1395). This setting in motion relates to the social change-level, whereby “processes of power underlying societal, structural forms of inequality and ethnic domination are challenged” (Van Laer & Janssens, 2017, p. 213) with a collective focus instead of an individual one. This collective focus does not entail a large-scale organizational transformation whereby social boundaries are eliminated. Yet, is does implicate a more tempered, long-term effort (cf. Meyerson & Scully, 1995) by second-generation professionals to “advance the interests of the group of ethnic minorities and promoting their ability to participate in society on a more
equal footing” (Van Laer & Janssens, 2017, p. 212) through making the social boundaries underlying the implicit exclusion more visible and open for debate and possibly -in time- obsolete.

“Sameness and difference”: switching between playing along and questioning implicit boundaries

The ability of second-generation professionals to set in motion small-scale social change in organizations by drawing on identity-level “difference” when confronted with social boundaries, points to the importance of the “difference” strategy. Several studies over the past few years have also started to focus on the ways in which second-generation professionals strategically add “difference” to their professional roles. Second-generation professionals thereby actively turn their deviant and disadvantaged ethnic group position into a career-level advantage in the labour market, for instance by attracting new groups of clients who were previously difficult to reach because of language or cultural lacunas in the organization (Konyali, 2014; Van der Raad, 2015). Or in the case of reaching out to individuals from certain groups in society by claiming less distance and easier access to these groups (Boogaard & Roggeband, 2010; Van Laer & Janssens, 2017). In other words, second-generation professionals manage to capitalize on “difference” in organizations.

The above-mentioned studies not only show how second-generation professionals manage to capitalize on “difference”, but they also concentrate on the potential backlash of drawing on “difference” as a career-level strategy. Similar to drawing on “difference” at the identity-level, opting for “difference” on the career-level can confirm and reproduce the already existing image of second-generation professionals as the “other”, since they actually position themselves as different (see also Van der Raad, 2015). And this positionality can
perpetuate and reinforce the existing social boundaries in organizations between the ethnic-Dutch majority and second-generation professionals.

The strategies of “sameness” and “difference” can have contradictory effects on social boundaries in organizations by both perpetuating and reinforcing them on the one hand, while also discussing and potentially changing them on the other. These inherent tensions and contradictions require second-generation professionals to switch between the strategies of “sameness” and “difference” in an “attempt to balance the different advantages and disadvantages each strategy implies” (Van Laer & Janssens, 2017, p. 211). And it is precisely this switching between the strategies of “sameness” and “difference” in order to engage with implicit boundary making in organizations, for which second-generation professionals possess the necessary positionality which enables them to flexibly navigate between diverse contexts and cultures.

Second-generation professionals have the capability to switch between “sameness and difference” because they have grown up learning and understanding diverse cultural repertoires (cf. Schneider et al., 2014, p. 5). Second-generation professionals are therefore capable of assessing a difficult situation which oftentimes involves “subtle”, implicit social boundaries on the one hand, and organizational power relations on the other, and they consequently decide how to act in terms of which strategy to choose. When choosing a strategy to engage with social boundaries, second-generation professionals steadily rely on “sameness”, since the Dutch (organizational) context of bright, impermeable boundaries requires the professional identity on which “sameness” in organizations is based, to predominate. And they add “difference” when it either serves the protection of their ethnic and religious identity, the development of their career, and/or their willingness and ability to bring about social change.
“Sameness and difference” in the education sector

The interplay between second-generation professionals employing the strategy of “sameness and difference” vis-à-vis implicit social boundaries in organizations, has been studied in a specific professional context in chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis, and that is the education sector. The chapters show that the education sector is characterized by an ethnic homogeneity among education professionals on the one hand, and on the other hand an ever-increasing ethnic diversity among pupils and students in the large cities in the Netherlands (and in several other European large cities as well). This homogeneity among education professionals is visible in the upper echelons of the sector in which the second-generation professionals work. These upper echelons, where organizational decisions are made, are characterized by a predominantly ethnic-Dutch, middle-class and middle-aged male workforce (cf. Van der Raad, 2015). But the homogeneity is also visible at the level of teachers who, in the large cities in the Netherlands, have to deal with a growing ethnic diversity among pupils in primary and secondary education, as well as with students in tertiary education (cf. Crul, Pasztor & Lelie, 2008).

When juxtaposing these increasingly super-diverse classrooms with the homogeneous composition in the upper echelons of the sector, as well as with the perpetual lack of ethnic diversity among teachers in the Netherlands, the ability of second-generation education professionals to switch between “sameness and difference” allows them to create links between social worlds. Through this bridging position, second-generation professionals can act as “cultural brokers” by “providing resources for youth in bridging across their cultural worlds in ways that reduce educational inequities (…)” (Cooper, 2014, p. 172). These educational inequities run contrary to the sector’s generally presupposed meritocratic nature that explicitly offers the same chances to all pupils and students.
Yet, despite its meritocratic premise, “subtle” organizational norms, behaviours and power relations that point to the existence of implicit social boundaries in the sector are recognized by second-generation education professionals. And these implicit social boundaries can affect pupils and students, but also the position of second-generation professionals themselves.

Second-generation professionals engage with the various implicit social boundaries in their organization and in the sector by using the “sameness and difference” strategy. They hereby rely on “sameness” by taking the sector’s characteristics and (limited) possibilities for change into consideration, while “difference” is used on the identity- career-, and social change-level to bridge the experiences and life worlds of the various stakeholders involved.

Chapter 5 shows how second-generation professionals are confronted with implicit social boundaries on the identity-level by ethnic-Dutch co-workers who occasionally attribute more importance to the ethnic or religious background of second-generation professionals than to their professional position in the organization. These instances of “othering” often place second-generation professionals in a position of “in-betweenness”, which can be described as a state in which second-generation professionals become stuck between cultures (Gans, 1992; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Heath et al., 2008), and are therefore required to make zero-sum choice in order to belong in the workplace (cf. Byrom & Lightfoot, 2012). However, many of the second-generation education professionals featured in chapter 5, do not make this zero-sum choice between their ethnic or religious identity on the one hand, and their professional identity on the other. Instead, second-generation professionals try to normalize their own presence in the upper echelons of the Dutch education sector by being a good professional and without taking up the position of “exceptional sameness” (Van Laer & Janssens, 2017, p. 210). This “exceptional sameness” implies that these professionals can only be understood as deviant from the rest of their ethnic and religious groups (cf. Konyali, 2014), and thus
the exception to the rule. By actively denouncing the position of “exceptional sameness”, second-generation professionals refrain from making a zero-sum choice that could hold the ideas about and the social boundaries towards their ethnic and religious groups intact.

Implicit social boundaries towards the ethnic and religious groups from which the second-generation professionals hail, also come to the fore at the career-level, as chapters 4 and 5 show. Second-generation principals, for example, experience social distance and a “subtle” lack of trust from other principals -who are overwhelmingly of ethnic-Dutch descent- about their motives for setting up a school, whereas this freedom to found, direct and internally organize a school is one of the pillars on which the Dutch education system is built (Maussen & Vermeulen, 2015, p. 90). However, second-generation professionals know how the Dutch education system works, and what is (implicitly) expected of them, and they use this knowledge to engage with these feelings of social distance and distrust. Second-generation principals, for instance, invite other principals over to visit their schools in an attempt to be transparent but also to show these other principals that their schools are not so very different. Simultaneously, second-generation professionals see and use their ethnic and religious backgrounds as valuable additions in their organizations and in the education sector in general. Because of their second-generation positionality, second-generation professionals are able to tap into and switch between multiple cultural repertoires. And this switching between multiple cultural repertoires has turned from an individual competence into an important form of capital in the increasingly super-diverse context of the Dutch big cities (cf. Kasinitz et al., 2008; Levitt, 2009). Second-generation professionals, as chapters 4 and 5 shows, capitalize on the career-level by bringing in expertise on diversity issues at the institutional level. But they also form “cultural partnerships” (Cooper, 2011) through forging network contacts
with other education organizations and by bringing new knowledge into networks and diversifying the world of decision-makers in the education sector.

The ability of second-generation professionals to form cultural partnerships through “sameness and difference” is also an important feature for bringing about social change in the education sector. This social change is directed towards providing more equal chances in education for all pupils and students. In chapter 4, ethnic school segregation features as the main social boundary through which divisions rooted in society are mirrored in differences in the quality of schools and opportunities available to pupils (Gramberg, 1998; Beach & Sernhede, 2011). The chapter shows how second-generation professionals’ strive for more equality is related to their will to combine their interests (and the advantages they have as second-generation social climbers) with those of the people they work for. This “relational self-interest” (Stall, 2010) comes to the fore when second-generation professionals use “sameness” in the form of their knowledge of the Dutch school system and the related possibility of setting up one’s own school, in combination with their knowledge about and experiences with the specific needs of ethnic-minority pupils. In catering to the specific needs of ethnic-minority pupils, second-generation education professionals employ their multiple cultural, religious and language repertoires to better connect with the thoughts and life worlds of these pupils, and thereby provide better education (cf. Cooper, 2014). But they also use their ability to switch between “sameness and difference” to better relate to parents who want to be involved in their children’s school trajectories, but who do not always exactly know their way around the system or who are not always fluent in Dutch.

Second-generation education professionals have the capability to switch between “sameness and difference” because they have grown up learning and understanding diverse cultural repertoires. In the super-diverse work environment of the Dutch large cities, and the changing educational context
that goes along with it, second-generation education professionals are not only motivated but also equipped because of their ability to switch between “sameness and difference” to engage with the various social boundaries in their organizations and in the sector. Their capability to switch between “sameness and difference” in order to engage with implicit social boundaries, therefore has the potential to open up social boundaries on the identity-, career- and social change-level. It is wise to keep in mind, however, that this potential for change is limited by the characteristics of the organization and the sector, as well as by the contradictions that accompany each strategy (cf. Van Laer & Janssens, 2017). These contradictions are visible, for instance, when second-generation professionals engage with the negative effects of ethnic school segregation through the foundation of schools that are attuned to certain specific needs of ethnic-minority pupils. Yet, because these schools were originally founded by Turkish-Dutch second-generation professionals, they have attracted mostly pupils with a Turkish background. And they thereby, inadvertently, perpetuate the social boundary of ethnic school segregation. Hence, the interplay of “sameness and difference” allows second-generation professionals to successfully engage with a specific social boundary in the education sector, while this engagement can simultaneously and unwittingly affirm the social boundary.

Despite the limitations and contradictions, second-generation education professionals are using their capability to switch between cultural repertoires through “sameness and difference” as a bridging function to, formally and informally, advise colleagues and other education professionals how to deal with super-diversity in education. If this bridging function proves to be fruitful, it could lead to more education professionals becoming sensitive to the existence of implicit social boundaries in education and to more education professionals being willing and able to engage with these implicit social boundaries in the
hope of opening them up to include “difference” in whatever shape or form, both for their pupils and students and for their colleagues.

The Fine Art of Boundary Sensitivity

How social boundaries are opening up for and are being opened up by second-generation professionals in the workplace can be answered by looking at how the strategies of “sameness” and “difference” are employed by second-generation professionals on the career-, identity- and social change-level (cf. Van Laer & Janssens, 2017).

The involvement of second-generation professionals with social boundaries in organizations starts as an individual career-level boundary strategy. Second-generation professionals encounter implicit social boundaries when they attempt to enter organizations, climb the organizational ladder, and gain acceptance by co-workers, and they act upon these social boundaries by portraying “sameness”. Having grown up and been socialized in the Dutch context, second-generation professionals employ “sameness” in the form of knowing and using alternative and professionally approved routes to gain access to organizations and higher level positions, and to find the necessary common ground with co-workers of ethnic-Dutch descent in order to become accepted.

When looking at “sameness” as a career-level strategy to find common ground, it entails elements of boundary blurring (Wimmer, 2008a; Wimmer, 2008b, p. 989). Boundary blurring is a boundary modifying strategy (Wimmer, 2008a, p. 1044) whereby second-generation professionals seek to change the meaning of the boundary by “making the social profile of a boundary less distinct” (Alba, 2005, p. 23) through de-emphasizing their ethnicity and promoting their shared professional identity with co-workers of ethnic-Dutch descent. On the one hand it could be argued that boundary blurring through “sameness” works, because second-generation professionals are allowed in
organizations and manage to climb the organizational ladder, which could point to a diminished and blurred clarity about who belongs within the organizational boundary lines. On the other hand, the fact that second-generation professionals are **allowed** in, points to the power of those on the other side of the boundary line. The continuous encounters of second-generation professionals with implicit boundaries show how “subtle” power is used in organizations by co-workers from all organizational echelons to create and maintain social distance on the identity-level towards second-generation professionals (cf. Van Laer & Janssens, 2017). Therefore, the strategy of professional “sameness” may blur boundaries on the career-level by giving second-generation professionals access to high-level positions in organizations. However, professional “sameness” fails to blur social boundaries on the identity-level, since the ethnic and religious distinctions between the second generation and ethnic-Dutch co-workers that form the boundary, remain intact.

Because second-generation professionals know the rules of the game and use this knowledge in the form of seeking alternative and approved routes to circumvent social boundaries in organizations, “sameness” as a career-level strategy also entails elements of boundary crossing (Alba, 2005; Wimmer, 2008a). Boundary crossing is a different boundary modifying strategy, whereby membership within the boundary is acquired by second-generation professionals through moving from one group to another through assimilation (Wimmer, 2008a, p. 1044). This assimilation happens when second-generation professionals not only know but also adhere to the rules of the game that are – implicitly- excluding them by using different routes to enter organizations and climb the organizational ladder. Boundary crossing is a viable strategy in the Dutch context of sharp and impermeable bright boundaries, since it doesn’t challenge boundaries but actually “reinforces [their] empirical significance and normative legitimacy” (Ibid., p. 1039). As such, boundary crossing protects the existence of social boundaries, and it could therefore be argued that second-
generation professionals perpetuate social boundaries by using “sameness” on the individual career-level as a means to establish themselves professionally in organizations.

When second-generation professionals opt for the “difference” strategy vis-à-vis implicit social boundaries in organizations, they do so in an effort to stay true to themselves emotionally by questioning implicit boundaries. This “staying true” relates to the identity-level through which second-generation professionals “attempt to express who they ‘really’ are” in the workplace (Van Laer & Janssens, 2017, p. 212). Or rather, I would argue that staying true is an attempt by second-generation professionals to express who they ‘also’ are, next to being good professionals (cf. Slootman, 2014). This open portrayal of “difference” in an organizational context of bright social boundaries can make second-generation professionals (even more) vulnerable to instances of “othering”. This is because bright social boundaries clearly demarcate who belongs within the boundary lines and who doesn’t, and they require “a breaking of many ties to the group of origin” (Alba, 2005, p. 26). By showing who second-generation professionals ‘also’ are, they emphasize the presence of origin group ties. Showing “difference” on the identity-level therefore cannot be seen as a viable modifying boundary strategy in the context of bright and impermeable social boundaries in organizations (cf. Wimmer, 2008a). Firstly, “difference” openly portrays that assimilation hasn’t occurred among second-generation professionals and boundary crossing is therefore no option as an identity-level boundary strategy. While secondly, “difference” on the identity-level cannot lead to boundary blurring since bright boundaries do not offer the required porousness and openness to make the social profile of the boundary less distinct (Alba, 2005).

Despite the fact that showing “difference” on the identity-level isn’t a viable modifying boundary strategy in a context of bright social boundaries, the “difference” strategy has the potential to transition into a boundary strategy on
the social change-level through the wider implications that may come about when second-generation professionals choose to stay true to themselves.

When second-generation professionals choose to stay true to themselves on the identity-level, they do so through openly discussing with co-workers their experiences with implicit social boundaries in the organization, and how these boundaries affect them. This attempt to protect and defend their ethnic and religious background within their professional context can be seen as a form of micro-emancipation (Alvesson & Wilmott, 1992). And this micro-emancipation can lead to micro-change (cf. Van Laer & Janssens, 2017, p. 213) when second-generation professionals widen their discussions with co-workers about their experiences with social boundaries in organizations to include more general patterns of exclusion in society. By making the combination between the organization and society, and between their individual experiences and the mostly negative perceptions and ideas about ethnic minorities in general (Vasta, 2007; Ghorashi, 2014a), second-generation professionals’ open portrayal of “difference” challenges ethnic-Dutch co-workers to consider their remarks and behaviours towards second-generation professionals in a broader context of exclusion, in which “difference” is positioned on the outside of the boundary lines because it is considered deviant from the “ideal” or norm employee (cf. Acker, 1992; Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998; Gowricharn, 2002; Van der Raad, 2015).

Through positioning “difference” in a broader context, second-generation professionals transfer the “difference” strategy from the identity-level to the level of social change. In this context of the social change-level, “difference” entails elements of boundary shifting (Alba, 2005; cf. Wimmer, 2008a). Boundary shifting “involves the relocation of a boundary so that populations once situated on one side are now included on the other: former outsiders are thereby transformed into insiders” (Alba, 2005, p. 23). Second-generation professionals hereby attempt to change the topography of the boundary (cf.
Wimmer, 2008a) in order for them to no longer be merely accepted in organizations because of their “exceptional sameness” (Van Laer & Janssens, 2017, p. 210), which implies that they are accepted despite their “difference”, and because they are exceptions to the rule. The shift entails that through “difference”, second-generation professionals challenge the implicit rules about who belongs -and who is therefore fully accepted, with the inclusion of their different ethnic or religious background- within the organizational boundary lines.

Understanding “sameness” and “difference” as boundary strategies that entail elements of boundary crossing, blurring and shifting offers an explanation for how the second-generation professionals featured in this thesis manage to successfully engage with implicit boundary making in an organizational context of impermeable, bright boundaries. Using “sameness” as a strategy to cross and blur social boundaries in organizations can be seen as a vital career-level strategy for second-generation professionals operating in a context of impermeable, bright boundaries in which their ethnic and religious backgrounds are deemed the complete and inferior “other” (Vasta, 2007; Ghorashi, 2014b; Ossenkop et al. 2015). Second-generation professionals use elements of boundary crossing to adhere to the rules of the game that are implicitly exclusive, and blurring to emphasize their professionals identity over their ethnic and religious one. “Sameness” thereby allows entry into organizations and up the career ladder, not despite but because it leaves the implicit social boundaries intact.

But “sameness” also allows second-generation professionals to bring their “difference” into organizations, when they regard their position in the organization established enough in terms of time and accomplishment (cf. Slootman, 2014, p. 200). Subsequently, once second-generation professionals are firmly settled within the organization through “sameness”, bringing in “difference” as an identity-level strategy to stay true to oneself, can cascade
into a strategy on the social change-level (cf. Zanoni & Janssens, 2007; Van Laer & Janssens, 2017) which offers the potential to shift the topography of social boundaries in organizations by questioning the terms under which belonging and acceptance in the organization come about.

The opening up of social boundaries by second-generation professionals can thus not exclusively be explained by the collective re-positioning of second-generation professionals through crossing (Wimmer 2008a, p. 1044), or by the blurring of boundaries by second-generation professionals through their emphasis on a shared professional identity (Ibid., p. 1044), nor solely by second-generation professionals bringing about large scale organizational boundary shifts through forcing their ethnic or religious “difference” to become an accepted part of the organizational in-group (Ibid., p. 1044).

The opening up of social boundaries in organizations by second-generation professionals comes from them switching between “sameness” and “difference”, and hereby turning “sameness” from being solely a career-level strategy crucial for individual success and status change, into a means to also bring in and use the identity-level and social change-level strategy of “difference” in organizations. This ability to switch between and flexibly engage with “sameness and difference” is a result of the newcomer position of upwardly mobile second-generation professionals. Growing up in the Netherlands in an ethnic-minority family, where they were among the first to go through higher education and attain high-level professionals positions, second-generation professionals are frontrunners in their families and in organizations when it comes to achieving high-level positions, and they have had to pave their own way to get there. Second-generation professionals thus have had the challenges of learning, reading and combining diverse and sometimes competing cultural repertoires, such as that of the family home, the education system, and the labour market (cf. Portes & Zhou, 1993; Heath et al., 2008). But the flip side of these challenges are the benefits that second-generation
professionals reap by having grown up practicing these various cultural repertoires (Schneider et al., 2014), and consequently becoming able to deal with and combine these repertoires in order to create the best of both “sameness” and “difference” (cf. Kasinitz et al., 2008; Levitt, 2009).

Second-generation professionals’ ability to deal with and combine various cultural repertoires in the form of employing “sameness and difference” vis-à-vis social boundaries in organizations, amounts to what I have coined the strategy of “boundary sensitivity”. Boundary sensitivity is an individual and contextual strategy that incorporates elements of boundary crossing, blurring and shifting in the form of second-generation professionals switching between “sameness and difference”. Boundary sensitivity offers a viable strategy towards the sharp and bright boundary lines that continue to affect second-generation professionals in the form of implicit boundary making in organizations because it leaves room for second-generation professionals to switch between “sameness and difference”, depending on what the situation requires. Boundary sensitivity therefore becomes a flexible and useful boundary strategy for the opening up of social boundaries, since it incorporates the three mechanisms of boundary change, as listed by Wimmer (2008b, pp. 1004 - 1007): 1) boundary sensitivity makes room for the introduction of second-generation professional “newcomers” in organizational positions of influence and power through second-generation professionals showing “sameness” on the career-level by using elements from boundary crossing and blurring (exogenous shift); 2) boundary sensitivity simultaneously allows for the possibility of small identity-level changes in the form of micro-emancipation, pursued by second-generation professionals through “difference”, to cascade into boundary shifts in the form of second-generation professionals problematizing matters of belonging and acceptance on a more general social change-level in organizations (endogenous shift); and 3) boundary sensitivity has the potential to redefine “existing hierarchies of power, institutional order, and networks of alliance” (ibid, p.
through second-generation professionals switching between “sameness and difference” to take up the role of “cultural brokers” (Cooper, 2014) and form “cultural partnerships” (Cooper, 2011) in professional contexts, such as the education sector, in which super-diversity is becoming the norm and the ability to switch between and link various life worlds is becoming a professionals necessity (endogenous drift).

The strategy of boundary sensitivity has the potential to open up social boundaries in the workplace because second-generation professionals do not make a zero-sum choice between “sameness” and “difference” (cf. Slootman & Duyvendak, 2015), but because they actively and intentionally switch between and thereby employ both “sameness and difference” in order to engage with social boundaries on the career-, identity- and social change-level. This employment of “sameness and difference” on three levels does not result in a straightforward process of social boundaries being opened up in the workplace by second-generation professionals. Rather, the ways in which second-generation professionals employ “sameness” and “difference”, that is through including elements of boundary crossing, blurring and shifting (Alba, 2005; Wimmer, 2008a) when they engage with impermeable, bright boundaries in the workplace, can amount to both a perpetuation and an opening up of social boundaries in organizations (cf. Van Laer & Janssens, 2017).

Second-generation professionals show a high level of strategic thinking when they act on the career-level through “sameness”, whereby they – inadvertently – perpetuate the existence of social boundaries, but manage to gain entrance to organizations and high-level positions in these organizations. Through their presence in organizations, they weigh the costs and benefits of acting on their own behalf on the career-level through “sameness” or on the identity-level through “difference” through which they might, as tempered radicals (Meyerson & Scully, 1995), “contribute to incremental, small-scale change which might ultimately lead to broader more structural changes” (Van
Laer & Janssens, 2017, p. 213). In both cases of perpetuation and opening up of social boundaries, second-generation professionals show that their rootedness in the Dutch professional context is strong enough to successfully employ “sameness” by taking into the equation the characteristics of their organization and of the entire sector, whereas their links with their ethnic and religious backgrounds offer them the potential to open up the implicit social boundaries that are still prevalent in many Dutch organizations through strategically showing and making use of their “difference”.

Theoretical implications

The focus of this thesis on how the boundary sensitivity strategy can open up social boundaries in the workplace, builds upon a number of studies that deal with the “sameness” and “difference” positionality of ethnic minorities in a professional setting (e.g. Siebers, 2009a, 2009b; Holvino & Kamp, 2009; De Jong, 2012; Ghorashi & Sabelis, 2013; Van Laer & Janssens, 2014; Slootman, 2014), as well as with studies that have centered around the mechanisms of boundary making and changing (e.g. Barth, 1969, 1994; Alba, 2005, Foner & Alba, 2008; Wimmer, 2008a; Wimmer, 2008b). In line with the studies on “sameness” and “difference”, the chapters in this thesis show that second-generation professionals alternate between their use of “sameness” and “difference” in the workplace. And in line with the studies on social boundaries, the chapters in this thesis also show that second-generation professionals make use of the traditional boundary strategies of crossing, blurring and shifting when dealing with the bright but implicit social boundaries in the workplace. The way in which the chapters of this thesis contribute to the theoretical debates around “sameness” and “difference” and social boundaries is twofold.

Firstly, understanding “sameness” and “difference” as strategies, points to the notion that they can be activated to serve a certain purpose, and this
activation in turn points to the concept of agency. Agency is the capacity to act (Giddens, 1979), albeit in a limited way as agency comes in degrees (Kockelman, 2007, p. 387) and can have intended and unintended consequences (Van Laer & Janssens, 2017). Still, the agency that second-generation professionals show when they employ “sameness” and “difference” is one in which they manage to switch between two seemingly opposite strategies. The chapters in this thesis show how second-generation professionals, as “newcomers”, are pre-eminently capable to employ both “sameness and difference” because they have grown up with multiple and sometimes competing cultural repertoires, such as that of the family home in which the Muslim religion often played an important role, and the Dutch society in which Islam is usually viewed as backward and problematic (e.g. Vasta, 2007; Foner & Alba, 2008), and in terms of coming from a lower-class background and to become among the first to enter higher education and obtain a professional position. These experiences of having to deal with different cultural repertoires have made second-generation professionals capable to switch between “sameness and difference”. They do not make a zero-sum choice between the two by consistently choosing one strategy over the other, although “sameness” is a constant in their career trajectories in the context of bright social boundaries. Second-generation professionals thus manage to take the best of “sameness and difference” by switching between them and they use the combination to their own advantage (cf. Kasinitz et al., 2008; Levitt, 2009) and to the advantage of other stakeholders in their professional field. This ability to successfully switch between the seemingly opposite strategies of “sameness and difference”, instead of having to make a zero-sum choice between the two or becoming stuck between the two, flips the often negative thinking about the second generation. In some current theoretical discussions and societal discourses, the second generation is represented in a static state “in-between” cultures or life worlds, and therefore unable to reach their full potential (cf. Gans, 1992; Heath et al., 2008). The
theoretical connotation of “in-between” in these discussions is that the second
generation doesn’t belong in either world. The contribution of this thesis is that
it shows, through the use of “sameness and difference”, that second-generation
professionals are not in-between cultures. Rather, they are—as I have coined-
“go-betweens” who are capable of switching between cultures because they
belong in multiple worlds. This belonging in multiple worlds allows second-
generation professionals to incorporate multiple viewpoints and a critical view
of cultural worlds that would otherwise be seen as natural and inevitable (Said,
1994). Second-generation professionals use these multiple and critical
viewpoints to fulfil their go-between role actively and consciously, for instance
vis-à-vis social boundaries in organizations, both on their own behalf and on
that of others.

Secondly, although Wimmer (2008a) concludes that he sees no other
possible strategies of boundary change that one could pursue -beside his
elegant classification which is based on either crossing, blurring or shifting-, this thesis shows that boundary crossing, blurring and shifting (Alba, 2005;
Wimmer 2008a) do not solely have to be understood as separate boundary
strategies. Instead, by employing “sameness” and “difference”, second-
generation professionals switch between crossing, blurring and shifting when
they engage with implicit bright boundaries in the workplace, depending on
whether they prioritize the career-, identity-, or social change-level (cf. Van Laer
& Janssens, 2017). Therefore, and in line with the call made by Wimmer (2008a,
p. 1046) “to develop an agency-based model of ethnic boundary making”, I
would argue that the strategy of boundary sensitivity, which is the result of the
upward mobility boundary sensitivity model (see figure 1), is an addition to the
classification of boundary strategies since it incorporates elements of all three
strategies. Boundary sensitivity’s use of these various elements requires us to
include in our analysis of boundary strategies what the underlying motives are
of people engaging with social boundaries. Boundary strategies have so far been
theorized as ways in which, on a societal level, people engage with boundaries in order to either alter their respective position towards the boundary, or to change the location of the boundary itself (Alba, 2005). Yet, if we include the subdivision of levels, that is the career-, identity- and social change-level (cf. Van Laer & Janssens, 2017), we gain a much more intricate understanding of how people engage with social boundaries, as well as an explanation of how the perpetuation and opening up of social boundaries can go hand-in-hand.

Directions for future research

The findings from this thesis shed light on how the engagement of second-generation professionals with social boundaries in the workplace is influenced by their ability to switch between “sameness” and “difference”, and how this ability to switch enables them to make use of various elements of different boundary strategies. These findings trigger new questions for future research to pay attention to. Such as the question of whether the upward mobility boundary sensitivity model (see figure 1) is also applicable to second-generation employees who have not gone through higher education and do not work as professionals. To what extent are they capable of and willing to switch between repertoires in the workplace in order to engage with social boundaries? In other words, how important is the upward mobility aspect in the model, and what role does the second-generation positionality play? This question is especially relevant in the context of boundary making and changing, since social boundaries are abstract entities, and engaging with them therefore also requires a level of abstract and strategic thinking for which highly-educated professionals might be quintessentially equipped.

Another question is whether the second-generation professionals’ ability to switch and “go-between” various repertoires is gaining relevance in other sectors, beside the education sector, that are dealing with increasing
superdiversity. The ELITES study has already focused on the law and business sector (Rezai, 2017; Konyali, 2017), and although interesting similarities and differences have been explored (Keskiner & Crul, 2017), the ethnic distinction between education professionals on the one hand, and pupils and students on the other, doesn’t present itself quite as pronounced in the law and business sectors with professionals and clients as it does in the education sector.

An interesting sector to explore the “go-between” role would be the medical sector. Current research on physicians of ethnic-minority descent working in a hospital in the largest city in the Netherlands, Amsterdam, shows how they can easily experience instances of in-betweenness at work, since they are seen by ethnic-majority physicians as lagging behind, and having to do extra work to meet normal quality standards. Simultaneously, ethnic-minority physicians are also seen by their ethnic-majority colleagues as unable to compensate for their presumed “lack”, “because their social identity remains non-Dutch” (Leyerzapf, Abma, Steenwijk, Croiset & Verdonk, 2015, p. 1005). In this context, moreover, the medical sector is dealing with similar issues as the education sector: an overwhelming majority of ethnic-Dutch medical professionals and an ever-increasing super-diverse group of patients or care seekers. Do second-generation professionals in this sector experience similar forms of “relational self-interest” (Stall, 2010), as has been attributed to the education professionals in this thesis? And if so, does this combination of firstly second-generation positionality, secondly the uneven ethnic distribution of professionals compared to the patients, and thirdly relational self-interest also lead to the ability and willingness of second-generation medical professionals to switch between cultural repertoires to bridge the life worlds of medical professionals and patients?

A final question for future research that I would like to address, is that of the “go-between” role of second-generation professionals. As it is argued in this thesis that the concept of “go-between” is better suited for this group of highly-
educated professionals of second-generation descent than the concept of “in-betweenness”, future research should explore how this belonging in multiple worlds is translated into various practices, besides the engagement with social boundaries. In other words, does the capability to switch between cultural repertoires, and to select the best of both or multiple worlds (Kasinitz et al., 2008; Levitt, 2009), always result in a second-generation advantage? And if so, in what ways? I would like to call for research to provide us with a deeper understanding of the “go-between” role. Especially in a world in which diversity in every way imaginable is increasingly becoming a reality, the ability of the second generation to switch and go-between and connect life worlds can hold relevant information for diversity researchers -and practitioners- about the ways in which we approach, theorize and handle diversity in organizations.

Some final thoughts

In the introduction of this thesis, I refer to the notion of “success”, and what it entails in the two studies on which the chapters in this thesis are based. I explain that with both the Pathways to Success project and the ELITES project, we aimed to objectify the notion of success by defining it based on job position and job status criteria, which in turn were used to select our respondents.

This strategy of defining “success” and consequently selecting respondents who we deemed successful to explain how they became successful, means that we selected on the dependent variable. This was done to “turn the usual research perspective in the field of migration and ethnic studies inside out” (Crul et al., 2017, p. 212), whereby we opted to not focus on explaining certain negative aspects commonly associated with the second generation (such as early school leaving or unemployment), but rather aimed to understand how these second-generation professionals had succeeded against all odds.
This aim included a focus on the pathways of these second-generation professionals through the education system and in the labour market. This focus on pathways allowed us to “see more precisely how people manage institutional challenges and find a way around blockades in order to succeed” (Ibid., p. 213). And this focus also showed how looking at “success” as a process instead of a fixed moment in time, places the notion of success not on the opposite side of failure, but rather as a remarkable positive outcome for this group of second-generation professionals who have had to overcome numerous difficulties to get to where they are (Crul et al., 2017, p. 322).

Selecting on the dependent variable hasn’t resulted in a one-sided view of “success”, but has rather exposed the various ways in which second-generation professionals engage with social boundaries during the course of their professional careers in order to become successful. Studying the pathways to success of second-generation professionals thus offers insights into successful strategies by second-generation professionals, but it also offers insights into the societal mechanisms which, through social boundaries in the education system and the labour market, can frustrate the upward mobility chances of the second generation and of other “newcomers” in Dutch society.