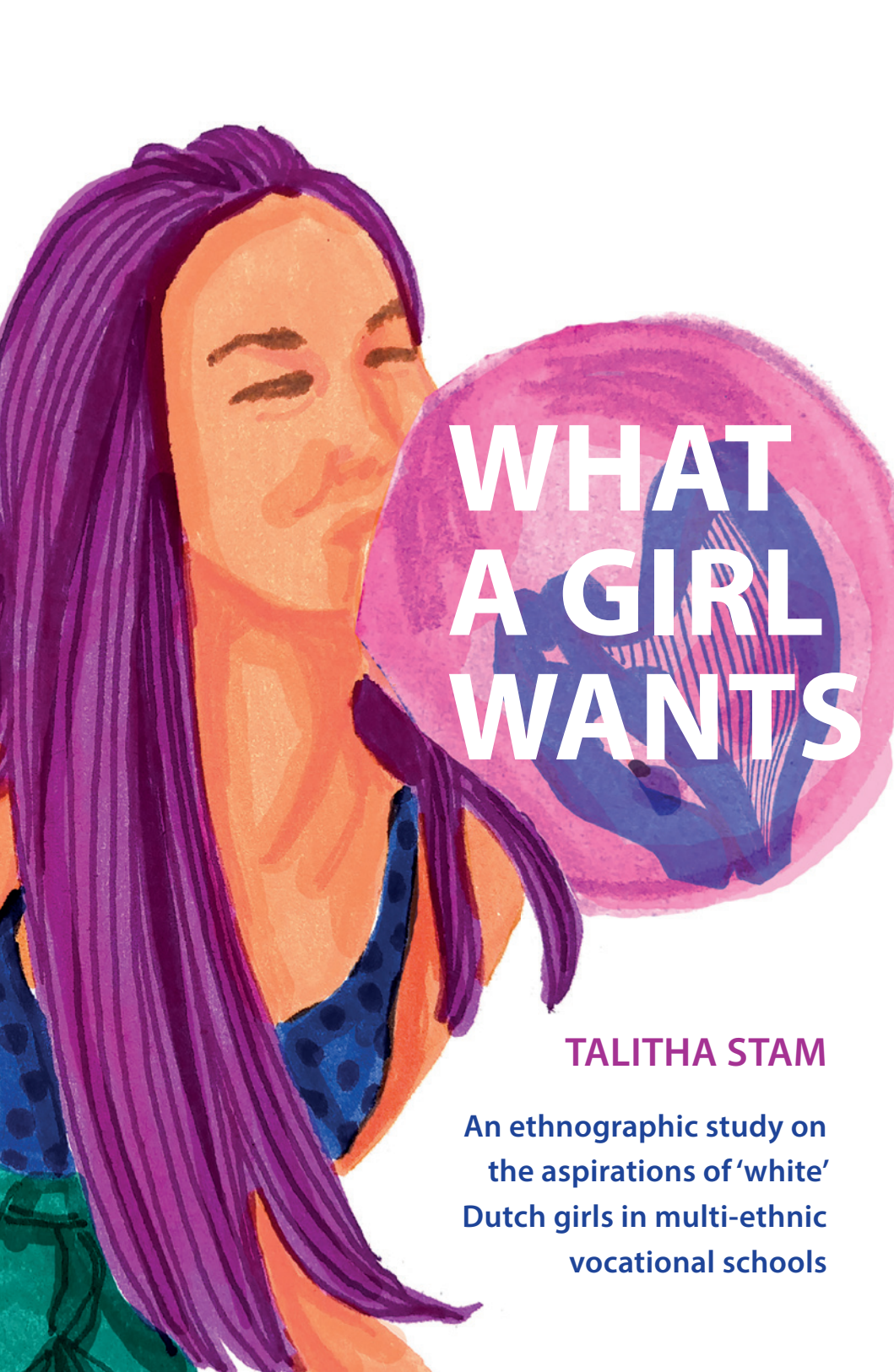

WHAT A GIRL WANTS

TALITHA STAM

An ethnographic study on the aspirations of 'white' Dutch girls in multi-ethnic vocational schools

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Wat een meisje wil

Een etnografische studie naar de beroepsaspiraties van 'witte' Nederlandse meisjes op multi-etnische vmbo- en mbo-scholen

Proefschrift

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For my parents with love

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Contents

Terminology

This dissertation was written at a time (2014-2018) in which intense debates were being held in the Netherlands on terms used to describe ethnicity, race and 'white' (which can be translated as *wit* or *blank* in Dutch) and 'black'. As a researcher, you want to present the *emic* perspective of your research participants, but you must also try to interpret these themes on an *etic* level. It is therefore essential to elaborate on the use of vocabulary for issues concerning race and ethnicity in order to avoid misunderstandings and misinterpretations. The title of the dissertation includes the terms 'white Dutch girls' and I would like to explain these words. When I write about 'white' Dutch I am referring to Dutch people with a 'white' skin colour who do not have a migrant background in their families. Although this categorisation follows a common practice in the Netherlands, I realise that it can be problematic as it ascribes seemingly fixed identities. Of course, there are many more divisions that can be made in terms of race, ethnicity, religion, languages, social class, etc. The question of who is 'white' Dutch and who is not may be informed by ancestry or appearance and as such ascribed to a person, but it is also an issue of self-identification. Being 'white' Dutch is therefore a complex notion and perceived members may also 'belong' to other groups. As a consequence, 'white' people are not a homogeneous group and 'white' experiences should not be essentialised. In this dissertation, I use the notion of 'white' Dutch and approach it as a social construction that is associated with skin colour, culture, perspective, social class, and power (Essed & Trienekens, 2008). When doing so, I put described racial and ethnic categories between single quotation marks to make clear that I see them as a social construct rather than as something factual. I use double quotation marks whenever I cite people.

Introduction

Making the invisible visible

> They
> Grow up in a poor language environment,
> Often come from multi-problem families,
> Have teachers with low expectations of them,
> Are less likely to use early childhood education facilities,
> Have fewer parental resources,
> Often have behavioural and learning problems,
> Receive less support with school from their parents,
> Have fewer non-academic capabilities,
> Often need special education,
> Are likely to attend schools with a high concentration of (other) underprivileged children,
> Rarely go outside their own neighbourhood, so that their knowledge of the world is limited.

This is a description of disadvantaged 'white' Dutch children of low-educated parents in the bottom tracks of vocational education. In 2003, these children were described as "*a forgotten group*" by the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP), one of the main governmental statistical bureaus. With more than 200,000 of these children attending primary schools in the Netherlands, they constituted the largest group being targeted by Dutch policies to combat educational disadvantages. In comparison, 198,000 children of low-educated parents in Dutch primary education had a migration background. Despite these numbers, relatively little attention was being paid to disadvantaged children from a 'white' Dutch background, hence the SCP's plea to raise awareness regarding this group in its 2003 report. In the 1970s the Dutch government launched a national policy programme to combat educational disadvantages aimed especially at children from disadvantaged homes (Driessen, 2015). This policy used

three indicators of disadvantage: parental educational level, parental occupational level, and country of birth (ibid). In the 1990s, educational disadvantage programmes shifted towards targeting pupils with an immigrant background (SCP, 2003). This was followed by another shift in 2006, when the only indicator of disadvantage became parental educational level (Driessen, 2015). This shift came about after several studies had concluded that the role of social class outweighed ethnic descent when explaining underachievement among children with migrant backgrounds (Stevens, Clycq, Timmerman, & Houtte, 2011; Traag, 2012; Van Ours & Veenman, 2001; Veenman, 1997; Werfhorst & Van Tubergen, 2007). Despite this, only limited specific attention was being paid to 'white' Dutch children with low-educated parents. This can be partly explained by their low levels of concentration, as 'white' Dutch children with low-educated parents are spread across primary schools all over the Netherlands and concentrations of this group do not usually exceed fifty percent within one school (SCP, 2003). This is in contrast to primary schools in many large cities where the vast majority of pupils have a migrant background and parents are predominantly low-educated (SCP, 2003). These types of schools, where the vast majority of students have a migration background, are referred to as 'black' schools, a controversial, but widely used term in the public debate in the Netherlands since the 1970s (Paulle, 2002; Paulle, Mijs & Vink, 2016). The term 'black school' is misleading, because it lumps together all children from various ethnic backgrounds except 'white' Dutch. Moreover, the term is associated with the lowest educational tracks, as upper Dutch academic tracks are never referred to as 'black schools'. It therefore implies hierarchical connotations that are reflected in the use of these labels in the characterization of schools. Schools where the majority of pupils have a 'white' Dutch background are often associated with good education and higher educational achievements, while schools where

the majority of pupils have an immigrant background are often seen as problem schools, characterised by poorer quality education, a problematic pupil population, a high dropout rate among teachers and bad test results. Nevertheless, a minority of 'white' Dutch children attend multiracial and multi-ethnic schools. Thus, high levels of school segregation in large cities tend to concentrate 'white' children of Dutch descent with middle and higher educated parents in separate schools (SCP, 2003). In this implicit correlation between racial, ethnic and social segregation, 'white' schools represent the children of middle and higher educated parents, rendering 'white' Dutch children without a migrant background but with low-educated parents invisible. When an updated version of the 2003 SCP was published a decade later it had the same conclusion, namely that 'white' Dutch children of low-educated parents were still "*a forgotten group*" (ITS, 2014). It is therefore high time to make this forgotten and invisible group visible again and to examine their school experiences and aspirations.

School Ethnography

Schools were the prime location for conducting the research for this doctoral study. During their time at school, young people discover their strengths and weaknesses and decide whether they want to stay in the education system or enter the workforce (Verkyuten, 2010). This compels them to think about who they are and what kind of work they want to do later on in life. Verkyuten (2010) argues that young people learn what is important to them while at school, whether this is helping other people, earning a good income, owning a business or entering politics. Their choice of study programme is likely to have a huge impact on their lives, as their educational choices will determine their future identity: who and what they are

going to be (ibid). Hence, aspirations and school experiences are inextricably linked to each other.

The Dutch education system in short

Before going into detail on the school ethnography, I will first provide a brief overview of the Dutch education system. After completing primary school, pupils are streamed into one of three types of secondary education: pre-vocational secondary education (VMBO), senior general secondary education (HAVO) or pre-university education (VWO) based on ability tests and teachers' recommendations. The vocational track (VMBO) has four levels to which pupils are assigned on the basis of the same ability tests and teachers' recommendations. Each VMBO level diploma gives access to a corresponding level in further vocational education (MBO). MBO is the Dutch abbreviation of Secondary Vocational Education (SVE) and forms the core of the Dutch Vocational Education and Training (VET) system (Onstenk & Blokhuis, 2007). Students with the bottom two VMBO level diplomas are required to obtain a MBO level 2 diploma. Students without a high school diploma start at MBO level 1. Students may progress to a higher level after completing a MBO level. Approximately sixty percent of the Dutch working population has a MBO diploma (Onstenk & Blokhuis, 2007). Seventy MBO colleges provide 700 vocational courses in agriculture, engineering and technology, economics, and health and social care. Each MBO course has two learning pathways: school-based (BOL) and work-based (BBL). Internships are compulsory in both pathways and must be provided by a recognised training company. This study focuses both on VMBO and MBO schools including the compulsory internships.

Data collection

In 2014-2015, I conducted the majority of the ethnographic fieldwork in two schools: a VMBO school and a MBO school

in a large city in the Randstad conurbation[1] in the Netherlands. The Dutch educational track VMBO is equivalent to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) level 2, and MBO level 2 is equivalent to ISCED 3. I also spent three months in England, observing a similar group of high school students in Year 10 (ISCED 3). As this doctoral study was part of a large-scale international research project on Reducing Early School Leaving in Europe (RESL.eu), most of the data collection took place in schools where the young people were at risk of early school leaving. The European definition of an early school leaver is a youngster under the age of 23 who leaves education without what is called a basic qualification, which is equivalent to an ISCED level 3 diploma[2]. In the Netherlands, this means that young people must complete either senior general secondary education (HAVO), pre-university education (VWO) or MBO level 2, and therefore pupils in the vocational track of secondary education (VMBO) must go on to another educational institution to obtain a further qualification. The compulsory transition from VMBO to MBO is a particularly challenging period for many young people (Elffers, 2011). During this transition, some students either do not show up at MBO, or leave within three months (ibid). I therefore chose to conduct a school ethnography both during the final year at a VMBO school and the first year of a two-year MBO programme.

During this time I got to know both the students and their teachers, their complex interactions, their frustrations, but also their moments of joy. I vividly remember how on one of my first days of observation, the teachers mistook me for one of the students. The girls were changing their clothes for PE classes, while I was waiting for them in my office outfit.

1 The Randstad conurbation consists of the four largest cities in the Netherlands (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht) and its surrounding areas.

2 http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/school/early-school-leavers_en accessed on April 12, 2018.

When the PE teacher, whom I had not yet met entered the PE hall, he yelled at me: "*Why haven't you changed your clothes for PE class?*" Three things stood out for me and they underpin this dissertation. The first one was highly visual: racial seating. On the very first school day, the MBO students divided themselves into groups along racial and/or ethnic categories that were policed by their peers. It remained normal for them throughout the school year to sit separately and to mutually police these boundaries during classes, group assignments/ activities, lunch breaks and other in-school events. This racial self-segregation occurred among all ethnic and racial groups and continued throughout the school year. The second thing that struck me was the continuous miscommunication between students and teachers regarding students' aspirations. Students often said, "*Teachers don't care about us*", and they perceived teachers who seemed unwilling to help them with their lessons in or outside of class hours as being uncaring. Many teachers just did not have enough time to help their students because they were overloaded with administrative work. Another important factor is classroom discipline. The Netherlands has one of the lowest scores on the disciplinary classroom climate index (OECD, 2013; OECD, 2016). Teachers were often so occupied with controlling classroom situations that they overlooked their students' needs. The students tended to interpret this as a lack of interest. Receiving less attention from teachers meant that students had to rely more on themselves and others to develop and realise their aspirations. However, due to their lower social class backgrounds, they were very much in need of support from their teachers. The third major thing that struck me was something that occurred outside the classroom. Whenever I explained my PhD study to people inside or outside school, both experts and laypersons raised questions about my "*objectivity*" towards my "*unusual*" research participants. Being a young 'black' female academic I needed to spell out why I was studying 'white' girls. During

many presentations and informal introductions about my research topic, two issues were continuously emphasised whenever I elaborated on my topic. The first one was: *"What is so special about 'white' girls? You never hear anything about them. Aren't they the ones doing well at school?"* And second: *"Can* you *actually study them objectively? I mean how do you know they are telling you the truth?"* It is not uncommon for scholars from other racial-ethnical backgrounds to be systematically questioned about their "*objectivity*" towards their research subjects, while 'white' researchers may operate in taken-for-granted ways, their objectivity unquestioned (also see Cankaya, 2017).

These three key observations and experiences of my ethnographic work offer important new insights methodologically, academically and theoretically. I have developed and elaborated these insights in four academic journal publications that are presented as chapters in this thesis. Although all of these articles can be read separately, they are connected by the recurring theme of aspirations and the theoretical discussion on this, which I will look at briefly before outlining the rest of the dissertation's structure.

Students' aspirations

In the field of the sociology of education, the notion of 'aspirations' is often used as an explanatory factor for school achievement and early school leaving, as aspirations can motivate or demotivate young people to continue with their education. Much of the existing data on pupils' aspirations actually measure educational intentions or expectations (Baillergeau, Duyvendak, & Abdallah, 2015) and more specifically, the relationship between aspirations, educational expectations and academic abilities (Furlong, & Biggart, 1999; Germici, Bednarz, Karmel, & Lim, 2014; Patton & Creed,

2007). According to Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) there is a correlation between the objective probability of educational success, which is embedded in social structures, and subjective (individual) aspirations. Individual aspirations (preferences), expectations (perceived capabilities and available opportunities), and perceptions are socially embedded, as they mediate what an individual desires and what society can offer. In other words, young people's aspirations are inextricably linked to their assessment of the opportunities available to them. These opportunities are partly shaped by the people and environment around them, but are also formed by individual choices and attitudes. Therefore, to understand the aspirations of 'white' girls at VMBO and MBO schools, it is necessary to examine the macro (educational system and labour market), meso (school and peers) and micro (family background and individual experiences and agency) level at which they are formed.

Macro level

Many quantitative studies in the Netherlands on pupils' aspirations have concluded that young people in the lowest levels of education often have the highest aspirations (Elffers, 2011; de Graaf & Van Zenderen, 2013; Kao & Tienda, 1998; Traag, 2012). Often, these high aspirations do not correspond to their current level of study. This has been addressed by various authors in different ways. One important explanation can be found in the structure of the Dutch school system. There is much research on how specific features of education systems influence young people's educational trajectories (Crul & Schneider, 2010; Crul, Schneider, & Lelie, 2012; Van Houtte & Stevens, 2015; Van Praag, Boone, Stevens, & Van Houtte, 2015; Werfhorst & Mijs, 2010). The educational tracks in Dutch secondary education are ordered hierarchically and they prepare students for different occupations. An important characteristic of the Dutch school system, however, is that it

gives pupils the opportunity to move from the lowest level of education all the way up to university level (Kalmijn & Kraaykamp, 2003). This prospect leaves open the suggestion that all educational levels are attainable and that a pupil's current level of education is not necessarily their final or highest destination. This resonates with what MacLeod (1987) has referred to as the achievement ideology – the notion that a person can be successful if they work hard. The typical macro structure of the Dutch educational system is therefore important for understanding the aspirations of young people in the lowest school tracks.

Meso level

Schools constitute the meso level and also play an important role in shaping pupils' aspirations (Archer, DeWitt, & Willis, 2014). On the meso level, the type of school that young people can or are allowed to choose is related to the study programme and the subjects on offer. Access is limited by pupils' competences and aspirations on one hand and by teachers' advice and expectations on the other. It is important to note that there is a great deal of prejudice towards the lowest levels of vocational education – which are often housed in separate schools – with regard to the quality of education at these schools and the young people that attend them (Van Daalen, 2013). The school context is therefore important for understanding pupils' aspirations. The messages that young people receive at these schools are a reflection of the broader social and cultural context in which these schools are perceived. Students evaluate their opportunities and aspirations in relation to their potential abilities and likelihood of success and the stigma attached to the schools they attend (Fuller, 2009, p. 159).

Micro level

There is also an interplay between aspirations and early school leaving at the micro level. Classical ethnographic studies have found that low aspirations may lead to school disengagement and early school leaving (Macleod, 1987; Willis, 1977). However, more recent large-scale Dutch education studies suggest that students who have 'high' educational aspirations at the start of their education are more likely to drop out due to disappointment with their progress, the system or other factors (Elffers, 2012). Van Zenderen (2010) found that the majority (70%) of MBO students aspire to obtain a university degree. Van Daalen (2013), however, emphasises that young people's 'high' aspirations should be understood within the context of Dutch perceptions of education, in which theoretical schooling is still seen as the ultimate aim, with university being the highest step on the educational ladder. Other researchers also question whether specific socially situated individuals even have the capacity to aspire. Appadurai (2004) reasons that people are only capable of aspiring when they are aware of what a desirable future is, and when they become convinced that this is achievable. Wyn and White (2000) were cautious about expressed aspirations, arguing that aspirations are far less an individual expression than has been suggested in previous research. Yet others indicate that young people often do not understand what kind of education or training is required for the occupation they desire, which often results in a mismatch between their educational pathways and the occupations they aspire to (Ingvarson, Meiers, & Beavis, 2005).

Individual family background turned out to be a powerful predictor of early school leaving, as pupils of parents who are low-educated or have a low socio-economic status are more likely to leave school without a diploma (Alexander, Entwisle, & Kabbani, 2001; Rumberger 1983 in Traag & Van Velden, 2011). Furthermore, it appears that it is particularly difficult for boys to access support for their school career

from their parents, peers and community (Elffers, 2011). As a result, much research has focused on the groups most at risk of early school leaving, typically young men from a migrant background in lower educational levels (e.g. Rumberger, 1983; Elffers, 2011; Cabus & de Witte, 2016). By doing so, attention is too often focussed on the individual characteristics and family background of these young people, with scant acknowledgement of structural conditions (e.g. de Witte, Cabus, Thyssen, Groot, & Van den Drink, 2013; Russel, Simmons, & Thompson, 2011). This has also led to other groups, such as young 'white' Dutch women, being ignored. The majority of the girls in this doctoral study did not drop out, but instead made great efforts to complete their training. By obtaining a basic qualification, they passed the early school-leaving threshold. Although this basic qualification means they are not early school leavers, they nevertheless face a very uncertain future on the labour market. Therefore, I suggest that we should discover what these girls want/aspire to and what is needed for them to realise their ambitions.

This will be studied on the basis of the main research question:

> How are the aspirations of 'white' Dutch girls with low-educated parents in multiracial lower vocational schools shaped and influenced by macro (educational system and labour market), meso (school- and family contexts) and micro level (perspectives of themselves) factors?

The main research question is divided into three sub-research questions:

1. Who are these minority 'white' girls in multicultural schools?
2. What are the experiences and interactions of minority 'white' Dutch girls in multiracial and multi-ethnic schools in relation to their aspirations?
3. How do they develop their aspirations?

Outline of the book

Chapter two is devoted to the method and methodology. This is in addition to the specific method elements that are discussed in the empirical chapters for each sub-study. In the method and methodology chapter I elaborate on my ethnographic research design and data collection. I describe where ethnography has been carried out and how and why I selected the schools under study. Furthermore, I discuss the ethical challenges and communicate the quality controls that were used. Lastly, I reflect on the relationship between me as a 'black' researcher and my 'white' research participants. It is hoped that this will give an accurate picture of how this ethnographic study was conducted.

Chapter three starts in the final year of a VMBO school where pupils were studying for their final exams, while having to make a choice about which compulsory further vocational education programme to follow. In this chapter we follow the daily school activities throughout the year. We get a glimpse of how the pupils interact with each other and with the teachers. In this school, where the majority of children have an immigrant background, both pupils and teachers deal with negative stereotypes. This negative image also contributes to the continuous miscommunications at school both among the pupils and between pupils and teachers. This chapter tries to

understand pupils' aspirations by focusing in particular on how young people develop their aspirations and make a decision regarding their compulsory further education. Following an extensive literature review on pupils' aspirations, the newly developed concepts 'reasons' and 'resources' are added in this chapter.

Chapter four elaborates on the newly developed concepts 'reasons' and 'resources' in order to better understand the development and realisation of pupils' aspirations. In this chapter, the literature on institutional arrangements in education is linked to young people's aspirations. By contrasting stories of 'white' female pupils without a migrant background attending a Dutch public VMBO school versus an English state-funded comprehensive school, this chapter aims to unravel how specific features in the Dutch and English education systems may influence the girls' distinctive ways of shaping and attaining their aspirations. An important aspect is the difficult transition from VMBO to MBO that takes place in the Netherlands, but not in England. In this the macro (education systems), meso (school) and micro (individual experiences and agency) level are connected. I aim to gain more insight into the Dutch educational system and try to understand what school has to do with it.

In **chapter five** we arrive at an MBO school, having passed the compulsory transition from VMBO to MBO. The MBO school is large and very different from the VMBO school. The former pupils have become students. There are new written and unwritten rules that everyone tries to understand and make their own. In the MBO classrooms, new groups are being formed based on racial and ethnic categories, including 'white' Dutch groups only. The whiteness of these 'white' Dutch students in multiracial and multicultural classrooms implies certain expectations and assumptions. This chapter specifically focusses on the racial and ethnic experiences of 'white' Dutch students, asking whether their whiteness

functions as white privilege, providing them with a resource, and questioning whether it is possible to lose white privilege.

In the Netherlands, internship training is a compulsory part of every MBO study programme, and this is the focus of **chapter six**. Internships build a bridge between the classroom and the labour market that can help young people to develop and achieve their career aspirations. At the same time, internships embedded in vocational education have been accused of streaming working-class students into dead-end career options and reinforcing gender inequalities. Drawing on general trends, this chapter contributes to this field of research by presenting ethnographic case studies of the internship experiences of young working-class women in lower vocational care training programmes in the Netherlands. It appears that the early streaming in Dutch education leads to limited internship options for this group which hinders the development and realisation of their aspirations.

In the **final chapter** of this dissertation I summarise the empirical findings, present the theoretical contributions, discuss the implication of this study and suggest directions for further research.

Methods & Methodology

Making the familiar strange and the strange familiar

The general aim of my thesis is to understand what 'white' Dutch girls with low-educated parents in lower vocational multiracial schools want in terms of their educational and occupational future goals as they continue their education, transitioning from VMBO to MBO. In multi-ethnic and multiracial VMBO and MBO schools, 'white' Dutch students are just one of the numerical minorities. As they are part of a 'forgotten' (SCP, 2003; ITS, 2014) and therefore often invisible group, not much is known about them. In this thesis, I have tried to make them visible once more.

My main research question is: *In what ways are the aspirations of 'white' Dutch girls with low-educated parents in multiracial lower vocational schools shaped and influenced by macro (educational system and labour market), meso (school and family contexts) and micro level (perspectives of themselves) factors?* In order to answer the main research question, I formulated three sub-questions: (1)*Who are these girls?* (2) *What are their experiences and interactions in multiracial lower vocational schools?* (3)*And how do they develop their aspirations within these settings?* In addressing these research questions, ethnographic methods were the most appropriate methods because they not only give insights into what people say or say that they do but into what they actually say and do in a particular location (Malinowski, 1929). In other words, using ethnographic methods revealed the development and realisation of students' aspirations in lower Dutch vocational education, and also gave me first-hand observations of and interactions with the ways in which 'white' Dutch girls with low-educated parents were a minority in multiracial schools. With an emphasis on the social contexts, I adopt a constructivist-interpretivist approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998) to ethnography in educational settings in order to gain

an in-depth understanding of the lived experience, taking the research participants' point of view as a starting point. Through my investigation of the above research questions I aimed to understand the meanings that 'white' Dutch girls with low-educated parents in multiracial lower vocational schools attach to their attitudes and actions and how these girls understand their own unique positions and both the possibilities that are open to them and the resources available to them as they shape their futures. I obtained a rich description of everyday life in my study's target schools through 'participant observation' (Delamont & Atkinson, 1995; LeCompte & Preissle, 1984). My ethnographic research on and in educational institutions illuminated how these girls behave and interact together (see also Woods, 1986). In addition to the research in schools I also included compulsory internship placements in the study in order to understand how these types of work experiences may shape the girls' educational aspirations and views on their occupational opportunities. Hence, the schools were my prime location for conducting research.

We are all familiar with school as we have all attended some kind of school at some point in our lives. Therefore, at the very least we know this institution from a pupil's perspective. The challenge for an educational ethnographer is to examine the 'commonplace' in a novel way, as if it is exceptional and unique (Delamont & Atkinson, 1995). This is what Erickson (1973) calls the process of "*making it strange*". The practice of "*making it strange*" used by a researcher when studying a familiar culture, such as a school culture, is equivalent to the practice of "*making it familiar*" that anthropologists engage in when studying another culture (Erickson, 1973). Following other researchers, I do not make a distinction between the two, but rather combine them as both the research participants ('white' Dutch girls) and the research setting (schools) are familiar and yet 'strange' to me at the same time. By doing so, I apply the process of "*making the familiar strange, and*

the strange familiar" (Delamont & Atkinson, 1995; Erickson, 1973; Spindler & Spindler, 1982) throughout the research.

Data collection

The majority of the ethnographic study took place in the Randstad in the Netherlands. The Randstad is a metropolitan region consisting of the Netherlands' four largest cities (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht) and the surrounding areas. It has a population of more than seven million people. Within this area I chose two schools that fitted within my study's empirical and theoretical design. *Holland High* (pseudonym) is a comprehensive public secondary-level school offering all Dutch educational tracks from pre-vocational to pre-academic education. This inner-city school has several buildings in and around a large city in the Randstad. It is common in the Netherlands for different educational tracks within comprehensive schools to be housed in separate buildings. Although they are part of the same comprehensive school, these often physically segregated buildings each have their own management and staff tailored to the pupils they serve. I focused on the school building housing the bottom two educational levels: basic and advanced pre-vocational secondary education (known as VMBO Basis and VMBO Kader in Dutch). The second school in my ethnographic research was *Randstad School* (pseudonym), a large regional senior vocational education centre (MBO) that provides numerous lower and middle vocational and adult education programmes for students over the age of sixteen. My study centres on the MBO level 2 Social and Health Care programme, which primarily trains female students in aged-care. The third and last school in my study was a large state-funded comprehensive secondary school located in a deprived area in the northeast of England. This English school was chosen as a

contrast to the Dutch schools in order to better understand how national institutional arrangements in education determine education and occupational opportunities. All three schools were carefully selected from a range of schools in the Reducing Early School Leaving in Europe (RESL.eu) project that funded my doctoral study. For the RESL.eu project both quantitative and qualitative data were collected in nine European countries, including the Netherlands. Most of this data collection took place in schools with young people at risk of early school leaving. In the Dutch context these are predominantly lower and middle vocational secondary schools (VBMO and MBO) as dropout rates peak in the first year after the compulsory transition from VMBO to MBO (Elffers, 2011). Within the RESL.eu project I was responsible for data collection (both quantitative and qualitative) in the Netherlands. To do so, I visited over thirty Dutch VMBO and MBO school locations in the Randstad, which provided me with a detailed overview of these schools. In order to follow the challenging educational transition in the Dutch lower vocational track I selected both a VMBO and a MBO school. Ideally, I would have liked to have followed the same students from VMBO to MBO, but given the limited time available for this doctoral study, this was not practically feasible. I therefore carefully selected a VMBO school and MBO school with comparable student populations and related study programmes and conducted the ethnographic study simultaneously in both schools.

I first gained access to the selected schools during the presentation of the first results of the RESL.eu survey data. Several school principals invited me to stay in their schools for a longer period, instead of only "*taking a one-off questionnaire*". As an educated anthropologist, it was my intention to carry out an ethnographic study, something that depends on the full co-operation and support of those on the site. Troman, who conducted his study in British primary schools, explained a similar process as follows: *"The selection of a case*

to research was more a matter of the school choosing me, than me choosing the school" (Troman, 2002, p. 110). In my case, it was an appreciated coincidence that the school principals of the carefully chosen schools were among those who had invited me to stay in their schools for a longer period. The empirical chapters, chapters three to six, also discuss specific methodological elements, such as full descriptions of the three schools under study.

I will now move on to elaborate when, with whom and how the data were collected. The data collection consists of primary data, including participation observation, biographical interviews and focus group discussions and secondary data, such as national and local education policies, school documents and students' school records. In spring 2014, I thus visited over thirty Dutch vocational schools to conduct the RESL.eu questionnaires. From September 2014 to May 2015, I engaged in extensive participant observation and conducted biographical interviews simultaneously in two Dutch schools. This also included fieldwork at the various internship places that are a compulsory part of senior vocational training. From May to July 2015, I conducted fieldwork at a British school that had been identified through the RESL.eu survey project by our British partner at Middlesex University. Two years later, between September 2016 and February 2017, follow-up interviews were held with all the key research participants. Finally, from May 2017 until February 2018, I re-visited the same Dutch schools on a monthly basis and observed new school classes with the same teachers in order to validate my initial data.

The key research participants in my ethnographic study are 'white' Dutch girls with low-educated parents in multi-racial lower vocational schools. During the fieldwork, I did not inform either the schools or the participants that I was only studying 'white' Dutch female students. The literature has suggested that it would be methodologically prudent

not to inform the students that the research specifically involved a subset, as it might run the risk of sabotage from the other students, due to jealousy or other barriers. Even though only 'white' Dutch female students with low-educated parents were studied, I also gathered data on their peers and fellow classmates from other racial and/or ethnic and gender backgrounds. At the time of the study, there were ten 'white' Dutch female pupils out of a total of one hundred pupils in the senior year at *Holland High*, divided over several lower vocational programmes and classes. These ten 'white' Dutch girls all had low-educated parents and were between fifteen and seventeen years old. I also selected ten British counterparts: 'white' female learners of 'white' British descent who were receiving Free School Meals. The Free School Meal is an indicator of parents with a low income and low level of education. The British girls were in Key Stage four, Year ten, and were fifteen years of age. The *Randstad School* also had around one hundred students, sixteen of whom were 'white' female students of Dutch descent, all with low-educated parents. In all three schools, I conducted intense participant observation, which is a critical part of an ethnographic study (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994). I followed my key research participants around and documented their ordinary and sometimes extraordinary daily life at school. I observed them interacting with their peers and teachers during classes. I also participated and observed during school breaks, activities in the school cafeteria, examinations, staff meetings, intake interviews, internship placements and graduation celebrations. I conducted biographical interviews and follow-up interviews with the 36 key research participants. Biographic interviews are a powerful tool for exploring the relationship between agency and structure, the ways in which contexts and situations shape human agency and how human beings act upon and shape the world around them (Wengraf, 2001). I also conducted 16 informal interviews with their parents. At each school, I held

three focus group discussions: two with six to eight classmates each and one with six to ten school staff, including teachers, a school social worker or the school nurse, the study career counsellor and a school administrator. During both the interviews and the focus group discussions, detailed themes were not imposed beforehand but were generated from data using grounded theory (Glaser, 1998). Although I entered the field with a broad interest in students' aspirations guided by the fieldwork data, other issues, such as race and ethnicity, appeared to be of significant importance for my key research participants both in behaviour and expressions. Individual interviews and focus group discussions lasted between 50 and 120 minutes. These were recorded and fully transcribed in the original languages. The quotes were written in full to preserve their meaning and when quoted I translated them from Dutch to English.

Ethical considerations

My research proposal was approved by the Ethics Review Board of the Social Sciences Academic Group of Middlesex University in London, the United Kingdom. In addition, my study complies with the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Scientific Practice (2012) and with the European Commission Research Ethics in Ethnography/Anthropology (2013). This means in brief that I followed the basic ethical principles: doing good (beneficence), avoiding doing harm (non-maleficence), and protecting the autonomy, wellbeing, safety and dignity of all research participants. My school ethnography was carried out with the consent, involvement and approval of the identified schools. During the fieldwork, all participants were informed that all information is confidential and participants (students, teachers and parents) should not feel obliged to reveal or discuss any of their answers with anyone, including

school staff, family members or friends. Before the start of the fieldwork, I held various information meetings about the scope of the study for the school staff, parents and students in each school. In addition to these meetings, opt-out forms were provided through school channels, home addresses, email addresses and letters addressed to the parents of all the students in the observed classes. If parents or young people wished to opt out (before, during or after data collection) they would be removed from any notes, analyses and output. If in any case parents and/or students should feel that being removed from the research was not enough, and did not want the researcher to be present in the classroom at all, the class in question would not be observed. However, this was not the case. Participant consent was obtained before biographical interviews. For each young person under eighteen years of age, at least one parent gave their active consent by signing a form to say that their child could participate in an interview. Research participants were asked to sign an informed consent form after issues of confidentiality and anonymity had been discussed with them. In any case, participants were always able to refuse to answer a question or to participate and were also able to withdraw from the interview at any time without having to explain their actions. All care was taken to ensure that data were handled and the research findings were presented in such a general way that family members would not be able to identify each other. I will not include any information that makes it possible to identify any research participants, including the schools, in any publications based on this fieldwork that I have published or may publish in the future. Information shared with me was kept strictly confidential and was not shared with other family members or the school, even if someone tried to ask direct or indirect questions about them. The only exception to this was if participants (students, teachers and parents) disclosed information which gave cause for concern in relation to bullying or forms of abuse. In these cases I informed the

school's social care, whereby the research participant was always informed of my actions.

Data analysis

My 'data set' (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011) entailed various sorts of field notes, including verbatim, basic practices, a logbook and a personal diary where I regularly and systematically recorded what I had observed and learned while participating in the daily lives of others. I added the interview transcripts and official school and policy documents to my 'data set' using the NVivo 10 for Mac qualitative software programme. These different types of texts were classified according to their type, i.e. logbook, diary, observations, policy documents, etc. The locations and participants involved were attached to the texts afterwards. This made it possible to make analytical distinctions between behaviour, language and performance: what someone says can therefore be matched with what someone does. I used my field notes as texts to be analysed and interpreted and approached them "*as if they were written by a stranger*" (Emerson et al., 2011 p. 174). This was needed, because as an ethnographer one has a vertical monopoly on the research cycle. To break the monopoly that researchers have on the data, I built in various checks and balances to scrutinise the quality of my research data.

Because ethnographic research on 'white' Dutch students in multiracial schools is relatively rare, the approach I used to analyse the data is closely connected to Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Grounded theory relies on the production of theoretical perspectives derived from data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this respect, the researcher focuses on the 'ground' – the data – and inductively generates more abstract concepts (ibid). In keeping with ethnography (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007) and Grounded Theory

(Strauss & Corbin, 1990) principles, my analysis was conducted as an ongoing process alongside data collection. During the school breaks I took time to analyse the data gathered so far to narrow down my research focus for the following data collection. In this way, the data collection could feed the analysis and vice versa. In addition, participants were involved in the ongoing process of analyses and interpretation by helping me to check and, if necessary, to revise initial interpretations. This was done by first letting the girls read my notes about them. I then asked them to explain the meanings they attached to a specific action, for example disruptive behaviour in the classroom (chapter three) or the seating choices in the classroom (chapter four). Involving participants in the analysis process helps to reduce potential power differentials between participants and the researcher (Barley & Bath, 2014; Flewitt, 2005). Following the grounded theory principles, the data were *open coded* (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) by identifying frequently-occurring observations, recurrent topics and primary aspects of the stories that people had told me in the NVivo 10 for Mac qualitative software programme. This was followed by *axial coding* (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) in which dimensions (similarities) and variations (differences) were determined and codes and concepts were added, combined, or removed as new data emerged and led to the rethinking of what I had discovered in the NVivo 10 for Mac qualitative software programme. The final stage was *selective coding* (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to integrate and refine the theory. By using a grounded theory approach, I was able to develop new concepts like 'reasons' and 'resources' (Stam, 2017) in order to better understand the development and realisation of pupils' aspirations. The concepts proved useful when observing the daily reality of my research participants. Moreover, the concepts were verified to determine whether they could be applied to other similar situations and people. Hence, I re-visited the field two years later in the same schools,

but in different classes with different students and both new and previously-met teachers.

Data quality

I used both internal and external controls to check the quality of the data, analysis and results of this study (also see Wester, 1987). The data quality was controlled for in three major ways. The first way was an external control whereby participants were allowed to read my field notes when they referred to them. The participants' feedback and verification served to check whether the data collected and my interpretations of them was accurate. I also used participants' feedback for quality control of the analysis. Often, they modified minor facts, such as 'mother's boyfriend' instead of 'mother's partner'. But sometimes I had misinterpreted their behaviour and they corrected this when reading my notes. For example, I had written down that the students were not paying attention because they were looking at their phones. But they had actually been looking for answers on their phones and showed me their search history to prove this. Hence, I corrected this. I also checked, and sometimes adapted, my interpretations by means of both the focus group discussions with school staff and students and the informal conversations with parents. The second method for controlling the data was data triangulation. For each key research participant, I interviewed the participant, at least one of her parents, her teacher and her classmates. In addition, I observed her at school, regularly visited her at home and reviewed her school results. These data sources were independently analysed and then triangulated to look for differences and similarities. There was, for example, a difference in what Sonja, a VMBO student, voiced about a fight between herself and a fellow student at school and what her mother communicated about the same incident. When Sonja

described the incident in full, she left out the part about the other student's racial and/or ethnic background. Her mother, on the other hand, began her description of the same incident by elaborating in detail on the other student's racial and ethnic background. These differences were taken into account in the research analyses. Lastly, I conducted repeated observations in other classes, school years and study programmes to understand if and how the perspectives of my key research participants were also shared in comparable settings. My findings formed the basis of the empirical chapters, which in turn are the basis on which this book was written.

Position of the researcher

I have often been asked whether these 'white' youths can tell "*the truth*" to a 'black' female researcher. Indeed, ethnographic fieldwork typically involves the development of close connections between the fieldworker and key research participants and situations being studied (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Lofland, 1995; Prasad, 2005). Therefore, the relationship between the researcher and the researched is often unique in ethnography (Hammersley, 1992; Spradley, 1980). Rather than studying people, ethnography means learning from them (Spradley, 1980). To learn from my key research participants in the schools, I had to develop trust between the researcher and the researched (ibid). Other researchers (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994), have pointed to the importance of rapport with the children, which I also tried to build with my participants. Like other ethnographers working with teenagers (Russell, 2005) I revealed general information about myself to the participants when asked, so that both parties exchanged information, facilitating a feeling of trust. Students enjoyed informing me about their lives at school and telling me their opinion. They shared their ups and their

downs with me. Some students used me as a shoulder to cry on when disclosing problems that they were experiencing both at home and school. I therefore got to know very personal details about them. I also acted as a source of support and guidance for some. For example, VMBO students often asked me about sex and how "*to do things*", while at MBO, the students had a lot of questions for me about financial matters. I documented these interactions as part of my ethnographic data collection. I kept detailed records about how my presence influenced the students and teachers' behaviour. This information was logged and reflected upon during analysis. Students were allowed to read my field notes when they referred to them. Although this carries the risk of the students influencing the data collected, like Russell (2005) I believe that gaining data from participants and encouraging feedback facilitates the research's validity. In addition, giving the researched the opportunity to see what was being written about them reinforced the necessary trust between the students and myself. This feedback and verification also served to check whether my interpretation was accurate.

Unlike other researchers, such as Paulle (2005), I had no previous experience as a teacher and subsequently I did not find myself "*fighting familiarity*" (Delamont & Atkinson, 1995) in the sense of facing situations with a teacher's mind-set. Teachers did not see me as a colleague and sometimes mistook me for a student. For example, a teacher asked me: "*Why are you walking down the hall and not in the classroom where you are supposed to be?*" These moments actually reinforced my relationship with the students. The majority of the teachers, however, were very welcoming, open and helpful. Many of them were curious about my findings and wanted to know if the research could help them to teach better. I met with teachers after school and even meet some beyond the scope of this study. Like teachers, some parents were also somewhat reticent at first. Many low-educated parents were

impressed by my "*high education*" and status of "*working at the university*". They sometimes overexpressed how I was an example to their children. On the other hand, some parents also responded outspokenly to my appearance. For instance, Iris, one of the VMBO students, had invited me to her house. When I rang the bell, her father opened the door and looked surprised. He then yelled at his daughter: *"Could you not have told me that it was a nigger you invited to my house?"* He, nevertheless invited me in, talked about his "*problems with foreigners*" and made some more uncomfortable 'jokes', but at the end of the meeting he insisted on walking me to the metro station, because "*it was already dark*" and he wanted me "*to arrive home safely nevertheless*".

I started the methodology chapter by noting the importance of making the familiar strange and the strange familiar (Delamont & Atkinson, 1995; Spindler & Spindler, 1982) and by observing how school is familiar to all of us, as we all have attended some kind of school. However, even though I had been to school, I had not attended a lower or middle vocational school. By using my own school experiences as an example, I show how the research settings were both strange and familiar to me. My personal school experiences represent specific elements of the Dutch education system. I learnt about the importance of schooling from an early age. My mother used to be a primary teacher, but due to a chronic illness she was unemployed for most of her life. I grew up with my brother and mother relatively poor in a deprived neighbourhood. Nevertheless, my mother made sure that my brother and I went to a good primary school in a wealthy area instead of the local primary school in our own neighbourhood. Every day, I cycled thirty minutes to my primary school where I was the only 'black' child in my class. At the end of primary school, the teacher recommended that I go to the lowest track of secondary education. My mother postponed this outcome by sending me to a comprehensive secondary school where

I had the opportunity to move up to a higher educational track in the second year if my grades were good enough. This comprehensive school had several buildings. The buildings were all very beautiful, large monumental buildings, except for one which was poorly maintained and located in an isolated area. There were no computers in its library and the central heating didn't work. All first-year students began in one of the nicer buildings. At the end of this year, based on their grades and ability, students were assigned to one of the three educational tracks. The students in the general (HAVO) and pre-university (VWO) track continued their education in the nice buildings. But the students in the vocational (VMBO) track were moved to the poorly maintained building. The message was clear: do not end up in the bottommost track and I did not. I graduated from the general (HAVO) educational track, went to higher professional education (HBO), continued to university and I am now about to obtain my PhD degree. Several studies have shown that due to its early tracking system, higher and lower educated people in the Netherlands live in separate worlds from the age of twelve onwards (SCP, 2014). Therefore, it is possible, as my case has shown, to complete Dutch higher education while not knowing anything about another part of the Dutch education system, namely lower and middle vocational education. This gave me the advantage of being familiar with Dutch education without having to "*fight familiarity*" (Delamont & Atkinson, 1995), as this part of the Dutch education system was still 'strange' to me. On top of that, my appearance, being a young-looking 'black' woman gave the impression that this part of the Dutch education system was not strange to me and that I belonged there, as I was regularly mistaken for a student. It is hoped that my rather unique position has enriched this rather unique study.

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Understanding Pupils' Aspirations

Abstract

In the first empirical chapter we follow the daily school activities of 'white' Dutch girls, who form a minority in their VMBO school where the vast majority of pupils are of immigrant descent, during their final school year. In this year, pupils prepare for their final exams and choose which compulsory further vocational education programme they wish to follow. In this chapter, I will discuss how the pupils interact with their teachers with regard to their aspirations. After an extensive literature review on pupils' aspirations, I came to the conclusion that there are still some crucial elements missing from the existing academic framework around pupils' aspirations, which deal with the realisation of pupils' ambitions. Through the study of ethnographic cases of 'white' Dutch girls attending a lower vocational school voicing their aspirations, two new concepts will be introduced: 'reasons' and 'resources'. With these two additions, it is hoped that this chapter will contribute to the existing academic literature on pupils' ambitions. It also endeavours to provide useful input for school staff to help them deal with the complexity of the formation and realisation of pupils' aspirations in vocational schools.

Introduction

Following an inductive approach, this chapter opens with an observation from my ethnographic research conducted among young people in lower vocational schooling. The quote below comes from Lisa, a 15-year-old pupil, who was voicing her aspirations to a teacher and the researcher during a lunch break at her school. Lisa is in her fourth and final year at a Dutch public secondary vocational inner-city school with a high number of students from low socio-economic backgrounds.

> During a short break Lisa (15) stays in the classroom with me and tells me what profession she would like to pursue: 'I would like to become an architect.' Her male teacher next to us laughs at her. Lisa responds to me by saying: 'Wow, do you see this? What do you think of this [referring to the teacher's response]?' I ask Lisa why she would like to become an architect. Lisa: 'I draw very well; I like to look at buildings you know … well it just seems very nice to me … But do you think it is possible for me to become an architect?' While asking this, Lisa looks at both the teacher and myself. Teacher: 'Becoming an architect? Then you have to go to TU Delft [Dutch university of technology] and there are only guys there so that seems very unrealistic.' Lisa turns her back to the teacher and says to me: 'You see what happens here? The teacher doesn't believe in me. Why should I even go to school then?'

Amongst other things, Lisa's example shows that it seems to be difficult for her to openly express high ambitions in school and for the teachers to take those ambitions seriously, given both the level of the school and her often disruptive behaviour

in the classroom. Lisa's case shows the kind of contradictory and detailed story that emerges when one moves away from traditional survey-based research on young people's aspirations (Baillergeau, Duyvendak, & Abdallah, 2015). In a survey, Lisa's ambition could have emerged as a standard finding, concluding that low-level schooling does not necessarily lead to low-level ambitions. Lisa's example also confirms a common finding that aspirations of low-level students often meet with prejudice or doubt on the part of their teachers. However, Lisa's case also shows the reasons for her ambition ("*I draw very well*") and highlights the contradictory deployment of resources likely to prevent her from achieving her ambition (disruptive behaviour in class). In this ethnographic fieldwork I found a number of such paradoxical cases, raising the question as to whether the existing methodologies and theories of young people's aspirations are sufficient to understand the ambitions of low-level students.

In this chapter, I will pose the question: *How do Dutch girls form and realise their educational aspirations in lower vocational schools?* Using data from my ethnographic research carried out amongst pupils from lower secondary vocational schools, I will show in more detail – through their stories – how existing theoretical frameworks are insufficient to explain outcomes, and I will argue that two additional elements are crucial to understanding aspirations: 'reasons' and 'resources'. Here, 'reasons' refer to the explanations behind why pupils have certain aspirations; and 'resources' refer to the knowledge needed to achieve these aspirations. The chapter will, thus, contribute to the existing academic framework of pupils' aspirations, and will provide useful features to help school staff deal with the complexity of the formation and realisation of pupils' aspirations in schools.

Understanding pupils' aspirations

The concept of pupils' aspirations is often used as a predictor for study outcome, as aspirations can motivate (or demotivate) pupils to continue with their education. There is a range of definitions for aspirations varying from: 'reflects pupils' hopes and dreams, likely to be disengaged from the school reality of students' (Khattab, 2015); 'part of your identity and serve as models for self-transformation' (Frye, 2012); 'what one wishes to achieve, not what one realistically expects to achieve' (Reynolds & Pemberton, 2001); and 'have to do with commitment in the sense of agency, choice and determination of goals' (Baillergeau, Duyvendak, & Abdallah, 2015). This study will focus on the last definition as it encapsulates the complexity of pupils' aspirations.

Many quantitative studies on pupils' aspirations have found that students in the lowest levels of education often have the highest aspirations (Elffers, 2011; de Graaf & van Zenderen, 2013; Kao & Tienda, 1998; Traag, 2012). These high aspirations often do not correspond with the students' level of study. The fact that these youngsters in the lowest levels of education have such high aspirations has been analysed in numerous ways. One explanation can be found in the national education system, where it is possible to move from the lowest level of education all the way up to university level (Kalmijn & Kraaykamp, 2003). This prospect leaves open the suggestion that all educational levels are attainable and that one's current level of education is not necessarily one's final destination. This resonates with what MacLeod has referred to as the achievement ideology – the notion that if a person works hard they can be successful. MacLeod (1987) discovered that amongst two groups of male working-class teenagers in the United States with the same educational and living conditions, the black minority group, called 'The Brothers', had high aspirations, while the white youth group, called 'The Hallway

Hangers', had low aspirations. Whereas 'The Brothers' believed in the achievement ideology concept, 'The Hallway Hangers' rejected this due to their feelings of being discriminated against. Comparable to 'The Brothers', numerous Dutch youths, especially those from a migrant background, have moved up from the lowest educational level to higher levels of education by accumulating qualifications (Crul, Schneider, & Lelie, 2012). Nowadays, this upward mobility in the Dutch education system has become more difficult due to changed regulations. There are additional requirements for accumulating diplomas. For example, a Grade Point Average (GPA) of 6.8 is needed in order to enter a higher educational level at secondary school, whereas previously just a pre-vocational secondary education qualification was sufficient.

Another approach used when analysing high aspirations among less well-educated pupils is questioning whether these young people are actually able to fulfil their aspirations. This has been addressed by various authors in different ways. Wyn and White (2000), for example, were cautious about expressed aspirations, arguing that aspirations are far less individualised than has been suggested in previous research. Appadurai (2004) questioned whether individuals actually have the capacity to aspire, reasoning that people are only capable of aspiring when they are aware of what is a desirable future, and when they become convinced that this is achievable. Van Daalen (2013) maintained that most individuals are drawn to the school careers that are highly valued by the educational system, 'independently of their personal aspirations or aptitudes'. As a result, there is a general negative attitude towards lower vocational training and the students enrolled in such training, and this is reflected in the relations and interactions at school (van Daalen, 2013). These prejudices have been demonstrated in various studies: '*I think I would have learnt more if they had tried to teach us more*' is the title of an article by Korp (2012). In it, he explains how low expectations and a negative

discourse often prevents vocational students from engaging in theoretical learning and discussion. Similarly, Hjelmér and Rosvall (2016), in a study on the interaction processes observed in mathematics classes in diverse Swedish upper secondary school programmes, showed that vocational students exerted influence more successfully when they wished to reduce the pace and difficulty of lessons, than when they wanted to get more out of their mathematics education. These studies show the paradox that, on the one hand, vocational students want to get more out of teaching, but on the other hand they also resist teaching and sometimes even disturb the class. This paradoxical behaviour could even be found in the same pupils, depending on the time and place (Rosvall, 2015; Russell & Thomson, 2011). Disruptive classroom behaviour, sometimes in direct relation to pupils' aspirations, has been studied extensively. In 'Learning to Labour', Willis (1977) describes why, and explains how the reproduction of working-class kids happens in Britain, based on their low educational aspirations. Amongst other things, Willis defines how 'the lads', through their working-class culture, resist teaching and how this prevents them from realising the liberal aims of education. Ogbu (1974) explained disruptive classroom behaviour as a collective reaction and adaption to the limited opportunities to benefit from education that were available to ethnic minority youth. This is in sharp contrast with Paulle (2005, 2014), who strongly dismissed theories based on ethnicity (Ogbu, 1974, 1991) and minority (Willis, 1977) status, and instead referred to embodied responses to chronic stress that lead adolescent students to contribute to the ongoing devastation of their own high poverty schools. Other more recent studies have connected various forms of disruptive classroom behaviour back to the relatively low educational status of these students, as this position is not only perceived low by themselves but also by others (Archer & Yamashita, 2003; van Daalen, 2013; Korp, 2012; Hjelmér & Rosvall, 2016; Russell, 2011). This allows the

cycle to repeat itself; starting at lower levels of education and having lower labour market position expectations works to lower pupils' aspirations. According to Rosvall (2015), a form of reproduction may also take place among the researchers when they study school environments with a majority of boys from working-class backgrounds. Rosvall (2015), therefore, challenges ethnographers to not only reproduce a given discourse, but to also give a representation of the complexity of those processes. This chapter aims to accept this challenge.

As the brief literature overview above shows, much research has already been done on the aspirations of young people in lower (vocational) education. As a result, we have learnt more about why they may have high or low aspirations and to what end their aspirations may lead them. However, there are still some crucial elements missing from the existing academic framework of pupils' aspirations, which deals with the realisation of pupils' ambitions in lower (vocational) educational settings. The overall negative attitude towards lower vocational training and the students enrolled in such training is reflected in the relations and interactions at school, and influences the development and realisation of their aspirations. Therefore, this study has combined the social power relations in everyday school activities with the development and realisation of pupils' aspirations. On the basis of ethnographic data, I suggest the addition of two new elements to the existing framework for studying the development and realisation of pupils' aspirations. The new theoretical elements 'reasons' and 'resources' will be clarified through ethnographic cases of 'white' Dutch girls voicing their aspirations in a lower vocational school. I argue that educational aspirations are shaped by the reasons and resources of pupils as indicated in the example of Lisa. Here, 'reasons' refer to the explanations behind why pupils have certain aspirations, and 'resources' refer to the knowledge needed to achieve these aspirations. This knowledge can be

obtained through school staff, family members, friends and significant others. 'Reasons' and 'resources' are built on the classic sociological theory of Giddens (1984) and inspired by Merton (1968). The theory of structuration by Giddens (1984) stated that people's actions are shaped by social structures, and he defined 'resources' as the capacity to change the material and social environment. In a school context, 'resources' (how) could include access to teachers or control over classroom events. Merton's strain theory (1968) states that society encourages individuals to achieve socially acceptable goals, but strain occurs when individuals are faced with a gap between their goals and their current status. When applying this theory to our pupils in lower vocational Dutch education, most pupils aspire to jobs that are highly valued in society (reasons), but their low education level may cause a gap between their goals (aspirations) and their current achievement level. By including reasons and resources when analysing pupils' aspirations, I not only developed a more comprehensive understanding of pupils' aspirations, but I also reduced the likelihood of making judgments on pupils' aspirations in advance, based on the inextricable link between lower and higher categories in the educational hierarchy.

Methods

Holland High is located in an inner-city area in the Randstad, the Netherlands. It is part of the comprehensive, public, secondary-level system of education and offers all pathways from pre-vocational (VMBO) to pre-academic education (VWO). This comprehensive school has approximately two thousand pupils spread across several buildings in and around a large city in the Randstad. For this study, I focused on one school location, which offers basic and advanced pre-vocational secondary education programmes (in Dutch:

vmbo basis and vmbo kader). This school location has around five hundred pupils, most of whom have low-educated parents. The vast majority of the pupils are the descendants of immigrants. The respondents to my ethnographic study were 'white' Dutch female pupils in their senior year of lower secondary vocational education. At the time of the study, there were ten 'white' Dutch female pupils in the senior year at *Holland High* out of a total of hundred pupils divided over several lower vocational programmes and classes. These ten girls were aged between fifteen and seventeen, and from diverse backgrounds regarding their parents' education and occupation. However, none of their parents had a university degree. During the fieldwork I did not inform the girls that I was studying only 'white' Dutch female pupils. The literature has suggested that it would be methodologically prudent not to inform the students that the research specifically involved a subset of pupils, as it might run the risk of sabotage from the other girls, due to jealousy or other barriers. Even though only 'white' Dutch female pupils were studied, I also gathered data on other pupils. Specific gender (chapter six) and racial/ethnic dimensions (chapter five) are discussed in other sections. This chapter focuses on the development and realisation of pupils' aspirations at school.

I conducted my research at *Holland High* from September 2014 to May 2015. Intense observations in the classroom and playground area were part of my research approach. I followed certain students around, and documented the ordinary and sometimes extraordinary daily life at this school. To be consistent with the methodological principles of triangulation, I combined observation with interviews with people in different roles and used materials from different sources. I consulted various school records and interviewed students (both individually and in groups), teachers, parents and school officials. I also observed pupils in classes and interacted with them in the breaks between classes. Individual

interviews lasted between twenty and sixty minutes. In both group and individual interviews, I used semi-structured interview protocols, asking open-ended questions to learn as much as possible about interviewees' experiences with school in general. During the collection of ethnographic data, I was always open with the school and my respondents about the nature of my research. The pupils knew that I was studying them and that the study was about their aspirations.

During the first meeting in the classrooms, teachers allocated extra time to introduce me and my topic. We talked about the pupils' possible aspirations and future plans, if they had any. I listened carefully to every pupil and invited the more silent pupils to speak up. In order to have contact with the pupils about this topic on a regular basis, I conducted one-on-one talks about their possible aspirations and future plans once a month. I realised that by using this approach young people were being encouraged to reflect upon their aspirations perhaps more often than they would normally have done. However, during these talks I allowed the students to choose the topic of conversation. This ended up being a mixture of everyday school and personal events, which occasionally included their aspirations and future plans. This approach revealed the development of reasons and resources within their aspirations and future plans. In order to better understand pupils' aspirations, I analysed them according to the categories 'what', 'why' and 'how'. The data showed that the vast majority of pupils could answer the 'what' of their aspirations by stating an occupation or a future plan, but 'why' and 'how' appeared to be more challenging questions. This chapter suggests that with limited knowledge concerning the 'why' and the 'how', the realisation of aspirations will proceed slowly. The categorisation of 'why' and 'how' are translated into theoretical concepts of reasons and resources. Through an examination of ethnographic cases I will illustrate

the advantages of using both reasons and resources when analysing pupils' aspirations.

Reasons

Reasons are often the first thing that pupils express when talking about their future aspirations. On the positive side, reasons can motivate pupils to act upon their aspirations. On the other hand, when reasons are absent pupils may feel frustrated, start doubting themselves, and even become discouraged about continuing with school. To begin with, Ivy knows very well what she wants to become and why (reason). The ethnographic case of Emma, in contrast, illustrates the absence of both aspirations and reasons.

> Ivy, 15 years old: I always wanted to become a musician. Since an early age I have played the harp and I love it. I have lessons every day and I also volunteer at a music school. I know it is very hard to be a successful musician, but that is all I have ever wanted. I have been preparing to audition for the best music school for over two years.

All Ivy's decisions are dedicated to achieving this goal. For example, at the national exam in primary school, which serves as the main determinant for entry level into secondary education, Ivy qualified for entry into a higher level of pre-vocational secondary school than where she is currently studying. However, she deliberately chose to attend a school on a lower educational level because she wanted to spend as much time as possible practicing her music. Ivy fully devotes herself to her dreams. Emma's story is very different:

> I have absolutely no idea what I want to become, never had, to be honest. I have done several online tests, but that did not help at all. I want to do something that I enjoy and that I can do, but I do not have a special talent. I do not know with whom I can discuss my options, if I have any at all.

Emma is clearly disappointed in school and in herself as she does not have any idea of what she wants to become. She could use all the help she can get. This is in sharp contrast to Ivy who knows exactly what she wants, why she wants it (reasons) and how to achieve it (resources). In the results of this study, girls like Emma and Ivy are the exception rather than the norm. Most pupils are somewhere in-between, knowing their aspirations and having more or less clear reasons, either with or without resources. Pamela, for example, did not have clear aspirations, but with the help of her parents she was able to explore her options and find something she liked.

> Pamela, 16 years old: I never really knew what I wanted to become. In the beginning, I wanted to become a stewardess, travelling around the world, you know. But I have heard that you need to speak many languages and so on, well, that is impossible for me. So I asked my family what they thought was suitable for me to do, and they all said hairdresser. Becoming a hairdresser did not really appeal to me; it seemed very unhygienic to be touching someone else's hair that might be full of dandruff and lice, yew. But my mother took me to an open day to this hairdressing school, and it was surprisingly very nice [big smile].

Although Pamela did not initially like the idea of becoming a hairdresser, thanks to her parents she will start this

educational programme next year. This shows how her parents gave her reasons for a specific aspiration and, combined with resources, she can now develop her aspirations. The same goes for Samantha and Esmee, neither of whom really know yet what they want to do with their lives. But they will visit some further vocational education colleges with their parents to learn more about their options. Their examples show the importance of parents in the development and realisation of aspirations. Unfortunately, parents are not always able to assist their children with their life choices, as Ashley's case clearly demonstrates:

> For as long as I can remember I wanted to become a stewardess. When I was little I even dressed up and played that I was one. I really like the travelling and serving people. I want to visit the whole world.

Unfortunately, Ashley's current educational level does not meet the requirements for qualifying to become a stewardess. She has no idea how to realise her aspiration, and just like Lisa's, Melanie's, Romy's, Emma's, and Naomi's parents, who are also unable to help their daughters, her parents are not in a position to help her. These girls are dependent on the resources of school, which can be influenced both positively and negatively by their own behaviour, as the next paragraph demonstrates.

Resources

If there is a large gap between a high aspiration and a low level of education, pupils will need access to resources in order to achieve their goals. Their social network, including school staff, family and friends, plays an important role in the development of their aspirations. This chapter started

with an ethnographic observation of Lisa, a 15-year-old lower vocational Dutch pupil, voicing her aspiration of wanting to become an architect to her teacher and the researcher. The teacher responded in a rather cynical manner ("that seems very unrealistic") to Lisa's desire to become an architect. As teachers' expectations are known to be a key determinant of pupil progress, which is often linked to pupils' aspirations (Feinstein, Hearn, Renton, Abrahams, & MacLeod, 2007), the teacher's reaction will be contextualised in the following paragraph, which shows how disruptive classroom behaviour negatively influences the realisation of pupils' aspirations. As I enter Lisa's classroom during a two-hour Dutch lesson at Holland High School, the following scene unfolds:

> It is Thursday 9:15 and the school bell rings for the second hour of the lesson. I'm on the second floor standing outside the classroom where the lesson is being given by a male teacher of native origin who is in his late forties. The classroom door remains closed, so I knock and enter. I walk directly towards the teacher and ask him if I may sit in on the class. Even though I have been coming here every week for months now, I always ask the teacher for permission. The teacher responds: "*Today is nothing special, but you know you're always welcome.*" I give a friendly nod and sit at the table in front of the class. The teacher stands next to me while I look around. It is chaos: three girls from migrant families with dark curly hair and revealing clothing are at the back of the classroom, taking selfies with each other on their phones. They are sitting on top of each other, on top of the tables, on the ground, screaming and giggling about the photo results. One of them opens the curtain, to allow more light in for a good picture. While this is happening, Pamela, a 'white' Dutch girl

with dyed blond hair and a piercing in her eyebrow, also at the back of the classroom, shouts: "*We need music otherwise we cannot dance*." So Pamela runs to the teacher's computer, goes to the YouTube website and puts on the latest song by Nicki Minaj. She dances exuberantly, and gets Samantha, Ashley and Lisa in the room to dance with her. While the teacher is still standing with his arms crossed, next to me, he says that he finds it very difficult to respond to this kind of behaviour, because "*they are not stupid you know. In the end their grades are sufficient*", so he feels there is little he can do about it.

Only three girls, including Ivy, are doing the assignment the teacher set the class. "*They really need it, and they know it*," says the teacher. The rest of the fifteen pupils are predominantly concerned with their phones. This time, they are not trying to hide it, as they normally would during other classes. During this class, there is no sneaking around; it is all out in the open. One of the girls is even making a short phone call during the lesson. Teacher: "*Yes, you could take their phones away, but then what? Are they going to work? I don't think so. I don't think this is about working*." The teacher is right; the current classroom situation is nothing special. I have witnessed this behaviour multiple times with different teachers. Books and pens are thrown around. You can also hear this incredibly loud laughing, almost fake, just to produce an effect. These girls are very aware of their troublemaking behaviour as Pamela shouts: "*I'm so energetic right now, you can't stop me*." Lisa: "*I really don't feel like doing anything*."

Afterwards, at the researcher's request, six of the girls reflected on their behaviour in a small private group session. Ashley:

> I know what we are doing is wrong, but it feels so good, you know. Especially when a teacher is losing his control over the class, you feel that you're in control over the whole class, including the teacher, and that feels great!

Lisa added, "*When nobody is doing anything, you don't feel like working either*." Samantha: "*I know I can afford to behave like that here, because I have good grades*." The Dutch teacher recognises that some pupils think he is too soft and that he should enforce the school rules more rigorously. But he deliberately chooses not to do this. As he says:

> I don't want to be playing police officer the whole time. They know the rules, so it's up to them whether they obey them or not. That also means that they can choose whether or not to make use of my teaching skills.

He was disappointed that his pupils 'choose' to do nothing, instead of learning and using his teaching skills. After listening to the reflections of both the pupils and the teacher, the researcher summarised the teacher's response and recounted it back to the students. All the girls were silent for a few minutes. This was unusual, as they would normally have had an immediate response. Pamela was the first to speak: "*Checkmate! He got us there*." Lisa smiled, "*Wow, who is in control now …*"[3] These reflections show that there was a misunderstanding between the female pupils and the teacher with regard to expectations: the teacher expected the pupils

3 It is not possible to say to what extent other teachers in other schools would respond in similar ways.

in their senior school year to be more self-reliant, while the pupils expected their teacher to be stricter. Thus, on the one hand the pupils wanted to get more out of their lessons, but on the other hand they tried to limit the lessons and sometimes disrupt the class.

As shown by the above example, a classroom situation in which young people exhibit rebellious behaviour can influence the realisation of pupils' aspirations in a negative manner. With such disruptive behaviour, pupils demonstrate that they may have other priorities (such as wanting to be in control), which do not contribute to their educational and occupational aspirations. This attitude may, perhaps unintentionally, position the teachers against the students as the Dutch teacher has already expressed his disappointment in his students because of their disruptive behaviour during his lessons. He felt that he was not able to teach properly, and he did not feel taken seriously as a teacher. This type of disappointment may cause teachers to lower their expectations of their pupils. Considering both the low educational level of the school and the disruptive behaviour in the classroom, it is sometimes difficult for teachers to take pupils' high aspirations seriously and therefore to help them to achieve them. Lisa has no idea how to realise her desire to become an architect. She loses her resource, in the form of the teacher, making it difficult to pursue her career aspiration, namely making drawings and enjoying being good at drawing. Due to different expectations of the teacher and Lisa, and her sometimes disruptive behaviour in class, Lisa has also not, or at least not yet, been guided towards alternative ways of achieving her aspiration, such as studying graphic design at a lower vocational level.

Final discussion

In an attempt to understand what motivates pupils in their life choices, this chapter first examined the existing literature. Much research has already been carried out on the aspirations of young people in lower (vocational) education. As a result, we have learned, among other things, that lower educated students often have either high aspirations in relation to their current educational position (Elffers, 2011; de Graaf & van Zenderen, 2013; Kao & Tienda, 1998; Traag, 2012) due to the achievement ideology (MacLeod, 1987) and the opportunities to accumulate qualifications (Crul et al., 2012; Kalmijn & Kraaykamp, 2003) or low aspirations due to the lack of trust in the school and their relatively low educational position (Paulle, 2005, 2014; Ogbu, 1974, 1991; Willis, 1977). Their position is not only perceived as low by the students themselves, but also by others (Archer & Yamashita, 2003; van Daalen, 2013; Erickson, 1982; Hjelmér & Rosvall, 2016; Korp, 2012). This overall negative attitude towards lower (vocational) education and the students enrolled in such training is reflected in the relations and interactions at school, and likewise influences the development and realisation of pupils' aspirations. By combining the social power relations in everyday school activities with the theories on pupils' aspirations, this chapter has argued that there are still some crucial elements missing from the existing academic framework of pupils' aspirations – those dealing with the realisation thereof. On the basis of ethnographic data, two additional elements have been suggested: the 'reasons' why pupils have these aspirations, and the 'resources' available to pupils to help them achieve their ambitions. The historical origin of 'reasons' and 'resources' is derived from Giddens' Theory of Structuration (1984) and Merton's Strain Theory (1968). With these two additions, this chapter attempts to contribute to the existing academic framework and hopes to provide some useful pointers to

help school staff deal with the complexity of the formation and realisation of pupils' aspirations at school. Through these newly developed concepts, I have tried to answer the central question: *How do Dutch girls form and realise their educational aspirations at the lower vocational school level?* Using ethnographic cases, this study has shown that the 'reasons' why pupils have certain aspirations are essential to the formation of these aspirations and that in order to attain these aspirations, it is necessary to have 'resources'.

Although these results are based on a study of 'white' Dutch girls (15–17 years old) at *Holland High*, a compulsory lower vocational secondary inner-city school in the Randstad, the Netherlands, it can be argued that these two newly developed concepts, 'reasons' and 'resources', are also of some relevance for a larger group. This larger group could include boys and young people from migrant backgrounds as they are also part of the larger multicultural inner-city school culture where ascribed racial categories have faded into the background. In this setting, I assume that 'reasons' and 'resources' are likely to take other forms, but they remain relevant for young people in lower (vocational) education. Nevertheless, further research is needed in order to understand how these forms could be influenced by gender and ethnicity.

The educational level of the pupils under study is perceived as the lowest in the Dutch compulsory secondary education system. This lower educational level limits both the teachers' expectations and the pupils' resources. However, even though these young people are at the lowest level of the education system, they have maintained high, and according to some teachers, "unrealistic" aspirations, even though the school discourages them from having high aspirations in the first place. These so-called high aspirations are often incongruent with their disruptive behaviour in the classroom. In fact, their disruptive classroom behaviour indirectly impedes the realisation of their aspirations. In view of both

the low educational level of the school and the sometimes disruptive classroom behaviour of the pupils, it is difficult for teachers to take pupils' high aspirations seriously and therefore to effectively help them to realise their dreams. This chapter has argued that if reasons and resources do not follow the same direction, it is difficult to achieve the end goal. Most girls have experienced a lack of resources, which has provoked intense frustration. This frustration partly explains the paradox between their high aspirations and their disruptive behaviour at school. Students who know their reasons for studying and have the necessary resources try not to participate in the disruptive behaviour in class. Instead, they focus fully on achieving their aspirations. In conclusion, two elements, 'reasons' and 'resources', have been suggested as an addition to the academic debate on pupils' aspirations. In theorising these newly developed elements, I shall end this chapter with an adapted definition of pupils' aspirations, an elaboration of the definition by Baillergeau, Duyvendak, and Abdallah (2015), which focuses specifically on the realisation of pupils' aspirations, namely, that they are concerned "with developing reasons and acquiring resources".

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What's School Got To Do With It?

Abstract

After developing the new concepts 'reasons' and 'resources' as an addition to the theoretical framework on pupils' aspirations in the previous chapter, this chapter examines them in practice. I contrast the stories of two 15-year-old 'white' working-class girls with a similar aspiration, but attending two very different schools: a Dutch lower vocational secondary school and an English state-funded comprehensive. By combining the wider literature on the effects of institutional arrangements with studies on pupils' aspirations, these stories will be analysed through the concepts 'reasons' and 'resources' to unravel how specific features in the Dutch and English education systems influence the distinctive ways of shaping their aspirations.

Introduction

Each education system is unique in the many ways it reflects both the context and historical development of a given country (Braster & Theisens, 2016: 37). Within an education system, institutional arrangements are important as they determine further education and occupational opportunities (Crul, 2015; van Praag, Boone, Stevens, & van Houtte, 2015). In the Netherlands, secondary education is organised through tracking whereby pupils are selected into one of three tracks at the age of twelve: an academic, a general level or a vocational track. These tracks are hierarchically ordered and they prepare students for different future occupations. The vocational track is perceived as being the lowest in status. Moreover, it has the highest number of students from families with a low socio-economic status and an immigrant background. Although most Dutch schools or schooling groups offer all pathways, vocational tracks are often segregated in a different building than the main school building. This contrasts with England where there are no formal tracks, only within-school tracks. This means that students of all abilities are housed in the same school building (van Houtte & Stevens, 2015). Over the years, the Netherlands has received criticism on this early selection into different tracks which results in highly segregated schools. In this context, Dutch educational experts have suggested alternative institutional arrangements. The Dutch council for secondary education (in Dutch: VO-Raad) has suggested implementing the British secondary education model in which high school exams (GCSE) can be done at different levels for each school subject, instead of taking the exams for all subjects at one level as is the case in the Netherlands (Dutch council for secondary education [VO-Raad], 2015). The Dutch and English school systems differ from each other in important ways that could potentially influence both the aspirations and the resources to realise pupils' aspirations. The

Dutch school system's early selection procedure forces pupils to think about their school and job aspirations at an early age. This can potentially have both positive and negative effects. It can be positive because pupils start to think about these issues early on and may therefore make more informed choices. It can also be negative because if they make the wrong choices they could find themselves stuck in a specific track, unable to remedy their mistake. The English school system, with its late formal selection, does not require pupils to decide upon their future professions early on. On the one hand, this gives pupils more time to think about their aspirations, but on the other hand, it may also postpone thinking and talking about them until it is too late.

I will present the narratives of two 15-year-old 'white' girls from a lower socioeconomic class attending schools in these two contrasting education systems. Both girls aspire to become game developers. Their stories of their pursuit of these aspirations reveal complex issues of power relations between teachers and students, their families' cultural capital (or lack thereof) and the challenges posed by their socioeconomic status (Jonker, 2006). In the in-depth interviews and ethnographic data, we see the interplay between the micro level (individual aspirations), the meso level (school and family context) and the macro level (national educational institutional arrangements). The main research question I formulated for our case studies is: *In what ways do Dutch and English girls voice their comparable aspirations, and how do institutional arrangements in education influence their resources and the development and realisation of their aspirations?*

Theoretical framework

An important factor shaping pupils' aspirations is the school type and school context (Archer, DeWitt, & Wong, 2014). The type of school pupils can choose or are allowed to choose, which among other things, relates to the study programme and the subjects offered, is influenced by options presented by the school officials, pupils' competences and aspirations and the interactions between pupils and their peers, parents and school staff. Pupils' choices made while at school and aspirations are closely intertwined; hence I will investigate in detail how their aspirations are formed and realised over time. Moreover, the messages pupils receive within their specific school context reflect upon and stand in relation to the broader social and cultural context, which students evaluate in relation to their potential abilities and likelihood of success (Fuller, 2009: 159). Anyon's (1980) work on the 'hidden curriculum' analyses pupil-teacher interactions in American elementary schools in communities with varying levels of socioeconomic status. He revealed how teachers' expectations help to shape what and how schoolchildren learn and what future work they are prepared for. In a more recent study, which examined power relations in an everyday secondary school context in relation to the development and realisation of pupils' aspirations, Stam (2017)[4] shows how difficult it still is for pupils in the lowest school levels to openly express high ambitions at school and, in return, for their teachers to take these ambitions seriously, given both the low level of their school track and their often disruptive behaviour in class. To better understand the development and realisation of pupils' aspirations in lower secondary education, Stam (2017) introduced the concepts 'reasons' and 'resources', whereby 'reasons' refer to the explanations behind their aspirations and 'resources' describe what is needed to achieve them. By linking

4 Stam's (2017) article is the published version of chapter three of this thesis.

the study of pupils' aspirations to the literature on the effects of institutional arrangements, I will explore how institutional arrangements in education influence both pupils' resources and the development and realisation of their aspirations.

In education, institutional arrangements characterise an educational system and shape the opportunities and constraints encountered by pupils and their parents in schools (Erikson & Jonsson, 1996). In a comparative study, Crul and others (2012) found that second-generation Turks across several European countries show very different outcomes, which they explain by differences in the institutional arrangements in each country (See also Crul, 2015; Schnell, 2014). Based on their results, Crul and Schneider developed the comparative integration context theory which argues that the success of the second generation across countries depends upon the opportunities provided by school systems and the way in which labour market institutions function in different countries (Crul & Schneider, 2010). Hence, this theory shows the mechanisms between students' agencies and the structures of the school and labour market. According to the comparative integration context theory the most influential factors within the institutional arrangements in education are: the age at which children start school, the age of selection and tracking (ibid). Tracking, in addition to other forms of ability grouping, such as streaming or setting, is a general feature of institutional arrangements in education in Europe (van Houtte & Stevens, 2015). The central argument behind tracking is that homogeneous classrooms permit a focused curriculum and appropriately-paced instruction to create the most productive learning environment for all students (Hanushek, 2006). According to Buchmann and Dalton (2002) in countries with relatively open, undifferentiated secondary schooling, like England, peers' and parents' attitudes toward academic performance significantly influence pupils' attitudes and aspirations because most occupational trajectories are still

open to all students until late in the game. In the Netherlands, on the other hand, where pupils are sorted into different educational trajectories at an early age, Buchmann and Dalton (2002) argue that students' aspirations are already largely determined by the type of school they have been tracked into. Interestingly, empirical results show that the aspirations of Dutch students in lower vocational tracks are not limited to low-level professions (Elffers, 2011; Traag, 2012). This can partly be explained by the fact that it is possible to move from a lower vocational track to a middle vocational track all the way up to higher education. This possibility potentially leaves options open for students.

Study

The current chapter is based on an international research project on early school leaving in nine European countries. This collaboration provided the opportunity to make an in-depth comparison between a school in the United Kingdom and a school in the Netherlands. The Dutch-English comparison is especially illuminating as the stratified character of the Dutch education system contrasts with the comprehensive nature of the English education system.

Research context

The English school is a large state-funded comprehensive secondary school with Ofsted[5] outstanding results that offers vocational courses. It is located in a deprived area in the northeast of England, which has the highest youth unemployment rates in England (Gregory, 2016; Ryan & Lőrinc, 2015). Most of the pupils at this school have an ethnic

5 Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (OFSTED) inspects and regulates services that care for children and young people and services providing education and skills for learners of all ages.

'white' English background. The Dutch counterpart is a public school in an inner-city in the Randstad, the Netherlands. This school is part of a broader secondary school group, offering all pathways from pre-vocational to pre-academic education. It has approximately two thousand pupils spread across several buildings in and around a large city in the Randstad. For this study, I focussed on one school location, which offers basic and advanced pre-vocational secondary education programmes. This school location has around five hundred pupils, most of whom have low-educated parents.

Schools

Below in table 1 I give a brief overview of both schools under study and also show how pupils can progress to the Game Design study programme within the Dutch and English school systems.

Table 1: Differences in school characteristics and tracking differences between the two target schools in England and the Netherlands.

	Dutch Secondary School	English Secondary School
Number of pupils	500 (mixed)	1,500 (mixed)
Age	12–16 (year 1–4)	11-16/18 (Year 7–11/13)
Class size	18 pupils	22 pupils
Special Needs	70% (LWOO[6])	20% (SEND[7])
National School Inspection	Satisfactory 2016	Outstanding (Ofsted 2013)
Between school tracking	End of primary school (age 12), pupils are divided into 3 tracks; vocational, general, academic.	Up to the end of Year 9 (age 14), all pupils follow the same curriculum.
Ability grouping	Within the vocational track there are four ability levels.	Each year pupils will be set in group 1 to 6 for the subjects English, Mathematics and Science.
Choosing Subject Options	Vocational pathway in Year 2 (age 13/14) for Year 3 and 4	End of Year 9 (age 14) for Year 10 and 11
National Curriculum Assessments	Year 4 (age 15/16)	Year 9 (age 14) Key Stage 3 SAT's Year 11 (age 16) GCSE[8]
School Results	100% of the pupils received a vocational diploma	30% level 1 (D to G-levels) 70% level 2 (C, B, A and A+ levels)
Progression to study Game design		
Preparatory training	MBO level 2 Creative Production course	BTEC level 2 Media Production course
Entree level for preparatory training	Basic vocational programme diploma plus successful interview and ability test	4 GCSE at grades D-E incl. Mathematics and English, possibility to retake English and Mathematics GCSEs plus successful interview and visual work.

Table 1: *Continued*

	Dutch Secondary School	English Secondary School
Duration preparatory training	1–2 years full-time	1 year full-time
Game design course	MBO level 3 Game design	BTEC 3 Game design
Entree level Game design	Middle-management vocational programme diploma or equivalent MBO Level 2 qualification. Plus portfolio of work and successful interview	Four GCSEs at grades A*–C/9–4, including English or Mathematics or equivalent BTEC Level 2 qualification. Portfolio of work. Successful interview and satisfactory reference.
Duration Game design study	2–3 years full-time	2 years full-time
Progression after level 3 Game design study	MBO level 4	BTEC 3 the Extended Diploma
Duration	2–3 years full-time	1 year full-time
Progression to University degree	University of Applied Sciences BA Creative Media and Game Technologies in Game Design	University BA Digital Arts
Duration university degree	4 years full-time	3 years full-time

6 Learning support (LWOO) is available for pupils who need extra support to obtain their lower secondary vocational diploma. It is usually provided by schools in the form of extra lessons or homework assistance (source: https://www.government.nl/topics/secondary-education/contents/pre-vocational-secondary-education-vmbo).

7 Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) can affect a child or young person's ability to learn (source: https://www.gov.uk/children-with-special-educational-needs/overview).

8 The General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) is the principal means of assessment for 16-year-olds.

Data Collection

During the school year 2014–2015 a school ethnography and biographical interviews were conducted in both schools. I spent three months in the English school and ten months in the Dutch school. The core respondents were twenty racially and ethnically 'white' working-class girls between the ages of 15 and 17. The ten racially and ethnic 'white' girls of Dutch descent were in their final year of lower secondary vocational education and had diverse backgrounds in terms of their parents' education and occupation. However, none of their parents had a university degree. All ten racially and ethnic 'white' girls of English descent received the Free School Meal, which is based on the low income and the education level of their parents. They were in Key Stage 4, Year 10, and age 15 with various educational levels. Two years later, a second round of interviews took place with the Dutch girls. Through the official local authorities and school records I was informed about the educational position of the English girls two years later in the school year 2016-2017.

Analysis

The aim of this chapter is to explore how institutional arrangements in education influence pupils' aspirations. The data provided a unique opportunity to analyse a Dutch and an English girl, both of whom aspired to become a professional game maker. Furthermore, both girls were living in a single parent household. The similarities between these girls allowed me to explore the importance of differences within schools embedded in two different national school systems. The girls' data were systematically compared and analysed through the concepts of reasons and resources of pupils' aspirations as explained in the theoretical framework paragraph.

Meet the Girls

Let us first introduce the girls, fictively named Melanie and Mandy, two 15-year-old 'white' working-class girls being raised in a single-parent home. Both their mothers had left school without a secondary school diploma. During the first round of interviews, Melanie was attending a Dutch lower secondary vocational school and Mandy an English comprehensive state-funded secondary school.

Dutch girl Melanie

The Dutch girl, Melanie, plays video games on her PC or the Xbox that was given to her by a family member every spare moment. Melanie has bright, eye-catching hair that she regularly dyes a different colour, either red, purple, green or black. Her vivid hair contrasts with her pale face and dark, alternative-looking clothes. Melanie recently attended her first Animae[9] event when one was held in her own city. Melanie and her friends saved money to go fully dressed-up to this event, where people of all ages come together to enjoy Animae, video games, Manga[10] and other popular modern Asian videos and games. "*At this event it suddenly occurred to me. I love Animae. Wouldn't it be supercool to design my own video game, where strong, beautiful and smart girls with normal (not half naked) clothes play the leading roles?*" Although Melanie had no idea how much game makers earn or even whether there are any jobs in this sector, she was immediately enthusiastic about becoming one. Melanie lives with her mother in a suburb where they rent a three-bedroom apartment in a large apartment block in front of the metro station, which is a few stops away from her school. She does not know her father as he left when she was two years old. She has no siblings. Her mother works in the care work sector as a cleaning lady. Sometimes Melanie

9 Animae are Japanese animated cartoon videos.

10 Manga are Japanese comics.

helps her mother to make some extra money, in addition to her student job as a cashier at a local supermarket. She uses this money for her personal expenses. In appearance Melanie resembles her mother: both wear alternative dark clothes and dye their hair. Melanie started dyeing her hair various colours at the very start of secondary school. Although her friends also have coloured hair, she is one of the few pupils with such an appearance at her secondary school. Melanie attends this particular secondary vocational school because it is the closest lower secondary vocational school to her home. She works on her Manga drawings whenever she is not in class.

English girl Mandy

Mandy is a 15-year-old petite 'white' English girl with a pale face and dyed dark red hair. She wears the standard dark blue school uniform with pants and a polo-shirt, all a size too big for her. Mandy has been drawing Manga cartoons since primary school. "*I really got into it and started to improve more and I really like it.*" After school, she plays free online video games and listens to Japanese rock music. "*I love the Japanese culture and all that.*" Mandy lives with her mother in a small three-bedroom apartment in a deprived neighbourhood in the Northeast of England. Mandy does not know her father. Her mother was 17 when she had her; the year before she had "*failed her final examinations (GCSE*[11]*)*", which resulted in her becoming a NEET[12]. Mandy explains: "*without good GCSE grades, you have huge difficulties to find good jobs. Me mum [my mother] never found a steady job*". A similar thing had happened to Mandy's grandmother. "*Even me nanna [my grandmother] had to go to work at the age of fifteen, when she got me mum [my mother]. She was smart, but she never got the opportunity.*" In order to prevent the same fate for Mandy, she

11 General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE).

12 Young people (aged 16 to 24) who are not in education, employment or training.

and her mother decided she should go to the best school in the area. Hence, Mandy takes a thirty-minute bus ride every day to attend this school. "*This school gets really good Ofsted*[13] *rates and so me mum [my mother], we both decided on this school.*" Her favourite school subject is Mathematics, because she is very good at that. Mandy has heard that you must be good at Mathematics to become a game developer. Her teacher told her that it pays very well and provides many job opportunities. Mandy needed to ask her teacher twice about the job opportunities and salary just to be sure, because she says; "*I don't want to end up like me mum [my mother].*"

Aspirations Analysed

There is much research about how specific features of education systems influence young people's educational trajectories (Crul & Schneider, 2010; Crul, Schneider, & Lelie, 2012; van Houtte & Stevens, 2015; van Praag, Boone, Stevens, & van Houtte, 2015; Werfhorst & Mijs, 2010). This study combines the literature on the effects of institutional arrangements with studies on pupils' aspirations. For this, I elaborate on the concepts 'reasons' and 'resources' (Stam, 2017) in which 'reasons' explain why pupils have certain aspirations; and 'resources' are what is needed to achieve them. The above stories of Melanie and Mandy will be analysed using the concepts 'reasons' and 'resources' to unravel how specific features of education systems influence the distinctive ways of shaping similar aspirations.

13 The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) has rated this school as "Outstanding" for many years.

Melanie's Reasons

> "I love Animae. Wouldn't it be supercool to design my own game?"

The Dutch girl, Melanie, developed her aspiration of becoming a game developer primarily based on what she likes doing, independent of the study programme she was following in secondary vocational education. In the Netherlands, vocational pupils are required to select a vocational programme that prepares them for a specific profession at the age of fourteen. However, many of them find it difficult to select a programme that suits their interests and abilities (Elffers, 2011). Melanie chose the Health Care study programme because that was the only programme in which Mathematics was not compulsory. However, she then developed an interest in designing her own video games. Melanie searched the Internet to figure out which senior vocational college had a course that would allow her to become a professional game developer. Together with her mother she visited an introduction day. In contrast to her secondary vocational school, she met other girls at this college who were also into gaming. She immediately felt at home in her new school and made many new friends. "*There was this girl there, also with coloured hair and I thought that she must have had the same interests as me and I was right, so we became friends.*"

Melanie's Resources

Family and school

Buchmann and Dalton (2002) stated that in a differentiated secondary school system, like that of the Netherlands, pupils may feel that their parents' opinions do not matter much because their trajectories are pretty much determined at an early stage. Although Melanie's vocational education

trajectory had seemed rather fixed, she was still able to switch to a study where she could learn to become a game developer. Melanie pursues her aspirations with her mother's support. In her choice to become a game developer, making money is not an important motivation, even though her mother struggles to make ends meet every month. Her mother is also happy with everything Melanie desires to become, saying "*if it is something she loves doing, it is fine with me*". Melanie's mother is not pushing her daughter to aim for a job with a particularly high salary, but supports Melanie in what she wants to do. This is in line with what teachers in the Netherlands advocate for vocational education students from a young age onwards. As pupils have to make choices at a very young age, within the limits of the school track they have been selected into, the emphasis is on them choosing programmes that speak to their aspirations. Parents seem to follow the school's approach in supporting what their children like to do.

School and classroom climate

Melanie described her secondary vocational school as being "*large and loud*" and describes her classmates as being "*disrespectful to the teachers*". This resonates with our ethnographic observations during classes and is in line with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) findings that the Netherlands has one of the lowest indexes of disciplinary classroom climate (OECD, 2013, 2016). Chapter three, also published as (Stam, 2017), demonstrated how disruptive classroom behaviour indirectly impedes the realisation of pupils' aspirations. "*In the context of both the low educational level of the school and disruptive class behaviour, it is difficult for teachers to take pupils' high aspirations seriously and, therefore provide effective assistance to help them to realise their dreams*" (Stam, 2017, p. 267). For Melanie, the problematic disciplinary situation in the classroom meant that her teachers were often too occupied with controlling

the classroom situation and unintentionally overlooked her needs. Less attention from teachers meant greater dependency on her mother and significant others to help her to develop and realise her aspirations. Thanks to Melanie's strong desire to become a game developer, she figured out by herself what was needed to realise her aspiration.

School system

Upon first sight, the Dutch education system seemed to be restrictive for Melanie, forcing her to select one out of the four vocational programmes offered by her secondary school that prepares pupils for a specific job or job sector. None of these pathways appealed to Melanie. She only chose the health care programme because that was the only programme where Mathematics was not compulsory. When the final year of the secondary vocational education arrived (at age sixteen), she needed to sign up for senior vocational education (MBO). The Dutch vocational education system has a high degree of flexibility even when choices for specific programmes have been made earlier. This allows young people to choose a different study direction. This opportunity allowed Melanie to pursue her aspirations even though she had previously chosen a very different study programme. After obtaining her secondary vocational school diploma, Melanie took a preparatory training course that she needed to complete in order to enter her gaming study[14]. For Melanie, the transition to MBO was an opportunity to make a fresh start in her educational career and realise her aspiration. However, the flexibility of the Dutch education system can also work to the disadvantage of many pupils.

Mandy's Reasons

Mandy's reasons for wanting to become a game developer forms an interesting combination of aspirations, skills and an

14 See table 1 on pages 78-79 for more details.

assessment of job opportunities. Mandy has loved drawing Manga cartoons since primary school and she regularly plays online free video games. At the same time one of the subjects she likes and performs in above average is Mathematics, a crucial subject for becoming a game developer. She is also concerned with job opportunities because she does not want to end up like her mother, who was a NEET[15] when she left secondary school. Given her current education level and working-class family background Mandy's aspirations could be considered relatively high. British studies have so far largely been unable to adequately explain the high aspirations of working-class students (Fuller, 2009). Freie (2007) argues that in the changing economy and job market traditional expectations, consisting of a working-class man earning money while his wife stays at home with the children, are no longer economically feasible for most working-class families. Therefore, advanced education and employment for women are increasingly viewed as being necessary steps towards obtaining financial stability (ibid).

Mandy's Resources

Family and School

In an open comprehensive schooling system, as in England, parents and significant others tend to have a huge influence on pupils' educational choices because their trajectories are more open and decisions regarding further education are not taken until the end of secondary school (Buchmann & Dalton, 2002). In this context, both Mandy and her mother view Mandy's current position in a low-ability class as being temporary and they are both still aiming for the highest possible educational level with the specific aim of getting the best job opportunities. Mandy, talking about her mother,

15 Young people (aged 16 to 24) who are not in education, employment or training.

says: "*When I get like Es, she [mother] tends to say, you need to revise more. You need to try better. She [mother] wants us to revise and get good grades and get a good job.*" Mandy's mother has high expectations for her daughter to succeed, which corresponds with the general finding that overall parents in the United Kingdom have high expectations (OECD, 2012). Mandy continues: "*The pressure is on me, just to achieve these things, because they [mother and grandmother] couldn't when they were younger.*" Mandy noticeably discusses her future plans in the light of her mother's educational and occupational experiences, failures and struggles, stating: "*I don't want to end up like me mum [my mother]*". Several others studies have shown how daughters both identify and empathise with their mother's struggles and translate these experiences into a need for financial independence (Freie, 2007; Hubbard, 2005). Luckily for Mandy the occupation of game developer offers "*good job opportunities*" according to her teachers, and therefore her mother supports her aspirations.

School

At secondary school, Mandy worried about getting the highest grades possible. She felt that if she failed, her future options would be drastically limited, as had happened with her mother and grandmother previously. Mandy: "*It just affects your whole future.*" This focus seems to partly divert pupils from developing their aspirations to achieving the best possible GCSE results instead. The English teachers interviewed for the research seem to follow a similar approach; "*You are just trying to get the kids the best possible grades for that particular course so that's more our focus.*" Even in Mandy's low-ability class pupils work hard to get the best possible grades for their GCSEs. Most of her classmates openly expressed hopes and dreams of going to university. However, in private, teachers communicate that university is unreachable for most of the low-ability level learners, and say: "*If they [pupils] are more*

motivated by the idea of going to uni [university], well…" An OECD (2012) report has shown that teachers' expectations of pupils in the UK is well below average, which could result in them having attitudes that may negatively influence their pupils' learning environment. Fuller (2009) argues that there is circular element in this environment: "*the messages students receive within school are a response to an individualised defeatist sense of their own abilities that then impacts on attitudes to education*" (ibid, p. 140). Mandy's motivation is, however, largely external: she concentrates on her favourite and best school subject, Mathematics, because she has understood that you must be good at Mathematics to become a game developer.

School system

In the English education system, the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) test takes place at the end of compulsory secondary education, at age 16. For that reason, secondary education is predominantly focused on the preparations for this national curriculum assessment. Although Mandy knew from an early age that she was interested in game developing, her GCSE results did not allow her to enter the BTEC level 3 Game Design programme, for which the benchmark of satisfactory achievement is 5+ GCSEs at grades A*-C including English and Mathematics (Ryan, & Lőrinc, 2016). Even though it is not possible to repeat years in English secondary schooling, Further Education (FE) colleges now offer GCSE re-sits. This was not the case when Mandy's mother and grandmother were at school. This means that although Mandy, with her strong aspirations, initially got stuck in the system, she found a loophole by following the BTEC level 2 preparatory training course while taking an extra course at the FE College to re-sit her GCSEs. In this way, she still hopes to progress to the BTEC level 3 Game Design, which could provide a route into higher education.

Discussion

Various studies have shown how institutional arrangements in education determine further education and occupational opportunities (Werfhorst & Mijs, 2010; Crul & Schneider, 2010; Crul et al., 2012; van Praag et al., 2015). By combining the broader literature on the effects of institutional arrangements with the studies on pupils' aspirations, this chapter has explored how institutional arrangements in education influenced the development and realisation of pupils' aspirations. For this, I used ethnographic and longitudinal data that provided a unique opportunity to analyse similar aspirations among a 'white' Dutch and a 'white' English 15-year-old girl, both of whom happened to be involved in the same Japanese Manga sub-cultures and who had a comparable socio-economic situation. I explored their stories and how specific features in the Dutch and English education systems influenced the development and realisation of their aspirations through the concepts 'reasons' and 'resources' (Stam, 2017). 'Reasons' refers to why pupils have certain aspirations and contributes to the development of pupils' aspirations; and 'resources' describes which elements, both positive and negative, in terms of family support, the school environment and national school system, influence these aspirations and contribute to the realisation of pupils' aspirations. The 'reasons' I identified for both girls to become a game developer are very similar and are largely shaped by the global culture around gaming. However, their 'resources' are different and are formed partly by differences in the two school systems. The Dutch school system, characterised by early tracking, closes off many options at a young age. It also negatively influences the school climate for the students in the lowest tracks where they are grouped together. But early tracking also has a more positive aspect as it requires pupils to start thinking about their future career options at a very early age. This creates feelings of great

uncertainty for those who are unsure about their choices, but for those who have a clear idea about what they want to become, it creates the opportunity to explore early on what they need to study and what school level and direction they need finish to fulfil their dreams. Early tracking in the Netherlands also gives pupils the opportunity to correct bad choices made earlier, as they can switch direction when they enter senior vocational education (MBO). The case study from the Netherlands shows that such loopholes provide pupils with the opportunity to realise their aspirations, especially if they are motivated. The much more open comprehensive school system in England offers the illusion of chances for all, but its informal ability tracking means that many pupils will not be able to pursue further educational opportunities. This system also provides loopholes for the most motivated pupils in the lower streams of education. The two school systems seem to restrict opportunities for children from disadvantaged backgrounds in different ways but with very similar results. To overcome the hindrances of both systems, both Melanie and Mandy had to carve out alternative routes via preparatory training courses while relying on their own and family resources. Strong aspirations played an important role in forging these alternative pathways.

Although our results are based on an ethnographic study of 'white' Dutch and English girls attending two secondary schools, it can be argued that our results could also be relevant for other groups. Research among children of immigrants has shown that the use of alternative pathways is very common among successful students in this group (Crul et al., 2012; Schnell, 2014). Moreover, our study outcomes may be extended to other comparable countries. The findings in this chapter help us to refine the mechanisms I described between agency and structure in the integration context theory (Crul & Schneider, 2010; Crul, 2015). Aspirations play a key role in understanding why some groups make use of loopholes and

alternative pathways in the educational system. It usually requires extra resources and motivation to find and make use of these loopholes. Both an individual's motivation for self-fulfilment and family support and pressure play a role in explaining this further.

This chapter is single-authored. A slightly different version is currently under review in an international peer-reviewed journal as: Stam, T., (under review). *Losing White Privilege? Exploring whiteness as a resource for 'white' Dutch girls in a multi-ethnic school.*

Losing White Privilege?

Abstract

The upcoming two chapters are situated in a MBO level 2 study programme for Social and Health Care. This means that the pupils, who have become students, have passed the compulsory transition from VMBO to MBO. 'White' Dutch students still form a numerical minority in super-diverse MBO classrooms. Much research on the role of race in education focuses on migrants and their children. The racial experiences of 'white' children are under-researched. This chapter examines whether 'white' working-class students of Dutch descent experience white privilege and if so, how they may use it as a 'resource' for developing and realising their aspirations. Most studies on 'white' working-class students do not take white privilege into account, and most work on white privilege has inadequately disentangled the impacts of race and social class. The ethnographic findings from a Dutch MBO school where the vast majority of students are of immigrant origin suggest that the whiteness of working-class 'white' students simultaneously does and does not act as a form of white privilege, depending on their interaction with their middle-class teachers. Due to its intersection with social class, white privilege appeared to be conditional upon meeting teachers' expectations.

Introduction

'White' children are under-researched in studies on the role of race in education (Morris, 2005). Nevertheless, they present a relevant case for analysing racial practices in schools, especially in super-diverse settings like Amsterdam, where people can be traced back to over 180 different countries and where there is no longer a racial or ethnic majority group that is dominant based on its demographic majority position (Alba & Nee, 2012; Kasinitz, Mollenkopf & Waters, 2002; Vertovec, 2007; Crul, 2016). In this chapter, I examine the experiences of 'white' working-class girls of Dutch descent who form a numerical minority in an ethnic and racially diverse school. I ask whether their whiteness functions as white privilege and offers a resource for them. This study tries to fill a gap in research about race and education because, on the one hand, studies on working-class 'white' young people seldom take white privilege into account, while on the other hand most studies on white privilege hardly focus on education and tend to overlook the intersection between race and social class (Morris, 2005).

In chapter three, also published as (Stam, 2017), I found that the concepts 'reasons' and 'resources' are useful in order to understand the development and realisation of students' aspirations. The term 'reasons' refers to the explanations for students' aspirations, while 'resources' describes what is needed to achieve these aspirations. Building on these concepts, this chapter specifically focuses on whether whiteness offers students white privilege as a resource in this school setting. This includes teachers' support, whereby the guidance and information provided by teachers may be a significant resource that helps students to develop and achieve their educational goals and aspirations (ibid). Due to their social class backgrounds, working-class students are even more reliant on external resources.

This study theoretically challenges the concept of white privilege articulated within the frameworks of race, ethnicity and social class, which I will elaborate in the theory section below. I will integrate these concepts into the research question of if and how the whiteness of 'white' Dutch working-class girls in a racially and ethnically diverse lower senior vocational school context functions as white privilege that provides them with a resource. The data come from a two-year ethnographic study of the *Randstad School* (a pseudonym, as are all the names in this book) in the Netherlands, which offers a super-diverse context in which the old majority group of 'whites' is now, demographically speaking, one of the many minority groups in the school (Crul, 2016). More methodological detail is provided in the method section, which is followed by the answers to the research question.

Theoretical tools

In order to theoretically challenge the concept of white privilege, this section contextualises theoretical tools – race, ethnicity, social class, whiteness and white privilege – within the Dutch context.

Ethnicity trumps race

The Netherlands has a rich history of migration studies and policy documentation. These studies and policy documentations usually focus on people with a migration background and their integration in the Netherlands. Both these publications and the Dutch public discourse on people with a migrant background concentrate predominantly on their 'ethnicity', 'national identity' and 'culture' differences (Essed & Trienekens, 2008). Racial categories tend to be used more easily in the United States and United Kingdom than in the Netherlands (Siebers, 2017). Whereas race was a common category in

early twentieth-century Dutch school textbooks and scientific works, it disappeared after the Second World War (Essed & Trienekens, 2008). In the early seventies, when large groups of migrants arrived, the Netherlands once more began to make a distinction in its statistics. This time a distinction was made on the basis of the country of birth of someone's parents by using two categories: *allochthones* to describe people with at least one parent born abroad, and *autochthones*, for people whose parents were born in the Netherlands (The Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy [WRR], 2016). In 2016 these classifications were replaced by "*residents with a Dutch or a migration background*" (Statistics Netherlands [CBS], 2016). Again, there are no notions of race to be found in these new terminologies. Yet, this does not mean that racial references are never used in the Netherlands. For example, this study is located in a super-diverse school, publically known as a 'black' school, a term widely used in the public debate in the Netherlands to signify schools where more than seventy percent of students have a migration background (Paulle, 2002). Parents have the right to freely choose which school to send their children to and this has resulted in what is known as 'white flight', whereby 'white' Dutch parents bring their children to segregated 'white' schools (Gramberg, 1998; Weiner, 2016). In 2010, more than half of the students in the four largest cities in the Netherlands [Amsterdam, Den Haag, Utrecht and Rotterdam] had at least one non-Dutch parent (Statistics Netherlands [CBS], 2016). In these 'super-diverse' contexts there is no longer an ethnic majority group that is dominant on the basis of its demographic majority position (Alba & Nee, 1997; Crul, 2016; Kasinitz et al., 2002; Vertovec, 2007). Therefore, it is even more relevant to study the former majority group of 'whites' – who are now, statistically speaking, one of the many minority groups – and their experience with race and ethnicity in education.

Whiteness in the Dutch context

Studying 'white' people and their whiteness is not common in the Netherlands (Wekker, 2016). Yet, internationally the study of whiteness stretches back to at least William J. Wilson's 1860 essay "*What Shall We Do with the White People?*" Three successive waves of whiteness studies followed, which were mainly dominated by publications written in English. Some of these theoretical findings may also be of use in the Netherlands. For example, Ruth Frankenberg, in her well-known book *White Women, Race Matters* (1988), conceptualises whiteness in three ways: first, as a location of structural advantage; second, as a position from which 'white' people view themselves, others and society; and third, as a set of cultural practices that are unnamed and unmarked, and which are considered to be 'normal.' Other authors, such as McIntoch (1988) and Freie (2007), also highlight ways in which whiteness is interpreted as normal, causing the invisibility of one's racial self while still marking the racial other. It is in these unmarked cultural practices that the power of whiteness lies (see also Wekker, 2016). Pamela Perry (2002) was one of the first researchers to compare 'white' American students in a predominantly 'white' high school to those in a multiracial high school. Perry (2002) examines the processes by which 'white' identities are constructed, concluding that 'white' students assert racial superiority by claiming they have no culture. This 'lack of culture' implies that one is the 'norm', the standard by which others are judged, and thus developmentally advanced (Perry, 2002). Due to the fact that 'white' American students were over-represented in the higher academic tracks in the multiracial school in Perry's study, the extent to which dividing students into different academic tracks contributes to the repositioning of whiteness remains an unknown. This will not be the case in this study, in which all students are at the same level. Hence, this raises the question of to what extent

whiteness alone promotes white privilege, which will be the central focus of this chapter.

For understanding whiteness in the Dutch context, it is important not to simply use the United States as a normative frame of reference. The academic book *White Innocence* (Wekker, 2016, 2017) was recently translated from English into Dutch. In the Dutch version, the author has translated the word 'white' as *wit* and not *blank*. In English both words would be translated as 'white'. In Dutch, however, these terms have different connotations. *Blank* also means clean, fair, colourless, etc. and it has a normative, positive term that is almost exclusively used in the fragments referring to 'white' people. It also has the connotation of white supremacy from the colonial past (Nzume, 2017, p. 17). This once more illustrates the complicated relationship between race and ethnicity in the Dutch context. Following other researchers such as Essed (1996), Hall (2000), Winant (2015), Wimmer (2015) and Wekker (2016) this chapter will use race and ethnicity as two sides of the same coin, subsuming and merging a more physical understanding of race with a more cultural view. I will use the notion of 'white' and approach it as a social construction that is associated with skin colour, culture, perspective, social class and power (Nzume, 2017, p. 18).

White privilege

The identification of whiteness as the implicit norm against which all other ethnicities are assessed is summarised in the notion of 'white privilege', which contains a number of different elements. Lareau and Horvat (1999), for instance, argue that whiteness is a form of cultural capital in educational settings. In this, white privilege refers to the idea that 'white' people, including 'white' students, profit from hidden institutional benefits that stem from their whiteness (Morris 2005, p. 100). However, such a one-dimensional approach does not take significant other background characteristics such as gender,

class and age into account. For example, Kirschenman and Neckerman (1991) demonstrate how people who are seen as belonging to the 'black' group racially are often perceived as working-class, while people who are considered as 'white' racially are perceived as belonging to the middle-class. Moreover, Carrie Freie (2007) shows how 'white' American working-class students use a discourse to situate themselves as "*normal*", which they perceive as "*middle-class*". In this way, the working-class students in Freie's study viewed themselves as being middle-class. Edward W. Morris (2005) shows how 'black' American teachers saw 'white' American students as being of a "*higher social class*", while 'white' American teachers perceived the same 'white' American students as "*lower social class*", based on the residential setting, minority setting and attitudes linked to "*lower class*". These 'black' American teachers did not interpret the geographic location and social styles of these 'white' American students as indicating a disadvantaged background in the same way as the 'white' American teachers did. Morris (2005, p. 102) argues that for many 'black' American teachers, whiteness appears to represent a "*symbolic*" form of capital (see Bourdieu, 1986) that links these students to a larger system of privilege and power and encourages favourable treatment of them. Furthermore, Morris (2005, p. 115) underscores that "*while the white teachers were more likely than the 'black' teachers to respond negatively to the white students, they still reacted to the 'black' and 'Latino' students even more negatively*". In the end, 'white' American students were nevertheless perceived more positively than the 'black' and 'Latino' American students, which emphasises the importance of studying white privilege as a resource available to 'white' students. All these studies show that white privilege needs to be studied in articulation with other dimensions of identity. Therefore, this study examines whether working-class students also have white privilege and if so, whether they are able to profit from it. 'White' middle and upper-class students

may benefit from both their whiteness and their social class background, but are 'white' working class students also able to benefit from white privilege? In other words, is white privilege a resource available to all 'white' students independently of their social class and educational background?

Setting and methods

The data for this study came from a two-year ethnographic study of the *Randstad School*. This school is part of a larger regional senior vocational education centre (MBO) that houses numerous types of senior vocational and adult education for students aged 16 years and above. Within the Dutch education system, lower senior vocational programmes are part of the compulsory education system. Pupils in the vocational track (as opposed to the academic track) must switch from their local high school to a regional senior vocational school at the age of sixteen. Consequently, regional senior vocational schools are attended by students from many local high schools. This study centres on the Level 2 senior vocational programme (MBO), which is equivalent to the ISCED (International Standard Classification of Education) level 3. It focuses on the Social and Health Care programme that primarily trains students in elderly care. Female students are traditionally overrepresented in this programme. For decades, these Level 2 programmes have been perceived as having a low status due to the ambivalent status of basic care work in Dutch society (see also Jonker, 2006).

Respondents and data-collection

Most of the students in the programme are working-class girls of immigrant or refugee origin, while a small minority is of 'white' Dutch descent. School classes are composed of students drawn from many local high schools. In total, there are around

hundred students, including nineteen females and five males, seventeen of whom are 'white' students of Dutch descent, including sixteen 'white' females and one 'white' male divided over four classrooms. I chose to make the 'white' Dutch female students the starting point for my analysis. I conducted twenty-four interviews with students, including all sixteen 'white' female students of Dutch descent as well as eight female students from other racial and/or ethnic backgrounds. I interviewed ten school staff members, including teachers, the head teacher, a school social worker and a school administrator. Detailed themes were not imposed on the data gathering beforehand, but were generated from data using grounded theory (Glaser, 1998). I entered the field with a broad interest in students' aspirations, the main theme of the larger research project. Guided by the fieldwork data, race and ethnicity appeared to be of significant importance for my respondents both in behaviour (segregated seating) and expressions. Respondents elaborated spontaneously and vividly on their interactions with their fellow students and teachers. These stories included their struggles with both their individual and group racial and/or ethnic identity and changed relationship with the teachers. Ethnographic research was carried out to explore these factors. During the academic year 2014–2015 I observed the four classrooms for two days per week. This included the observation of intake interviews, school breaks, activities in the school cafeteria, examinations, staff meetings, internship placements and graduation celebrations. A triangulation of methods (participant observations, interviews and focus group discussions) enabled the collection of valid and encompassing data on both students' meaning-making and behaviour, and relevant contextual factors. The factors that form a pattern in the data follow the line of argumentation in this chapter and are illustrated with representative fragments and citations. These quotes were translated from the Dutch original.

Analysing race

In this chapter, I use race and ethnicity as a category of analysis to scrutinise the concept of white privilege as a resource for students. In doing so, I often refer to 'white' Dutch to indicate Dutch people without a migrant background in their families. Although this division follows a common practice in the Netherlands, I do realise that it can be problematic as it ascribes seemingly fixed identities. There are many more divisions to be made in terms of race, ethnicity, religion, languages, social class, etc. In various studies, 'white' people tend to be viewed as one group in contrast to people with a migration background. But, 'white' people are not a homogeneous group and 'white' experiences should not be essentialised, as I will demonstrate in this chapter. However, I will not elaborate on the diversity within the contrast group of 'non-white' students in great detail. Like all racial and ethnic categorisations, whiteness is a complex concept and perceived members may also 'belong' to other groups. The question of who is 'white' and who is not may be described by ancestry or appearance and as such ascribed to a person, but it is also an issue of self-identification. I put the described racial and ethnic categories between single quotation marks to make clear that I see them as a social construct rather than as something factual. I use double quotation marks whenever I cite people.

Race and the researcher

It is important to elaborate on the racial and ethnic background of the researcher when examining themes like race and education. I am a racially 'black' woman of Haitian descent with markedly different racial and/or ethnic features compared to my key 'white' respondents of Dutch descent. The perception of my age also played a role. Since I was judged as belonging, in terms of age, more to the group of students than to the teachers, both groups often mistook me for a student. This had both advantages and disadvantages. Being

seen by the students as one of them allowed me to get close to both 'white' and 'non-white' students. They shared very personal stories with me and even invited me to their homes. Furthermore, 'white' students and teachers were comfortable enough with me to share their outspoken and sometimes negative feelings about people with a migrant background without making any reference to my own racial or ethnic features or making excuses to me. My gender also helped me to gain the trust of the respondents in this female-dominated school environment. The major disadvantage of being seen as one of the students was that they tried to involve me in some of the conflicts between groups of students within the school. This was in contrast to how they behaved with the school staff: students never tried to include staff in these group conflicts, but rather concealed them from them. When this occurred, I reminded the students of my "*researcher status*". As the teachers and other school staff often "*forgot*" about my presence, I also had to remind them regularly of my "*researcher status*". I frequently reflected upon situations and remarks made by the respondents in conversations about teachers, naturally without compromising the students' identity. A combination of various ethnographic approaches made it possible to gain a deeper understanding of the position in which 'white' students at the *Randstad School* find themselves socially, culturally, and educationally.

Becoming 'white'

The *Randstad School* is a large regional education centre attended by both students from the neighbourhood and the surrounding villages. The following ethnographic vignette from my field notes illustrates the different ways in which two ethnic/racially 'white' female students of Dutch descent, fictively named Dewi and Anouk, experienced entering the classroom for their first lesson at this super-diverse school. Unpacking this encounter reveals how whiteness becomes a racial and ethnic category for these female students.

> After a 30 minutes' scooter drive, "*So many different cultures I have never seen them together. I feel like a peppermint in a bag of liquorice*." For Dewi, the racial and ethnic composition of this classroom is the opposite of her elementary and secondary schools in the racially and ethnically homogeneous 'white' village where she lives. Dewi was very happy to see Esther, the other 'white' female student in the classroom, who lives in a neighbouring village. Anouk arrives a little too late, even though she lives within walking distance of the school. With a cup of coffee in her hand, Anouk glances in the classroom and shrugs her shoulders. Nothing special for her, because it is just like her secondary school, where there were also many girls from various racial/ethnic backgrounds. Thus, Anouk walks through the classroom as she wants to take a seat in the back. Meanwhile, Dewi makes a gesture that Anouk could join Esther and her, but Anouk ignores that. Once in back of the classroom, Fatima, a female student from Moroccan origin, places her bag on the chair where Anouk wanted to take place and says: "*You girls are already sitting in front of the classroom*."

This vignette demonstrates how Dewi and Anouk experienced entering the classroom for their first lesson in different ways. Moreover, it shows a common phenomenon whereby students divide themselves into groups along racial and/or ethnic lines, in which physical appearance – recognising diversity from someone's looks – is the main criterion for categorising classmates (see also M'Charek, Schramm, & Skinner, 2014). Searching for a seat in the classroom, Dewi was very happy to meet someone like Esther, another 'white' female student of Dutch descent. Based on her racial and ethnic 'white' Dutch background, Dewi and Esther expected that Anouk would join them, but she did not see the point in doing so. At the same time, Fatima was policing her boundaries, which forced Anouk to sit next to the other 'white' girls. Anouk, Dewi and Esther were the only three 'white' female students of Dutch descent in this classroom that consisted of twenty-two students in total. It was common for them to sit separately during classes, lunch periods and special events. Students placed themselves in clearly defined racial and/or ethnic categories that were acknowledged by their peers. Other groups in this classroom consisted of female students with colourful headscarves from Somalia, Yemen and Turkey; girls of Moroccan, Algerian and Tunisian descent without headscarves; Asian female students from China and Indonesia; and also the largest group in this classroom, 'black' female students from a mixture of ethnic backgrounds ranging from Dutch Antilleans to Surinamese, Cape Verdean, Ghanaian, Somalian, Kenyan and Congolese[16]. This process of grouping along racial and/or ethnic lines was also taking place in the other classrooms of the Level 2 programme at the *Randstad School*. In Classroom B, for example, where tables were clustered in groups of four, three 'white' female students of Dutch descent were sitting next

16 Here, the *emic* expressions have been used in which the respondents, when talking about race, mostly referred to the national descent of themselves and/or their parents.

to each other and when a 'black' female student entered the classroom she sat down at a new cluster of tables instead of sitting at the empty seat next to the three 'white' female students. Then two 'black' male students joined the 'black' female student. Gender was also a factor in students' seating choices, but for most of the time race trumped gender when it came to choosing a seat. Finally, a group of female students with a Muslim background entered the classroom and divided themselves over the clustered tables in which the Muslim girls with headscarves grouped together. Muslim girls without headscarves placed themselves at the remaining clustered seats. Classrooms C and D were composed by the students themselves. These students came from the same secondary school and were continuing their studies at the *Randstad School*. The school therefore ran a trial whereby the students were allowed to allocate themselves to either classroom C or classroom D. This experiment resulted in a classroom with only 'white' Dutch students (C) and a classroom with students from various racial and/or ethnic backgrounds except 'white' Dutch (D). This outcome was, according to the teachers, so undesirable that they stopped the trial immediately. Nonetheless, the students' chosen composition of classrooms C and D were maintained for the duration of the programme. In this, students were both the producers and products of defined racial and/or ethnic boundaries.

At the *Randstad School*, 'white' students recognised that certain ethnic and racial "*groups*" were being formed without explicitly referring to the racial and/or ethnic aspect of these divisions. Explicitly not mentioning the racial aspect of groups is what Amanda E. Lewis (2001) refers to as a "*hidden curriculum of race*," explaining that there is a white silence around the naming of race, while at the same time racial boundaries between groups considered to be different from one's own are maintained. It is only when I specifically asked students about the visible racial or ethnic aspect of their groups

that both 'white' and 'non-white' Dutch students expressed that "*it is much more comfortable to be with your own group*" and "*you understand each other better*". Both 'white' and 'non-white' Dutch students did not see any harm in doing this and believed it is "*normal*" to do it this way, saying that "*Everybody does it*." The racial self-segregation among students did not take a violent form, but there were times when students' racial and/or ethnic self-segregation seating choices were discussed through racial and/or ethnic tensions. Teachers who tried to change racial and/or ethnic divisions and group formations met strong resistance from both 'white' and 'non-white' groups of students. In the end, the teachers' attempts to break the students' self-imposed divisions even reinforced their determination to stick to their self-chosen group formations. And although 'non-white' Dutch students proudly mentioned their heritage in the form of national descent of their families to me, they were irritated when others referred to them by their descent only.

Next to the individual consciousness of being 'white', there is also a group process of belonging to the racial and/or ethnic 'white' group. From time to time individual conflicts between two students from two racial and/or ethnic groups turned into a clash between different racial and/or ethnic groups. For example, Soraya, who was part of the racial and ethnic 'black' student group, told her class that she had a debt of EUR 1,000 with her bank, but that she was going to buy the new iPhone anyway. In response, Esther, part of the racial and ethnic 'white' student group, told her not to be so "*stupid*." Soraya did not take that "*insult*" lightly and responded angrily to Esther. "*And then, there was a heated discussion and other students joined in. Suddenly, it became something between groups*", explained Dewi. Anouk, for instance, who was not present at that time, was nevertheless held accountable for things her other group members had said during the confrontation. She complained, "*People were mad at me for the things 'we' said, but I was not*

even there, so I did not say anything." Shirley, who is part of the racial and ethnic 'black' student group, was also absent, but nevertheless found that she needed to defend the words of her group members. These moments of tensions make clear that race materialises in the relations between different bodies (M'Charek, 2013). For the white girls in particular, being held accountable because of their group identity even though they had not been present was something new for them, and is part of their group process of becoming 'white'.

These incidents are just a few examples among many during my fieldwork that demonstrate how race and/or ethnicity act as important classifications through which students divide themselves in this school. It is important to emphasise that these racial and ethnic groups are by no means homogeneous. For example, the different ways in which Dewi and Anouk, 'white' female students of Dutch descent, responded during the first lesson at the *Randstad School* revealed group diversity. While Dewi was very eager to meet another 'white' female student, Anouk did not understand why she could not sit next to a 'non-white' Dutch female student. Anouk, like sixty percent of the racial and ethnic 'white' Dutch students in this study, grew up in the city and was thus accustomed to its multicultural reality. Most of the so-called city students had attended secondary schools where they were one of the few 'white' Dutch students in the lower performing tracks, which often made it impossible for them to form groups consisting solely of 'white' Dutch students. Anouk remarked, "*Well I was the only 'Dutch*[17]*' in the class at [anonymized name of high school] but still it felt good at [anonymized name of high school]. They accepted you even though you were 'Dutch', people take you the way you are.*" As

17 As stated in the methodology section, in the Netherlands it is very uncommon to refer to people's skin colour. Instead, most people refer to the national descent of students and their parents and say: 'Dutch' when referring to native 'white' Dutch people.

a result, city students habitually maintain mixed groups of friends as they already know these peers through school or from the neighbourhood. On the other hand, Dewi grew up in a racial and ethnically homogeneous village as did forty percent of the 'white' students in this study. These so-called village students attended segregated elementary and secondary schools. Consequently, village students mostly have a racially and ethnically homogeneous group of friends and therefore experience a super-diverse school differently than city students. Despite these distinctions, both village girl Dewi and city girl Anouk were not used to accentuating their racial and ethnic background. In this school, however, they were either divided up by others or they divided themselves along racial and ethnic lines. This has made them aware of being 'white'. Thus, grouping along a complex combination of racial and/or ethnic lines made the racial and ethnic characteristics of 'white' Dutch students visible, not only for 'non-white' Dutch students, but also for 'white' Dutch students. This initiated their process of "*becoming white*."

White privilege

I have demonstrated that whiteness plays a significant role for my respondents, and will now turn to analysing the notion of white privilege as a resource for 'white' students. Overall, schools operate according to a system of fixed rules and more implicit school values that form their identity. Within an institution, a school curriculum is developed, school staff is hired and certain practices become part of the implicit norms and culture of a school over time. Some argue that whiteness is embedded in teachers' pedagogy through "*unvarying conformity with the dominant white Eurocentric discourse that underlies white society's ways of thinking, living, and relating with people of colour*" (McIntyre, 1997, p. 135; Picower, 2009;

Rivière, 2008; Sleeter, 2001). This is also true for teachers, who are cognisant of racial and ethnic differences and inequalities (Feagin & Ausdale, 2001). Peggy McIntosh (1988) described this as "*the invisible knapsack*" in which 'white' people have invisible tools that provide them with white privileges. This contributes to the different layers of the concept of whiteness. Below is an example in which white privilege becomes visible.

During a cookery class, one of the lessons given in this study programme, the indirect privileges for 'white' students were revealed. In this class, a teacher makes a dish, which the students have to reproduce as accurately as possible. In this instance, the teacher put a pan on the stove, removed the meat from the package, and threw it directly in the heated frying pan. While the 'white' female students followed the teacher at each step, the 'black' female students looked at each other puzzled, and asked the teacher where they could find the lime or lemon. The teacher replied: "*if you have checked the ingredients list carefully, you will see that this recipe does not need any lime or lemon*." "*But how do we clean the meat then? At home, we always clean the meat thoroughly with water and lime or lemon,*" asked Jennifer, one of the 'black' female students, uneasily. The other 'black' students expressed similar feelings of discomfort. The teacher blankly looked back at the 'black' girls and then told them to do the assignment as instructed: "*Just put the meat in the pan without any discussions.*" The teacher got angry and did not understand why the "*Dutch students*" could simply follow her, but the 'black' students had to be "*so difficult*". Robin DiAngelo (2011, p. 54) uses the term "*white fragility*" to describe how racial and/or ethnic stress often triggers defensive responses among racially 'white' people. In this example, the 'white' teacher seemed unable to deal with a race-related difference around cooking. The teacher's way of doing things was presented as the unquestioned norm, making the 'black' girls' reaction a deviant response that embodied an unwanted difference.

It is in these unmarked cultural practices that the power of whiteness becomes clear (Wekker, 2016). Moreover, Modica (2015) argues that 'white' teachers who have not reflected on their own position of racial dominance may inadvertently transmit their narrow views on race to their students through the same whiteness discourses that are incorporated into their racial identity, thereby reproducing in their students the feelings and beliefs that perpetuate racist structures. In this, the teachers' understandings of race are an integral part of how class discussions surrounding multicultural texts unfold. The above example shows how 'white' students profit from being culturally close to the teacher. But white privilege also manifests itself in other ways.

At the *Randstad School*, all prospective students have an intake interview before being admitted to the study programme. These intake interviews are conducted by different teachers, two at a time, to gain a better idea of the background and the needs of their prospective students. Esther, an ethnically and racially 'white' Dutch student went to the introductory meeting with her mother, who works in maternity care. Esther's intake interview only lasted five minutes, even though thirty minutes was scheduled for each meeting. A teacher explains, "*So if a girl from [anonymized village] comes with one of her parents, who already works in*

the health and social care sector, I do not have to talk for thirty minutes." Shirley was next, and also came with her mother, who works in a hospital, but she received many questions about motivation and personal matters. Her intake interview lasted even longer than thirty minutes. The same teacher responded: "*you know, 'Hindustani' girls are often different at school than with their parents, so we don't trust answers that are given in the company of their parents. Well, what can we do? We just need to wait and see*." While a mother working in the Health Care sector was seen as an advantage for the 'white' female student of Dutch descent, this advantage did not seem to apply to the 'Hindustani' female student. In fact, it was even perceived as a negative, because the teacher was suspicious of whether the 'Hindustani' girl was truly motivated or if she had been forced in this direction by her mother. Both the cookery lesson and the intake interview examples show how 'white' female students experience direct and indirect privileges based on their racial and ethnic features.

Losing white privilege

I observed that being 'white' was often perceived as something positive by Dutch teachers at the *Randstad School* at the beginning of the school year, and that this resulted in direct and indirect privileges for 'white' Dutch students. However, over the year I saw that white privilege was often recalled by the teacher, due to the actions and attitudes displayed by the 'white' students. The concept of intersectionality helps us to understand this phenomenon. On average, the differences between teachers and the 'white' female students are greater than what they have in common, namely their skin colour, ethnicity and gender. Few teachers live in the immediate vicinity of the school or in other low income neighbourhoods. Moreover, most teachers have a bachelor's

degree in education, which is a much higher qualification than the one these students are studying for and the educational qualifications obtained by their parents. The teachers' middle-class background influences their understanding of what whiteness should entail. This is important for understanding the dynamics between 'white' students and their teachers. I argue that whiteness alone cannot promote white privilege as a resource available to students, as it depends on the interpretations of others, in this case the teachers. Thus, how teachers actually *perceive* students' class background has been explored. In this, the teachers' interactions with 'white' students intersect with race, social class and power. The power refers to the teachers, who have the ability to either assign or remove white privilege from 'white' students according to their interpretations of what can be considered as being truly 'white' depending on socioeconomic factors. The students at this school, both 'white' and 'non-white,' often face numerous personal difficulties, which some argue are characteristic of the low vocational education level. Below I give a summary of some of the personal challenges of six 'white' Dutch female students. These are not extreme cases, but are representative for both 'white' and 'non-white' Dutch students at this school:

> Anouk, 17 years old, has a father who is unemployed after being in prison for two years. Since his return, there are many tensions at home. Therefore, she often stays with her boyfriend.
>
> Dewi, 17 years old, does not have much contact with her father. She explains that she has a "*Lot of problems with my father. He prefers drugs and alcohol to his own kids you know.*"
>
> Stephanie, 18 years old, has been taking care of her mother since she was diagnosed with cancer. Her

twin brothers are too young to understand or help in the house. Her stepfather left after she reported him to the police for sexually abusing her.

Claire, 20 years old, was orphaned when her parents died in a car accident. She was also in the car, but luckily she survived. After the accident, she moved in with her boyfriend. Her boyfriend turned out to be very violent and kept her at home. With great difficulty, she broke up with him. Claire is currently living in a women's shelter.

Ellen, 19 years old, has a two-year-old daughter. The father of her child got into a large amount of debt and so they currently live under the supervision of an administrator to pay off their debts.

Hannah, 18 years old, explained to me, "*In my first week at this school, my mother threw me out of the house because I was in love with another girl. I had no place to go. You understand, I had other things on my mind than school.*"

These heart-breaking stories[18] show that many of these 'white' female students have to cope with several issues that often impede them from being able to perform their normal school duties. Hence, multiple disadvantages, such as their lower social class background and challenging home situations, overlap and this makes them even more reliant on external resources. The guidance and information that teachers can provide can be an important resource to help students to complete their education and achieve their aspirations (Stam, 2017). Teachers are very aware of this. One teacher commented

18 In consultation with the students, these stories have been reported to various authorities.

to me, "*Our students often have a lot of personal problems. Therefore, our work not only involves teaching, but also taking care of these non-school related issues*." However, while at the beginning of the school year teachers display a high degree of understanding for the difficult personal circumstances many students face, their sympathy tends to wane after a few months as they become increasingly irritated by their students' behaviour. A possible explanation for this change in their attitudes lies in the *process* through which teachers make sense of the complex connection between 'white' students' race, class and the school context. The teachers develop assumptions and expectations about 'white' students' through their own middle-class lens. Over time, they begin to wonder aloud if personal issues are really the reason why students are missing classes. One teacher stated, "*It is quite remarkable that 'everyone' is always absent during the exams.*" And of course 'white' students occasionally use their personal situation as an excuse to skip classes, when in fact they just didn't feel like coming: "*Yes, sometimes I'm not in the mood to go to school, so I won't. This does not have anything to do with my private life, you know. Sometimes, I just do not feel like it. Especially in the early mornings.*" Both the difficult circumstances and the "*I just don't feel like it*" behaviour of the 'white' students correspond to those of 'non-white' students. Whereas the teachers tended to differentiate between the 'white' and 'non-white' students at the beginning of the year, they stopped making such distinctions halfway through the year. Instead, they referred to "*everyone*" instead of to certain racial and/or ethnic groups. The teachers had higher expectations of the 'white' students, but they became disappointed in them. 'White' students were expected to be more conscientious, so failure to attend school became an indicator that a student did not deserve the initial privilege. Certain types of behaviour are not associated with the teachers' interpretations of whiteness, and this changes their approach to these 'white' students. This is different from

'non-white' girls, because expectations of them were low and remained low. Sometimes teachers were actually positively surprised by them. In this process teachers rely heavily on their own middle-class interpretations of what is considered to be appropriate behaviour while often dismissing the challenges that these girls are facing in their lives. As a result they lose their privilege because the teachers perceive their behaviour as being typical of the 'non-white' group (see also Wekker, 2016). In the long run, the whiteness of these students did not act as a form of recourse as their social class status tarnished their whiteness. In the context of school, in the interaction with teachers, white privilege was also about meeting middle-class behavioural expectations, thus it fell upon the individual to really deserve white privilege.

Discussion and conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to explore whether the whiteness of 'white' Dutch female students in a super-diverse school functions as white privilege and offers a resource for them. The concept of white privilege is often considered as being inherent to 'white' people. However, this rather absolute approach does not take into account significant factors such as class and gender. An intersectional approach contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of white privilege. Within super-diverse schools, the former majority group of 'white' people becomes numerically one of the many minorities. My ethnographic findings show that white privilege depends on teachers granting this privilege. The in-majority 'white' teachers initially provide direct and indirect forms of privilege, but over the course of the year, 'white' students lose their white privilege because they behave in ways that the teachers perceive as being typical of 'non-white' behaviour (see also Wekker, 2016). Students' access to the resource of white

privilege therefore also depends on them meeting middle-class 'white' behavioural expectations. The onus to meet these expectations falls on the individual. Working-class students in particular depend on this type of extra resource in the form of teachers' support in order to achieve their educational aspirations (also see Stam, 2017). I do not imply that taking away white privilege puts 'white' working-class students in the same position as 'non-white' working-class students. 'White' working-class students will continue to enjoy their white privilege based on their physical appearances, for instance when obtaining internships and student jobs that, in the long run, can help them to realise their aspirations. Further research is needed to show how this kind of white privilege works out for this group of 'white' working-class students in other settings.

To conclude, I have demonstrated the limits of white privilege and the ways in which it can be lost. These findings add to the complexity and depth of both academic and public debates around white privilege and the role of race and ethnicity in education from the perspective of 'white' students in super-diverse schools where they are a numerical minority. This insight is important to critically develop social theory on race and power dynamics, as well as social policies aimed at improving the schooling experience for 'white' students in lower track vocational schools, both in the Netherlands and abroad.

This chapter is co-authored by Elif Keskiner. A slightly different version is currently under review in an international peer-reviewed journal as: Stam, T., & Keskiner, E. (under review) *Who Cares? The mismatch between 'white' Dutch working-class girls' aspirations and internship experiences in the care sector.*

Who Cares?

Abstract

In the Netherlands, internship training is a compulsory part of every MBO programme, and this is the focus of the final empirical chapter. Internships build a bridge between the classroom and the labour market that can help young people to develop and achieve their career aspirations. In this way, internships can be both a 'reason' and a 'resource' for developing and realising students' aspirations. At the same time, internships embedded in vocational education have been accused of streaming working-class students into dead-end career options and reinforcing gender inequalities. Drawing on general trends, this chapter contributes to this field of research by presenting ethnographic case studies of the internship experiences of the same girls we have met in the previous chapters, young 'white' Dutch working-class women in lower vocational care training programmes in the Netherlands. It appears that early tracking in Dutch education leads to limited internship options for this group and the conclusion is that this hinders the development and realisation of their aspirations.

Introduction

Internship experience is often deemed crucial for developing work-related skills, preparing young people for the labour market and helping them to build social networks. Internships can help to turn general vocational education programmes into more specialised programmes attuned to students' preferences, allowing them to put their aspirations into practice (see also, Onstenk & Janmaat, 2006). A successful internship can positively influence students' career aspirations and give them a portfolio of knowledge and skills (JOB-monitor, 2016; Robinson, Ruhanen, & Breakey, 2016). Therefore, it can be a crucial 'reason' and 'resource' that enables students to find their way in the labour market and achieve their ambitions. In chapter three, also published as (Stam, 2017) these notions were introduced, whereby 'reasons' refer to the explanations behind why students have certain aspirations, and 'resources' to the knowledge needed to achieve them. Most studies on internships (defined as school-based learning whereby students participate in workplace learning for a fixed period of time) focus on highly-educated students who can choose their internships autonomously (Kim & Park, 2012; Robinson et al., 2016). Studies on internship and other forms of workplace learning are more often linked to preventing youth unemployment (Bleijenberg, Jansen, & Schuurmans, 2012; Brockmann, 2013; Cabus & Haelermans, 2017; Heckhausen & Tomasik, 2002; Lehmann, 2005; Pang, 2015; Walther, 2015) and school dropout (Fuller & Unwin, 2013; Jonker, 2006; Russell, Simmons, & Thompson, 2011). In this chapter, internship refers to the fixed period of workplace learning that is a compulsory element of school-based vocational education. At least half of the students' time is spent at school and a shorter fixed period is spent in the workplace. Other forms of workplace learning, such as apprenticeships, traineeships, etc., are thus referred to as other forms of workplace learning.

I will focus on the latter category in our aim to add a new perspective on the impact of practical experience on students' aspirations in order to prevent youth unemployment and school dropout. I will analyse a case study of the internship experiences of young 'white' working-class women without a migrant background in lower vocational care training programmes in the Netherlands who found themselves in internship placements to which they did not initially aspire. The specific racial and ethnic dimensions have been discussed in the previous chapter of the book.

In the Netherlands, students with the lowest secondary education school diploma (VMBO) who aspire to a career in the health and social care sector must continue their education at a MBO school for level 2 vocational training in health and social care[19]. Internships are compulsory in Dutch MBO programmes so that students can acquire job-related skills. Most MBO level 2 Care students, however, experience a mismatch between their aspirations and the internships available to them. This course only provides internships in aged-care, as other options are reserved for higher MBO levels. Most organisations in the health and social care sector claim that they can only offer limited internships to level 2 students due to their perceived limited work and ability level. Therefore, the MBO level 2 Care course can be seen as 'disguised' training in aged-care, even though the vast majority of students who choose level 2 Care do not aspire to such a job. Esther, a 17-year-old student, wanted to become a midwife, but first she had to finish a compulsory internship in aged-care. Providing personal care during her compulsory internship at an elderly care institution was particularly stressful:

> "I need to wash old people… their private parts too… so if you don't want to do this, it's very difficult. After

19 Background information on the Dutch education system is explained in introduction chapter on page 15.

> the first time I did this, I called my mother, crying. [...] But I need to do this, I need to be strong. […] They told me that if I want to become a midwife, I have to finish this [compulsory internship] first."

As Esther's words reveal, students need internship experience in order to complete their training. Without it, they cannot acquire a diploma and become early school leavers, unable to pursue a higher level of education. An early school leaver is a youngster under the age of 23 who leaves education without an ISCED (International Standard Classification of Education) level 3 certificate. In the Netherlands, this is a senior general secondary education (HAVO), pre-university education (VWO) or MBO level 2 diploma. Many studies on early school leaving focus on the groups most affected, typically composed of young men and youngsters with a migrant background in the lower levels of MBO (e.g. Cabus & de Witte, 2016; Elffers 2011; Rumberger, 1983). The idea behind focusing on the most affected groups is that developing solutions with these groups in mind will have the greatest impact (de Witte, Cabus, Thyssen, Groot, & Van den Brink, 2013; Elffers, 2011). Yet, the focus is often on these youngster's individual characteristics and family background, with scant acknowledgment of structural conditions (e.g. de Witte et al., 2013; Russell et al., 2011). Consequently, responsibility has shifted from the institutions responsible for education (the state, education system and schools) to the individual. If young people leave school without a diploma, this is usually attributed to their individual characteristics. In contrast, this chapter aims to understand, through ethnographic data and repeated in-depth interviews with sixteen working-class Dutch girls, if and how the structural conditions under which students are obliged to do an internship influence their educational trajectories and increase their risk of early school leaving. In the next section, I will outline this chapter's theoretical framework. I will then

describe the data and the context in which they were collected. The results will be presented in the next section, followed by the conclusion.

Theoretical framework

In this section, I will review both theoretical and empirical findings on the interaction between students' aspirations and internship experiences, and how they influence their educational trajectories and risk of early school leaving.

Students' aspirations and internship experiences

Much research has been conducted into students' aspirations, specifically on the relationship between aspirations, educational expectations and academic abilities (Furlong & Biggart, 1999; Gemici, Bednarz, Karmel, & Lim, 2014; Patton & Creed, 2007). Other studies have also shown the important influence that parents may have on their children's aspirations (Rainey, Simons, Pudney, & Hughes, 2008). Some research indicates that young people often do not understand what kind of education or training is required for their desired occupation, resulting in a mismatch between their current educational pathways and the occupations they aspire to (Beavis, Curtis, & Curtis, 2005). To better understand the mismatch between developing and realising students' aspirations, in chapter three, also published as (Stam, 2017) the concepts 'reasons' and 'resources' were introduced, whereby 'reasons' refer to the explanations behind why students have certain aspirations, and 'resources' refer to the knowledge needed to achieve them. Reasons influence how aspirations are shaped (ibid). In this chapter I will show that internship experiences, as part of compulsory vocational education, can be a crucial 'reason' and

a 'resource' helping students to orient themselves towards the labour market and achieve their aspirations.

Students' employment experience, be it in an internship programme or an additional job outside of school, plays an essential part in shaping their pathways (Keskiner, 2017). Student employment is a widespread practice in the Netherlands and an important resource. As young people are allowed to work from the age of sixteen, the majority of Dutch vocational students acquire work experience during their studies through unrelated paid employment. Another important way to gain experience is through a compulsory internship. Keskiner (2017) underlines that students benefit by working in their field of study, as this helps them to develop work-related skills and social networks for their future labour market transitions. Crul (2015) reconstructed the educational pathways of successful second-generation Turkish professionals in Sweden, France, Germany and the Netherlands and reasoned that workplace learning experiences were fundamental to their career paths as they often found employment in the company where they had worked as interns. Moreover, successful internship experiences of Australian university students were also found to positively influence their career aspirations (Kim & Park, 2012; Robinson et al., 2016). The above findings draw more on higher vocational and university training than on lower vocational training. Cabus and Haerlermans (2017) were among the few who studied the internship experiences of Dutch students in lower vocational training. They also found that 'in-school' work experience made students more attractive to the labour market, and that employers are willing to pay more for employees who had acquired these skills.

Studies on internships in the care sector examine in more detail whether internships correspond to aspirations. A study of Dutch nursing students' preferences showed that less than five percent wanted to work in elderly care, while over seventy percent preferred to work in a hospital (Bleijenberg

et al., 2012). This confirms what is known as 'the care sector hierarchy', with elderly care at the bottom and hospital care at the top (also see Sommerville, 2006). This undervaluation of elderly care could be because jobs such as shop assistant, waiter and (aged) care assistant were classed as being 'unskilled' and requiring no training (Fuller & Unwin, 2009; Hebson, Rubery, & Grimshaw, 2015; Sommerville, 2006). Van Iersel et al. (2017) suggest that the negative image of elderly care comes from unfamiliarity with what it entails. They suggest that work experience may give a better picture of it in practice, which in turn, could encourage young people to choose this sector (Bleijenberg et al., 2012; van Iersel, Latour, De Vos, Kirschner, & Scholte op Reimer, 2017). Finally, a 'reason' may be found in the distance between the quality of workplace learning (content, guidance, assessment), and the quality of school-based learning (cf. Onstenk & Blokhuis, 2007). Such a mismatch is also suggested by Jonker (2006), who analysed the stories of two students who dropped out of a Dutch vocational school for elderly care work and showed that the students felt that their teachers misinterpreted their efforts at school as unwillingness to learn. Furthermore, Niemeyer and Colley (2015) argue that vocational education and internships contribute to gender inequalities. Their study addresses the significance of aspirations and uncovered the structural patterns and normative orientations that contribute to the reproduction of female and male career aspirations (Niemeyer & Colley, 2015). This finding is especially crucial for countries like the Netherlands, where elderly care work training is provided by MBO colleges and is very segregated in terms of gender distribution. Recent statistics show that almost eighty percent of the students studying health and social care at MBO are female, while women account for barely ten percent of the students in technical subjects (Statistics Netherlands [CBS], 2016–2017). Therefore, it is hardly surprising that the

care sector has the highest dropout rates among girls (Dutch Expertise Centre Vocational Education [ECBO], 2011).

In sum, while internship experience can be a crucial 'reason' and a 'resource' to help students find their way towards the labour market and realise their aspirations, the few studies on internships in the Dutch care sector suggest that both the specific sector and the way in which the internship connects to students' aspirations are of crucial importance. In the Netherlands, the mandatory nature of internships for the elderly care sector and MBO level 2 training adds an extra complication. Most research focuses on students who were able to choose their workplace learning organisations. But how do internships influence students' aspirations and educational trajectories when they are compulsory and unilaterally assigned? Especially if they do not correspond to these young people's aspirations? I will try to answer these questions based on our ethnographic data and repeated in-depth interviews in the results and concluding sections, but first I will describe the data and provide the context in which they were collected.

The Study

The data for this chapter came from a two-year ethnographic study of the Randstad School, pseudonym for a MBO school that provides numerous vocational education training and adult education programmes for students over the age of sixteen. The study centred on the MBO level 2 Social and Health Care programme, which primarily trains students in aged-care, and traditionally attracts mainly female students. Most of the female students at the Randstad School were working-class girls of immigrant or refugee origin, while a minority was of 'white' Dutch descent without a migrant background. In total, there were around hundred students, including ninety females and five males, seventeen of whom

were 'white' students of Dutch descent without a migrant background, with sixteen 'white' females and one 'white' male divided over several classrooms. Rather than overlooking the smaller number of 'white' female students without a migrant background, I chose to make them a starting point for our analysis. Even though only 'white' Dutch female students without a migrant background were studied, I also gathered data about other students. Specific racial and ethnic dimensions have already been discussed in chapter five.

This chapter concentrates on the eight-week compulsory internships at various care institutions for the elderly that are part of MBO level 2 vocational training in Care. These internships were prearranged by the Randstad School, who assigned students to internship placements at various aged-care institutions. During the school year 2014-2015, I participated in and observed at eight different internship workplaces, following sixteen 'white' Dutch working-class female interns without a migrant background. Out of the sixteen respondents only one aspired to work in elderly care at the start of the internship. The remaining fifteen respondents did not intend to work in this sector because they wanted to become a maternity care worker, hospital nurse, beauty specialist, stewardess, nursery assistant, and so on. Thus, most respondents aspired to a job in the health and care sector and had an affinity with care. Some of them had already experienced caring for people, such as a sick mother or grandmother, little brothers or their own child. They had also learned about the care sector through positive stories told by their mothers, aunts and other female family members employed there. These positive stories, in combination with the opportunity to accumulate diplomas within the Dutch education system, had led these students to expect that it would be possible for them to realise their aspirations.

The data were analysed in order to map and understand young females' internship experiences and the development of

their aspirations based on lived experiences of learning, related to their background. Data came from participant observations and formal and informal interviews with students, employees at the internship places and teachers. These data were recorded, transcribed and translated from Dutch to English. The quotes were translated and written in full to preserve their meaning. In the interviews and ethnographic data, I observed a strong interplay between the micro level (students' aspirations), the meso level (internship context) and the macro level (national vocational education system and care sector). Hence, the analysis aims to understand the ways in which young people interpreted and interacted with the contexts of different learning sites. I will first present a general description of the internship experiences before zooming in on the experiences of three young female interns at three different aged-care institutions. These cases were selected as they contained particularly rich material on the role of internship experiences and aspiration development and are representative of different types of outcomes.

Results of the ethnographic study

All of our sixteen respondents found themselves in internship placements that they had not initially considered. At the start of their vocational training in Care at the Randstad School, most of them were full of aspirations and enthusiasm, even though the majority wanted to work in parts of the care sector that require higher level diplomas. In the first year of MBO level 2 Care, students must learn vocational skills during a compulsory eight-week internship in aged-care. Internships at this level are arranged by the school. The advantage is that students are assured of an internship place, in contrast to those in higher MBO levels. Failure to find an internship placement often means being unable to complete your course and obtain

a diploma. Students are eager to start their prearranged and compulsory internship in elderly care as it enables them to complete their course.

> "I think it will be a bit like visiting your grandparents, so that's always fun….. for now." Kim, 16 years old

> "I'm really excited to start with the internship. Anything is better than school."
> Anouk, 17 years old

When our respondents actually started their internship, however, they were confronted with work they had not expected and which they found difficult and sickening. They came – sometimes for the first time in their lives – into contact with bodily waste, illness, loneliness, dependence, despair and the death of people who were strangers to them.

> "I hope I will never be like that [elderly people depending on care]."
> Linda, 19 years old

> "I've never seen a dead person before."
> Sanne, 18 years old

Their internship also made them realise that it would be extremely difficult to achieve their aspirations towards higher levels of education, as on average only one out of ten students are admitted to a higher level. As a result, most of them lost their motivation and seven out of sixteen of our respondents dropped out of the training.

> "Every day I went to my internship so against my will. I couldn't take that anymore, so I stopped." Michelle, 19 years old.

However, the majority, nine out of sixteen, of our respondents completed their training, albeit with great effort and personal frustration. Although gaining a basic qualification means that they are not registered as dropouts, they still face an uncertain future on the labour market. In this chapter, I present the internship experience of three girls who completed their training in order to understand how workplace learning could be a 'reason' and/or a 'resource' to help them orient themselves towards the labour market and realise their aspirations. By doing so, I show the pitfalls and failed promises of the basic MBO level 2 qualification in Care. I hope to contribute a new perspective on the role of workplace learning in relation to students' aspirations in order to prevent youth unemployment and school dropout.

Esther (17): "I haven't done all of this for nothing"

In the introduction, we briefly encountered Esther, a 17-year-old girl who aspired to become a midwife, because she "*loves babies*". In order to put Esther's internship experiences into perspective, I will illustrate the conditions and daily activities of her internship in order to understand how her experiences influenced the development and realisation of her aspiration to become a midwife.

Family background and aspirations

Esther lives with her parents and older brother in a small town near the city where the Randstad School is located. Her father works in an office and her mother works in maternity care, assisting the midwives. Esther's dream is not only to assist midwives, like her mother, but also to become one herself. In the Netherlands, working in maternity care requires a MBO level 3 diploma and you need a bachelor's degree to become a midwife. Esther recently graduated from high school with a vocational diploma that only gives access to MBO level 2

programmes. Together with her mother she visited the open day at the Randstad School. "*They told me that if I want to become a midwife, I have to finish this [MBO level 2] first.*" The school also informed Esther about the required internship in aged-care for this level 2 training programme.

Internship experiences at a nursing home

Esther's first internship was at a newly-built nursing home in a residential area in her hometown. It is located in a modern five-floor building that provides 24-hour intensive care, nursing and supervision for people with physical or mental limitations. Esther was assigned to the third floor for people with dementia. Although the nursing home is for people of all ages, most of its residents are elderly. During her eight-week internship, Esther worked for four days a week and attended the Randstad School on Fridays. For this, she received a small monthly internship payment. The nursing home has morning, evening and night shifts, but as Esther was underage, she was not allowed to work the night shifts. She therefore alternated morning and evening shifts on a weekly basis. She had to complete three practical components: basic cleaning, personal care and organising activities, all of which could be done during her internship at the nursing home.

Her daily routine was as follows: at 7:00 am there was a brief update meeting in the staff room where she met her colleagues for that day and received a list of the patients she would be working with. Next, she woke up the elderly residents, got them out of bed, washed them and brought them to the dining room. Then, she returned to the bedrooms to change the bedlinen, make beds and do some basic cleaning. She then went to the dining room, waited for the residents to finish their breakfast and cleaned it together with her colleagues before taking a break. After the break, she did a morning activity with the residents, either a walk in the gardens, a game or a chat. "*This is the last, but not the least activity I do here. When I*

have the afternoon shift, it's the same routine, but then I put the elderly people to bed, instead of waking them up." This means that Esther had to wash elderly people on a daily basis, which she found "*absolutely horrible*".

> "Of course, I don't let them know that I hate this [washing them]. I just pretend I like it. But really, it's horrible, so horrible. […] Yes, I knew beforehand that we had to do this [washing elderly people]. We practiced this on [lifelike] dolls a lot, but now at my internship, doing this for real, I find this so difficult to do. I did not expect that. I expected it to be really bad, but like this… no!"

After eight weeks of what Esther referred to as "*a huge struggle*", she managed to complete all the practical components at her internship and when she completed her lessons at school, she received her MBO level 2 diploma, which is equivalent to a basic qualification. Esther now wanted to continue to the next level. "*I have not done all of this for nothing!*"

Continuing of education

After graduating from MBO level 2, Esther was one of the lucky few to be admitted to the level 3 programme, in which she could specialise in age groups in care. At the Randstad School, only one in ten students on average are admitted to level 3 because to qualify you have to finish the programme in time, without repeating exams or having a record of truancy. Esther started her level 3 internship at a kindergarten, working with babies as she had always wanted. However, this was a disappointment:

> "Babies really need to be taken care of the whole day; feeding them, changing diapers and then they sleep. To be honest, it is quite boring!"

Esther decided to ask her internship supervisor if she could change. After eight weeks, she was allowed to go to the toddler's department, which she enjoyed.

> "Toddlers are awesome! They are so funny and cute. And the best thing of all, you can really communicate with them. Absolutely amazing!"

Esther liked this internship so much that she wanted to pursue kindergarten care as her future profession. Unfortunately, the MBO level 3 classes at school were less successful. She failed her school assignments over and over again. Esther felt that level 3 was too ambitious for her and did not complete the programme. As she has a basic qualification [MBO level 2 diploma], Esther is not an early school leaver, nor is she considered as being 'at-risk'. She is, however, unable to fulfil her ambition of working with toddlers as that requires a level 3 diploma. She is currently looking for any job, but the jobs that she is qualified for, in elderly care, do not appeal to her.

Ellen (19): "I came this close to dropping out"

Family background

Ellen is 19. Her mother works in a nursing home and has a MBO level 3 diploma. Her father does not have any qualifications and works fulltime in a factory. Officially, Ellen lives alone with her two-year-old daughter because that is financially beneficial, but her boyfriend is practically always with them. Her boyfriend accrued large debts and is currently under the supervision of an administrator, working as a mechanic to pay off his debts.

Aspirations

Ellen had tried various things before starting the Randstad School, as she was still developing her career aspirations.

> "I actually wanted to become a lot of things. For a long time, I wanted to become a preschool teacher, but I found out that you need to have a higher education degree [bachelor's degree] for that and no that is just not me, so I let that go. Then, I wanted to become a hairdresser, but I didn't want to do that anymore either. […] It's more like when you're finished with high school at the age of 15-16, you really don't know yet what you want to become, because it's way too early to know this."

After graduating from high school Ellen went to the hairdressing school, a MBO level 2 programme. "*You just had to choose so quickly and I thought, I will do this, because it seemed like fun. But it wasn't at all. So I gave up*." Ellen ended up working in a neighbourhood supermarket, but when she unexpectedly got pregnant and took maternity leave, the supermarket did not extend her contract. Ellen decided to focus on her baby, and this inspired a desire to work at a day care centre. The following semester Ellen signed up for the Randstad School's MBO level 2 Care programme.

Internship experiences at an end-of-life home

Ellen soon found out that there are no internships in day care centres at this level of education. Instead, she was assigned to an aged-care institution, a small health and social care facility in a residential area near the school. Although she had to cycle 45 minutes to her internship, she started off in good spirits, working in the palliative department for elderly people with a life-limiting or terminal illness. Despite the intense conditions her first week felt good. She had the afternoon shift and mainly did activities with the elderly to get to know them better.

> "A man turned 100 and I organised his birthday party. That was so much fun. He told me told stories about his past and everything. Really nice you know. [...] So I thought, maybe it's not that bad after all? For now, so far so good [big smile]."

The next week, Ellen started on the other practical training components, such as basic cleaning and personal care, including bathing people. Her initial response was optimistic: "*That won't be a problem. I'm a mommy, so I'm used to pee and shit*". But the reality was different.

> "It's quite filthy and the smell, it smells very different when it is from your own child. [...]. I started to feel so guilty that I was not able to do this. I even doubted if I was a good mother at all. I am very unhappy here [internship]."

At the end of the week, Ellen called in sick and stayed at home for months. In order to keep her free scholarship, she attended school one day each month and then called in sick again. She did this for almost a year.

Back on track

At some point Ellen realised that she needed to complete her course. "*If I can't succeed at this, I really won't achieve anything*". The next semester she returned to her previous internship at the end-of-life residence and was allowed to work in the same department. Once more she had to do basic cleaning and personal care tasks, including washing old people, which she continued to find "*terrible*". But Ellen knew she had to finish this time, even though she realised that she no longer wanted to work in the care sector. "*That's not really my thing.*" With great difficulty and many interruptions, Ellen completed MBO level 2 training in aged-care after three years and obtained a

basic qualification, but "*I came this close to dropping out*." She is currently working as a cleaner in the nursing home where her mother works, while taking care of her daughter.

Stephanie (18): "I'm clearly the only one wanting this"

Our third story comes from the 18-year-old Stephanie, the only girl in our study who actually aspired to a job in elderly care from the start of her training.

Family background
Stephanie has a very challenging home situation. A few years before I met her, her mother was diagnosed with cancer and has been in and out of hospital since then. Stephanie looks after her younger twin brothers when her mother is in hospital. Their father is unknown and last year, the children's stepfather left after Stephanie reported him to the police for sexually abusing her. Because of this and her mother's illness, the household is under the supervision of the child protection services. After taking a year off to recuperate, Stephanie started the MBO level 2 programme in Care with great enthusiasm.

Aspirations
Having taken care of others for most of her life, Stephanie has known for a long time that she wants to work in aged-care. Although she realises that this may be a strange aspiration for a girl of her age, as she is "*clearly the only one wanting this*" in her class, she has wanted to work with the elderly for as long as she can remember.

> "When I was young, don't remember how old I was, but young, I had a friend and together with her we visited her grandmother in a home for old people. I had never been to a place like this before in my life. I didn't know something like this existed. But you

know, it was so much fun meeting all these 'oldies' […]. Really, I had so much fun. I asked the staff if I could work there too. They smiled at me and said I could come back when I was 16. […] So, I did."

When Stephanie turned 16, approximately six years after her first visit, she returned to this place. Unfortunately, it had been closed down due to austerity measures. Stephanie nevertheless finished her vocational high school and took a gap year before starting the MBO level 2 Care programme.

Internship experiences at Domiciliary Care Agency

Stephanie's compulsory internship was at a domiciliary care agency where she visited older peoples' homes to help them with household tasks, personal care and other activities so that they could maintain their independence and quality of life. Her day began at the office of the Domiciliary Care Agency located in the city centre. There she received a list of that day's clients (predominantly elderly people) and the tasks they had requested. In the first weeks, interns are accompanied by an experienced employee. After that, the interns visit clients alone, but with an experienced employee working in the vicinity. In general, domiciliary care internships are perceived as being difficult because students must be able to start working independently soon. On a typical day, Stephanie visited two clients, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. This gave her enough time to travel to and from the clients' homes. Most of Stephanie's clients were also receiving medical support from a district nurse. Stephanie absolutely loved her internship and enthusiastically described her daily tasks at her internship at a domiciliary care;

"I visit old people at their homes. I drink tea with them. We sometimes take a letter to the mailbox together. Or we run other errands. Everything we do

> we do it together. Sometimes I do some cleaning for them. It just depends what they ask from you."

An important difference in the daily tasks of the internships compared to the others is that Stephanie does not have to wash the elderly people, which is a rare exception.

> "No, I don't have to wash them. We do everything with clothes on [wink, wink]. […]. The people really like it when you visit them. Sometimes you're the only visit they get that day. Isn't that sad? They are so grateful."

No work opportunities

After successfully finishing her internship and school assignments, Stephanie graduated from MBO level 2 in Care. With her level 2 diploma, Stephanie returned to the domiciliary care agency to see if she could work there. Unfortunately, there were no jobs for level 2 graduates as the company considers that the work they can do is too limited. The agency told her that she would be more than welcome to come back if she had a MBO level 3 diploma. However, as we have seen with Esther, this is not so easy for her or many other MBO level 2 graduates. First of all, obtaining a MBO level 3 diploma after completing MBO level 2 means at least two more years[20] of fulltime study, during which students cannot work fulltime. Secondly there are financial restrictions for both the educational institutions and students as students at senior vocational colleges who are over the compulsory school age must pay tuition fees. Student loans are available, but must be repaid. Therefore, this is not

20 An average, a vocational training at MBO level 2 takes 1 to 2 years and a training at MBO level 3 takes 2–3 years depending on the programme and previously obtained diplomas. If a student continues on to MBO level 3 training after completing MBO level 2, they are usually granted 1 year of exemption, depending on the programme. This means that a level 3 course takes 2 more years of study for MBO level 2 graduates.

a desirable pathway for Stephanie. Even though she was the only respondent whose aspirations matched her internships experience, at the end of the day it became apparent that she had been trained for non-existent jobs.

Conclusion and discussion

The aim of this chapter was to add a new perspective on the role of workplace learning in relation to students' aspirations and school dropout. I analysed sixteen case studies of internship experiences of young 'white' working-class women without a migrant background in lower vocational training in care in the Netherlands who found themselves in internship placements that did not match their initial aspirations. The analysis of their internship experiences contributes to the existing research on the impact of internship placements on careers in three ways. First, much research has focused on the groups most at risk of early school leaving, typically young men from a migrant background in lower educational levels (e.g. Cabus & De Witte, 2016; Elffers, 2011; Rumberger, 1983). By doing so, attention is too often concentrated on the characteristics of these young people, with an emphasis on individual characteristics and family background and scant acknowledgement of structural conditions (e.g. de Witte et al., 2013; Russell et al., 2011). This has also led to other groups, such as young 'white' working-class women being ignored. This chapter reveals both the gendered and structural constraints facing these girls. Gender segregation and gender inequality in vocational education and types of workplace learning have been studied extensively. Structural patterns and normative orientations have been shown to contribute to the reproduction of gender-specific aspirations among boys and girls (Niemeyer & Colley, 2015). Our study shows how there is only a limited number of options for girls at the

bottom of the educational hierarchy. They are often streamed into a gender-specific sector, such as care work, eighty percent of which is female, while barely ten percent of technical students is female (CBS, 2016-2017). Within this sector they are confined to the subsector of elderly care, driven by macro-level factors of supply and demand of internship places. So, in the Dutch cases I studied, vocational training in the care sector is actually a euphemism for studying and interning in elderly-care. Instead of helping students to develop or realise their aspirations, these internships are more like a rite of passage that students must undergo. These undesirable work experiences indirectly influence their educational trajectories and increase their risk of early school leaving. This makes these young women more vulnerable on the labour market. It is therefore no surprise that the care sector creates the highest number of drop outs among young women in the Netherlands (Dutch Expertise Center Vocational Education [ECBO], 2011). Aspirations play a crucial role as these young people are finding themselves in situations that they had never wanted to be in. In Stephanie's case, on the other hand, I saw that positive educational outcomes are produced when aspirations match expectations. But even though Stephanie's aspirations matched her internship experience, there were no jobs for her when she graduated.

Structural conditions shape opportunities within a specific context in which internship experience can be a crucial 'reason' and a 'resource' to help students to orient themselves towards the labour market and realise their aspirations (Stam, 2017). But during their internship period, the girls understood that their aspirations towards higher levels of education would be very difficult to accomplish. Consequently, many of them lost motivation and some even dropped out of the course. Our case studies examined girls who did not drop out, but who instead made great efforts to complete their course. By obtaining a basic qualification,

they passed the early school leaving threshold. Although this basic qualification means they are not early school leavers, they still face a very uncertain future on the labour market. As the three cases showed, the girls are blocked, either because there was a mismatch between their internship experiences and their aspirations; they cannot make the transition from level 2 to level 3; or they cannot make the transition to the labour market. Many employment possibilities, especially low qualified ones (MBO level 2 and 3), in elderly and home care have been lost due to budget cuts (van Dijk, 2014). Nursing homes have also raised their care work diploma requirements, and often require at least MBO level 4 certification (ibid). As a result, students in the lowest vocational educational levels are often trained for non-existent jobs, even though their diploma is considered as a basic qualification to the labour market. Therefore, the structural conditions raise questions about the role internships play in the Dutch care sector, as student interns are primarily fulfilling a (cheap) labour gap in the elderly care sector without this furthering their educational pathways.

Our case study has tried to show how the structure, organisation and nature of work influences the success of young women in lower vocational education and their aspirations regarding paid employment. Therefore, I call into question the self-evident relationship between internships and aspirations that was found in other studies and put the mismatch between internships and aspirations on the research agenda.

Conclusion & Discussion

Within the sociology of education and migration, 'white' girls are a blind spot in terms of the research into inequality and educational disadvantage. Few researchers focus on minority 'white' Dutch girls in schools where the majority of children are of immigrant origin. Through ethnographic research, this study has provided insights into how these minority 'white' Dutch girls function within the Netherlands' complicated school system. The girls I followed attended lower Dutch vocational education (VMBO basic and MBO level 2) where the risk of leaving school without a diploma is comparatively high. Early selection into these vocational tracks at the age of twelve had led to systematic restrictions in terms of their future education and the development and realisation of their aspirations. Based on my data I have developed the two new concepts 'reasons' and 'resources' as theoretical concepts to add to the aspiration literature. These concepts can also be used in practice to improve the development and realisation of students' aspirations.

I have also exposed the blind spot of disadvantaged 'white' Dutch students in lower vocational multi-ethnic schools. For them being 'white' comes with certain expectations and assumptions. However, these are expectations that are based on middle-class 'white' children that the working-class youngsters I observed are unable to live up to as they have so many disadvantages to contend with. My ethnographic study thus sheds new light on the intersection of race, whiteness and social class in a Dutch context. In this concluding chapter, I summarise and assess my empirical findings, engage in the theoretical discussion on early school leaving, students' aspirations and race, and suggest theoretical concepts to improve the realisation of students' aspirations. I finish by showing the implications that my dissertation has for the education of these girls and the schools they attend.

Empirical findings

The main empirical findings of this ethnographic study have been published as four separate academic journal publications and were presented as chapter three to six in this book. Instead of summarising each chapter separately, I will review the main empirical findings according to my research questions.

Being 'white' in multi-ethnic schools

My first research question is: *who are these minority 'white' girls in multiracial and multi-ethnic schools*? A combination of freedom of choice for parents to choose their children's primary school and the tracking system at Dutch secondary schools has contributed to the racial and cultural segregation of schools in large cities. Pupils with an immigrant background are more likely to be enrolled in the lower educational track than 'white' Dutch pupils (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2018). Meanwhile, 'white' Dutch higher-educated parents try to send their children to a school with predominantly 'white' students (Karsten, Felix, Ledoux, Meijnen, Roeleveld, & Van Schooten, 2006). Since the 1970s this has been producing schools where the vast majority of pupils are of immigrant descent – controversially referred to as 'black schools' – as opposed to schools where the majority of pupils are of 'white' Dutch descent, known as 'white schools'(Paulle, 2002; Paulle, Mijs, & Vink, 2016). In multiracial and multi-ethnic lower vocational Dutch schools, 'white' Dutch pupils are in the minority. In the empirical chapters of this thesis we have met some of them, such as 15-year-old Melanie in chapter four. She, for example, looks like the cover girl of this book with her brightly-dyed hair and pale skin. Melanie lives with her mother in a public rented flat in a multi-ethnic low-income neighbourhood within walking distance of her high school. Her main reason for attending

her multi-ethnic school was because it was nearby. This also applied to 17-year-old Dewi from chapter five, who attended the local high school. Unlike Melanie, however, Dewi lived in a predominantly 'white' Dutch low-income village, which meant that she had attended 'white' Dutch local primary and secondary schools. Most of the girls I studied went to the local high school in their neighbourhood. Their lower-educated parents were often uninformed about the differences between schools. Furthermore, additional travel costs and logistical arrangements prevented them from sending their child to a school further away.

MBO schools are large regional further vocational educational centres spread across cities and provinces. Once students make the mandatory transition from VMBO to MBO, they receive a free public transport pass from the Dutch government. Despite this, 'white' female students with low-educated parents often opt for the nearest MBO school. Hence, MBO schools are attended by 'white' Dutch students from both the neighbourhood and the surrounding villages. The majority of MBO students in large Dutch cities have an immigrant origin. This can be explained by the same mechanisms we observed at VMBO schools: namely the Dutch tracking system in which relatively more young people with a migrant background end up in lower vocational education levels (OECD, 2018); and the fact that 'white' middle and higher-educated parents prefer to send their children to a MBO school located outside the large multi-ethnic cities. As a result, 'white' Dutch girls, mostly with lower-educated parents, form one of the many numerical multiracial and multi-ethnic minorities at MBO schools in large multi-ethnic cities. Similar to their multiracial and multi-ethnic classmates, these 'white' Dutch girls with lower-educated parents often have to deal with numerous personal difficulties. Melanie from chapter four, for example, never knew her father; Stephanie from chapter five had an abusive and addicted stepfather, and Ellen from

chapter six had a boyfriend with huge financial debts. Many of the 'white' female students I met during my ethnography are confronted with multiple disadvantages, such as their lower social class background and challenging home situations.

"I feel like a peppermint in a bag of liquorice"

The second sub-question is: *What are the experiences and interactions of minority 'white' Dutch girls in multiracial and multi-ethnic schools in relation to their aspirations?* The racial organisation of the schools meant that 'white' culture was not a given fact. Dewi from chapter five had grown up in a racially and ethnically homogeneous 'white' low-income village and thus had to get used to her new multiracial and multi-ethnic classroom at MBO. On Dewi's first day of school, she said: "*So many different cultures I have never seen them together. I feel like a peppermint in a bag of liquorice*." With this quote, Dewi explained how she felt being a minority 'white' student in a school where the majority of pupils had an immigrant background. The racial-ethnic component of being at school was very prominent for the girls. They experienced this in different ways, however, depending on their previous experiences with multiracial and multi-ethnic settings. In chapter five I reported a difference between 'village' students like Dewi (40% of the participants in this study) and 'city' students like Melanie (60% of the participants in this study). The village students had attended 'white' primary and secondary schools, while city students had attended secondary schools where they had been one of the few 'white' Dutch students in the lower performing tracks. These different backgrounds and experiences indicated the importance of not considering the group of 'white' Dutch girls with low-educated parents as a homogeneous group. Therefore their 'white' experiences should not be essentialised. Having said that, in the course of this study certain patterns became visible that applied to all of

the 'white' Dutch female students in this study to a greater or lesser extent. These included: ethnic-racial tensions between classmates and the stigma attached to their education level.

On the very first school day, the MBO students placed themselves in clearly defined racial and/or ethnic categories that were policed by their peers. This racial self-segregation occurred among all ethnic and racial groups and continued throughout the school year. The racial self-segregation among students was not physically enforced, but there were times when students' racial self-segregations were nuanced by racial tensions and stereotypes. I encountered many of these during my fieldwork, but did not have the space to include all of them in the empirical chapters. For instance, there were comments on race: "*you are so white, you don't need a light anymore.*" Or about culture: "*if you want to come for dinner with Dutch people, you have to make a reservation one year in advance.*" All minority 'white' Dutch young people in this study said that they received such comments from their fellow classmates. Some used the word 'discrimination' to capture their experience. Interestingly, these racial-ethnic interactions were also elaborated upon by the parents of VMBO pupils during informal meetings and house visits. MBO students, on the other hand, brought up these issues themselves, even when we were talking about something else. These ethnic-racial confrontations made them aware of their whiteness because they saw themselves through the eyes of racial-ethnic others. My observation in chapter five was that race was as much defined by cultural differences as by phenotypical differences (see also Perry, 2002).

Next to the ethnic-racial confrontations between classmates, the 'white' Dutch girls also had to deal with negative comments from people outside these schools. Aunts, cousins and neighbours described their school as a "*ghetto*"

school, "*because of the high number of foreigners*[21]." As a result, the 'white' young people in my ethnography felt they had to justify why they attended these schools. The stigma that low-level vocational education evoked among such outsiders was among the first things they experienced as soon as they started attending their school. This overall negative attitude towards lower vocational education and the students enrolled in such schools was reflected in the relations and interactions at school. This had an impact on the development and realisation of pupils' aspirations.

Developing high aspirations in the lowest level of vocational education

This leads on to my third sub-research question: *How do they develop their aspirations?* Various components in their educational path make it necessary for students to reflect on their future and this may have direct and indirect consequences for their aspirations. In the Dutch education system, young people in the pre-vocational track (VMBO) choose their curriculum at the age of 14. Although this decision is part of their future aspirations, it is most often based on which school subjects they like or dislike, regardless of their aspirations. For example, most of the girls I studied had dropped math because they were not good at it, even though this subject is necessary to become, for example, a beautician, an aspiration that was often expressed. When confronted with math being mandatory for this aspiration, they answered that they would deal with that problem later. Occasionally, they chose school subjects because their friends had chosen them. Girls also have to select a study programme when they move on to a MBO school at the age of sixteen. The Dutch vocational education system has

21 In Dutch, she said: *buitenlanders*, which is literally translated as foreigners, however 'students with an immigrant background' would be the more *etic* interpretation.

a high degree of flexibility, even if specific programmes have been chosen at an earlier stage. This allows students to change the direction of their studies. Therefore, aspirations could be and were developed independently of the current study programme and level. However, the flexibility of the Dutch education system is disadvantageous for many pupils. The fact that students' aspirations developed independently of their current study programme and level led to miscommunications between teachers and students. This is illustrated in chapter three, which opened with an interaction between Lisa and her teacher about her aspiration of wanting "*to become an architect*". Her teacher found her aspiration "*unrealistic*" given her level of education and disruptive behaviour during class. This illustrated, more generally, that it is difficult for students to openly express high ambitions in school and, in return, for the teachers to take their ambitions seriously, given both the level of the school and their frequent disruptive behaviour in class.

Overall, the girls formed aspirations based on things they saw around them. As they usually did not have role models around them, they sought other ways to develop their aspirations. In chapter six, I illustrated how Stephanie wanted to become a doctor because her mother was chronically ill, while Anouk in chapter five, wanted to become a lawyer to help her father who was in prison. Even TV shows inspired students' aspirations. TV series such as 'How to get away with murder' and 'Master Chef' gave them the idea that they wanted to become a lawyer or a cook. Several girls drew upon their hobbies as an inspiration for a future profession, such as Lisa in chapter three, who said: "*I love drawing and I like to look at buildings*". Therefore she wanted to be an architect. Nonetheless, most of these professions were, according to their teachers, considered to be too "*high*" and "*impossible*" for these girls, because they were attending a school at the lowest level of the Dutch educational system. This, in combination with their

disruptive behaviour in the classrooms, meant that they were often not taken seriously at school when they expressed their aspiration of wanting to become a doctor, lawyer or architect. This resulted in continuous miscommunications with their teachers and major disappointments. The combination of these disillusionments in addition to not knowing how to achieve their aspirations lowered motivation to complete school and even led some girls to drop out.

The majority, however, completed their VMBO programme and made a successful transition to MBO. At MBO the girls found themselves forced into internships that were generally not in line with their aspirations. As shown in chapter six, they also realised during these internships that it would be extremely difficult to realise their aspirations by moving up to higher levels of education. On average, only one out of ten MBO 2 students are admitted to a higher level. As a result, most of them lost motivation, and some dropped out. But again, the majority completed their training and received their MBO 2 diploma, the minimum requirement for entering the labour market (known as a basic qualification). Despite all their efforts, they did not come close to realising their aspirations.

Theoretical contributions

The findings of this ethnographic study are important for the theoretical debates on early school leaving, students' aspirations and whiteness in education. In the current theoretical debate on early school leaving, the emphasis is often placed on children with a migrant background and the individual factors that contribute to early school leaving. This "categorical thinking" (Ghorashi, 2014) has contributed to the creation of government-dependent categories of people that needed to be helped out of a disadvantaged position. The

problem lies within the individual, while structural conditions are left unquestioned (ibid). The focus on 'white' Dutch students helps us to understand how existing educational systems and structures affect early school leaving, as a migration background cannot be the source of their failure. It allowed us to zoom in on the Dutch education system (tracking and study options) and how the lower vocational schools shape this (internship options). In addition, when I zoomed in on the group of 'white' girls, it became clear that they also encountered specific difficulties that have to do with their working-class origins. This is initially obscured by their 'whiteness' which comes with expectations, assumptions and some privileges that are later revoked. I discuss this articulation of the school system, early school leaving, aspirations and 'whiteness' below.

Early School Leaving

The European Union aims to reduce early school leaving (ESL) to a maximum of ten percent of 18 to 25-year olds by 2020 (Van Praag, Nouwen, Van Caudenberg, Clycq & Timmerman, 2018). The Dutch national target is even lower, namely eight percent. In order to meet this target, Dutch youngsters are pushed to obtain the basic qualification. I often observed how schools made enormous efforts to achieve this. Early school leaving percentages have fallen in the Netherlands, but students' aspirations remain a challenge. This was observed during the compulsory internship period, where the focus was on completing internships rather than finding an internship that matched students' aspirations. During this crucial period, students could not practice their aspirations but instead had to intern in the elderly care sector in order to complete their study programme. The government focus on ESL has led to a relatively large number of quantitative studies on early school leaving in the Netherlands, many of which focus on the groups

most at risk of early school leaving, typically young men from a migrant background in lower educational levels (e.g. Cabus & de Witte, 2016 Elffers, 2011; Rumberger, 1983). Attention is too often concentrated on these young people's individual characteristics, with scant attention for structural conditions (e.g. de Witte, Cabus, Thyssen, Groot, & van den Brink, 2013; Russel, Simmons, & Thompson, 2011). This has resulted in a lack of studies on other groups, such as young 'white' working-class women.

In chapter six, we saw that there were only a limited number of options for girls at the bottom of the educational hierarchy. They were often streamed into a gender-specific sector, such as care work, where eighty percent of the students was female (Statistics Netherlands [CBS], 2016-2017). Within this sector they were confined to the subsector of elderly care, due to macro-level factors regarding the supply and demand of internship places. These unchosen and unwanted trajectories increased their risk of early school leaving. The demanding internships and limited labour market options led to most of these young women losing motivation and several dropping out of the study programme. Unsurprisingly, the care programme in Dutch vocational education has the highest number of dropouts among young women (Dutch Expertise Centre Vocational Education [ECBO], 2011). Although most of my research participants passed the early school leaving threshold, they still face a very uncertain future on the labour market. A recent publication (Vink, 2018) also confirmed that young people with a MBO level 2 diploma were more often unemployed and had more flexible jobs compared to young people with a MBO level 3 or 4 diploma. I therefore argue that the development and realisation of students' aspirations should be much more central to our thinking about early school leaving.

Students' aspirations

Aspirations form an important concept within early school leaving literature as they can either motivate or demotivate students to continue with school. Students' aspirations have therefore been widely studied in the field of educational sociology. The concept is often used as an explanatory factor for school achievement and early school leaving. Within these studies aspirations are usually a measurement of educational intentions or expectations (Baillergeau, Duyvendak, & Abdallah, 2015) and are studied in relation to educational expectations and academic abilities (Furlong & Biggart, 1999; Gemici, Bednarz, Karmel, & Lim, 2014; Patton & Creed, 2007). Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) theorised about aspirations as the conceptual link between structure and agency. They argued that working-class students do not aspire to higher education because they have internalised and reconciled themselves to the limited opportunities that exist for them (ibid; Willis, 1977). A more recent Dutch study on this matter showed, however, that although social class had a primary effect on educational outcomes it had little impact on educational aspirations (van de Werfhorst, 2007). This leaves the question open as to how educational aspirations are formed among working-class students, and why their aspirations often do not correspond with their educational outcomes.

Several studies have shown that the education system plays an important role in determining further education and occupational opportunities (Crul et al, 2012; Van Praag et al., 2015; Werfhorst & Mijs, 2010). These studies, however, generally concentrate on students from the middle group of education and how easily they can or cannot continue to higher levels, leaving the bottommost education group unexplored. I have compared education and employment opportunities for young people in the lowest (vocational) education levels and examined how the Dutch education system either facilitates or

limits the development and realisation of students' aspirations. Elaborated upon in chapter four, the Dutch school system with its early tracking closes off many options at a young age. In addition, it negatively influences the school climate for young people in the bottom tracks where they were grouped together. However, early tracking also has a more positive element. Young people need to start thinking about future career options at a very early age, unlike pupils in the comprehensive school system in England. In the English education system, the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) test takes place at the end of compulsory secondary education, at age sixteen. Secondary education therefore predominantly focuses on the preparations for this national curriculum assessment, instead of pupils' aspirations. Moreover, the more open comprehensive school system in England presents the illusion of opportunities for all as the final decision is postponed until the GCSE exam. But informal ability tracking means that similar options are closed off without the pupils and their parents being aware of this, as many pupils will be unable to pursue further educational opportunities. Hence, both school systems seem to restrict opportunities for children from disadvantaged backgrounds in the lowest education levels in different ways but with very similar results.

In the 1970s and 80s, some researchers (Macleod, 1987; Willis, 1977) were already arguing that the curricular structure of schools channels working-class students into programmes that prepare them for working-class jobs. Decades later other studies have pointed out that vocational programmes replaced this role by arguing that vocational programmes became "the fall-back strategy" (Bates, 1991), "choice by default" (Skeggs, 1997) or "choice coercion" (Jonker, 2004). However, as Brockmann (2012) argued, much of the research dismisses vocational choices and constructs young people as failures and second-chance learners. My findings are in line with Brockmann (2012), because the majority of the 'white' Dutch

female MBO students in this study aspired to a vocational occupation, they just required higher vocational diplomas. They hoped to achieve their aspirations in the end thanks to the opportunities to accumulate higher degrees over time offered by the Dutch education system (Kalmijn & Kraaykamp, 2003; Crul et al., 2012).

Reasons & Resources

After an extensive literature review on pupils' aspirations, I came to the conclusion that there are still some crucial elements missing from the existing academic framework around pupils' aspirations, which deals with the realisation of pupils' ambitions. I therefore introduced two new concepts: 'reasons' and 'resources' to the existing academic literature on pupils' aspirations in chapter three. My use of the concepts 'reasons' and 'resources' was derived from Giddens' Theory of Structuration (1984) and Merton's Strain Theory (1968). The theory of structuration by Giddens (1984) stated that people's actions are shaped by social structures, and he defined 'resources' as the capacity to change the material and social environment. In a school context, 'resources' may include access to teachers or control over classroom events. Merton's strain theory (1968) stated that society encourages individuals to achieve socially acceptable goals, but strain occurs when individuals are faced with a gap between their goals and their current status. When applying this theory to our pupils in lower vocational Dutch education, most pupils aspire to jobs that are highly valued in society (reasons), but their low level of education may cause a gap between their goals (aspirations) and their current achievement level. By including 'reasons' and 'resources' when analysing pupils' aspirations, we not only develop a more comprehensive understanding of pupils' aspirations, but we also reduce the likelihood of making previous judgments of pupils' aspirations based on the

inextricable link between lower and higher categories in the educational hierarchy.

These newly developed theoretical concepts – 'reasons' and 'resources' – can also be used by students, teachers, parents and policy makers to improve the realisation of students' aspirations in order to prepare them better for the labour market. As my study showed, most of the girls I studied have obtained the minimum basic qualification, but nevertheless have difficulties finding a job. These concepts are therefore not necessarily linked to early school leaving outcomes but move beyond the basic qualification threshold. Reasons and resources can either move in the same direction or in opposite directions from each other. This can be visualised as follows:

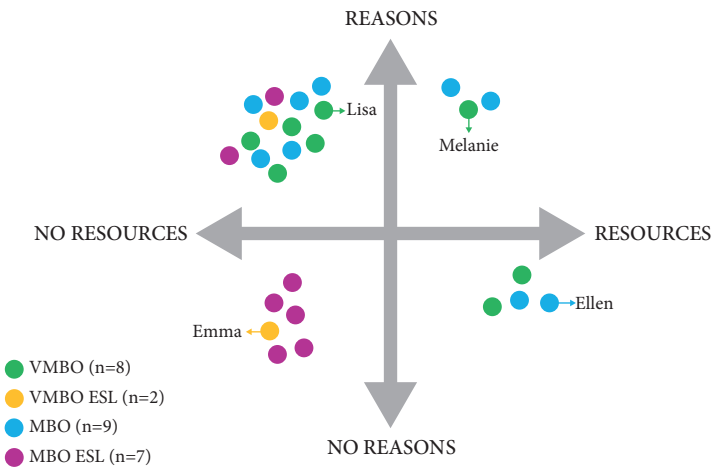

Figure 1: Heuristic grouping of the key research participants' reasons and resources.

In figure one I have grouped my data heuristically to provide a visual image of the reasons and resources of my key research participants. Depending upon which concept moves in

which direction, tailor-made advice can be provided to better understand why these girls may or may not achieve their aspirations. In clockwise direction I explain the four different groups.

(1) Group 1: both have reasons and resources
These are the lucky ones, but at the same time this is the smallest group. These girls know exactly what they want from an early age onwards, why they want it, and all their decisions are aimed at achieving their goal. They also have supportive parents, and therefore do not need a lot of assistance.

(2) Group 2: have resources, but do not have formulated reasons
This is the second smallest group. Its members have supportive parents who are crucial for the development and realisation of their aspirations. With the help of one or both of their parents, they are likely to choose something in line with what a parent or another relative is doing or has done in the past.

(3) Group 3: do not have expressed reasons, nor do they have sufficient resources
Often girls in this group are disappointed in school and in themselves as they do not know what they want to become and how they could achieve it anyway. They could use all the help they can get but do not know who to turn to, and this makes them even more frustrated. Most of the time, these girls are rebellious, play truant and are the most challenging girls to reach.

(4) Group 4: do not have adequate resources, but have formulated their reasons
This is the largest group. In this group, the girls' current educational level does not meet the requirements for

their future aspirations, and therefore they have no idea how to realise their aspirations within the complex Dutch education system. Most of the time their parents are not able to help them. Consequently, they are dependent on the support of their school. Due to the uncertainty as to whether they can achieve their aspirations, they often change their mind a few times about which job to pursue. Even though they are only exploring the available options, this behaviour may lead other people to not take their aspirations seriously. Within this group a distinction can be made between those who focus more on the end result and those who focus more on the actual job.

(a) Group 4a: Focus on the end result
Girls in group 4a do not mind too much what they will be doing as long as the end result is satisfactory. For example, if a girl in this group aspires to become wealthy, she will want something that will make her rich regardless of the actual job. This desire is often expressed by girls because they have grown up with severe financial problems and never want to worry about money again. They specifically look for information on job security and salary.

(b) Group 4b: Focus on the actual job
For the girls in group 4b the job is the most important. These girls often want to make a job out of their hobby or favourite TV series. They are specifically looking for someone to support them with options tailored to their education level.

Melanie from chapter four is an example of group one [both have reasons and resources]. She knew how to make use of the Dutch education system, but was rather an exception. For many pupils, the Dutch education system does not work in

their favour. Ellen from chapter six illustrates group two. She was still developing her career aspirations, but in the end she took her mother's work as a starting point for her aspirations. Ellen's mother worked in a nursing home and therefore knew exactly what her daughter aspired to and how to achieve this. After Ellen obtained her basic qualification, she could not immediately practice her aspiration. Her mother was able to help her with a cleaning job in the nursing home where she was working. However, not all parents can help their children in this way. For example, Lisa, from chapter three, did not have parents who were architects, or could find other work for her. Lisa represents group four, the largest group [have formulated reasons but do not have sufficient resources]. Interestingly, most of them eventually obtained the basic qualification, because they were motivated to achieve something. Yet they do not see obtaining a basic qualification as their final destination: what they want is to achieve their aspirations. They need support in the form of personalised advice. Group three [no reasons nor resources] poses the biggest challenge. Emma from chapter three is an example of this. She had no idea of what she wanted to become and also did not know who to turn to. Because Emma did not know what she wanted, others could not help her either. This led to frustrations and rebellious behaviour both in the classrooms and at home that resulted in her losing the help of the people she needed the most: her parents and teachers.

Whiteness: Class trumps race

In the final theoretical paragraph, I reflect upon the inequality and educational disadvantage of 'white' girls along with their Dutch background. I embed this in the theoretical debates on whiteness. In the same way as 'white' Dutch girls in this study needed to justify their attendance in multi-ethnic schools, I was questioned about my decision to study 'white' students.

Yet, as a 'black' academic, it was not at all strange for me to study 'white' people, as whiteness has always been visible to 'black' intellectuals (Ahmed, 2004; Lorde, 1984; Wekker, 2016). It has only recently surfaced as a concern for those who are white (Reay, Hollingworth, Williams, Crozier, Jamieson, James, & Beedell, 2007). Even though there is a growing literature on whiteness (Frankenberg, 1997; Freie, 2007; Giroux, 1999; Hill, 2004; Lipsitz, 1998; Perry, 2002), relatively little research has been done in the Dutch context (Weiner, 2016). Philomena Essed and Sandra Trienekens (2008) in '*Who wants to feel white?*' were among the first to study the concept of whiteness in the Dutch context. They explored the cultural expressions of white normativity and the notion of whiteness as identity among 'white' university students. Their article concluded that whiteness in the Dutch contexts remains a "floating concept" in which 'white' skin colour is one of the criteria for inclusion, but at the same time it is not mentioned as such. According to Essed and Trienekens (2008) whiteness has deeper connotations of citizenship, national identity, western superiority and civilisation, which makes it a difficult concept to introduce to the Dutch context. Melissa F. Weiner (2015; 2016) contributed to a growing literature on discriminatory practices and stereotypes among 'white' Dutch teachers towards students with an immigrant origin in Dutch schools (van den Bergh, Denessen, Hornstra, Voeten, & Holland, 2010; Thijs, Westhof, & Koomen, 2012). These authors have shown how whiteness was embedded in teachers' pedagogy through a dominant white Eurocentric discourse (Van den Bergh et al., 2010; Thijs et al., 2012). These findings were consistent with my results. In chapter five of this thesis I examined whether the whiteness of minority working-class 'white' Dutch MBO students in a multiracial and multi-ethnic school functioned as white privilege and offered a resource for them. The concept of white privilege is often considered as being inherent to 'white' people. Yet on the

one hand, most research on white privilege has inadequately disentangled the impacts of race and social class, while on the other many studies on 'white' working-class students do not take white privilege into account. Taking an intersectionality approach (Crenshaw, 1989) I theoretically challenged the concept of white privilege articulated within the frameworks of race, ethnicity and social class. My ethnographic findings suggest that the whiteness of working-class 'white' students simultaneously did and did not act as a form of white privilege, depending on their interaction with their in-majority 'white' middle-class teachers. I argue that whiteness alone does not promote white privilege as a resource available to students but depends on the interpretations of others, in this case the teachers. This was also observed by Reay et al. (2007, p. 1042) who stated that "*it is a person who makes value judgments that carry symbolic power; a value of others*". Correspondingly, Morris (2005, 2006, 2007) also found that whiteness became a resource primarily through the way in which the teachers linked it to social class and status, exemplified in perceptions of 'white' students as "*middle class*" by the 'black' teachers or as "*trailer trash*" by the 'white' teachers. In addition to this, my longitudinal results revealed that white privilege was not only granted by their in-majority 'white' middle-class teachers, but also recalled over time. This adds a dynamic aspect to white privilege that has not yet been discussed in the literature. The in-majority 'white' middle-class MBO teachers in this study initially provided direct and indirect forms of privilege, but over the course of the year, 'white' working-class MBO students lost their white privilege because they behaved in ways that the teachers perceived as being typical of 'non-white' behaviour (Wekker, 2016). In this way, the whiteness of the lower vocational students had a different meaning than the whiteness of their middle-class and higher educated teachers. As a consequence, students' access to the resource of white privilege also depended on meeting middle-class 'white'

behavioural expectations. Hence, the onus to meet these expectations fell on the individual.

It is important to underscore that the recalling of white privilege did not put 'white' working-class students in the same position as 'non-white' working-class students. Although I did not conduct a comparative study between 'white' Dutch students and Dutch students with an immigrant origin, a recent Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report (2018) showed that children with a migrant background often come from poorer families and are therefore at a disadvantage at school. The 'white' Dutch girls in this study also came from poorer families and thus were also at a disadvantage at school, as I have revealed with this ethnographic study. In addition, the same OECD report (2018) stated that students with an immigrant background tend to underperform in Dutch schools even when they come from wealthier households. Further research is needed to understand the underlying mechanism of these differences. Nevertheless, this does not discharge us from looking at the existing educational structures and asking ourselves why children from poorer families are at a disadvantage in Dutch schools in the first place.

Discussion: Stairway to educational success?

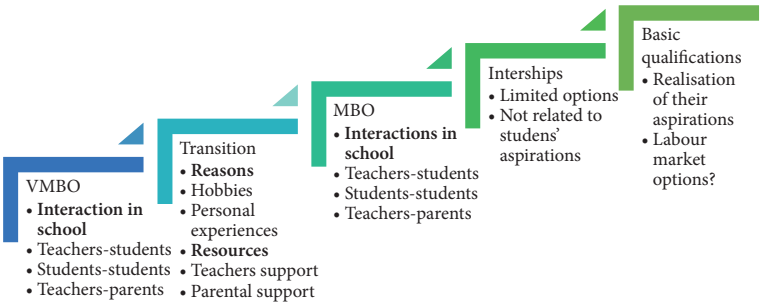

Figure 2: Stairway to lower vocational educational success in the Netherlands

My empirical results arising from the ethnographic study in combination with theoretical contributions are visualised in figure two: the staircase to educational success. The staircase represents the Dutch lower vocational education system with its final goal being the minimum basic qualification. By walking up the stairs with 'white' Dutch female students I tried to expose the existing structures as they faced similar structural problems. At each of these steps, students could leave school early. The first step is VMBO (pre-vocational education in secondary Dutch schools). In chapters three and four I elaborated upon the miscommunications between teachers and students regarding their aspirations. On the one hand, students had high aspirations, but on the other hand the same students acted rebelliously in class. Teachers were often so occupied with controlling these classroom situations that they overlooked the students' needs. The students tended to interpret this as a lack of interest.

The second step is the compulsory transition from VMBO (pre-vocational education in secondary Dutch schools) to MBO (further vocational education college). This compulsory

transition has already been investigated in previous studies (for example in Elffers, 2011), which resulted in a pilot (VM2) whereby a basic qualification could be obtained at VMBO. The pilot took place at a number of schools with varying results (Dutch Expertise Center Vocational Education [ECBO], 2012). Perhaps the newly developed concepts 'reasons' and 'resources' could improve schools' understanding of how their pupils' aspirations work and help them to teach these young people to express their aspirations more concretely.

After the challenging transition to MBO, internships are one of the main reasons for early school leaving in the Netherlands (Bekker, van de Meer, Muffels, & Wilthagen, 2015). The most common reason for this is that some students cannot find internship places and therefore cannot complete their studies. In the study programme I researched, the school offered internship places to reduce the likelihood of early school leaving. However, in chapter six we saw that the internship places offered by the study programmes also led to school dropout. The main problem with these vacant internships was that they were one-sided choices in elderly care and not in line with the girls' aspirations. Most of the girls in this study finished their internship and obtained the basic qualification, albeit with great difficulty. Hence, they reached the end of the stairs, but not their final destination, which is to fulfil their aspirations. Passing the threshold of the basic qualification, which is the aim of most policies does not actually do much to help the girls find a place on the labour market. I therefore urge a rethink of the early school leaving threshold, the basic qualification, and suggest investing more in the development and realisation of students' aspirations.

Practical implications

This PhD thesis aimed to understand the meanings that 'white' Dutch girls with low-educated parents in multiracial lower vocational schools attach to their attitudes and actions and how these girls understand their own unique positions and both the possibilities that are open to them and the resources available to them as they shape their futures. For this, I focussed on 'white' Dutch girls to gain an in-depth understanding of their lived experience, taking their point of view as a starting point. Even though I conducted interviews with their parents and teachers, these conversations were devoted to better understanding the situation. It would be interesting to study the parents in more depth as they clearly emphasised race and ethnicity in a different way to their daughters.

In addition, the teachers' perspective could also be given a more prominent place in the discussion. I have been unable to sufficiently address their daily struggle, working under high work pressure due to the problematic home situations of their pupils for whom they often sought individual solutions. For example, one of the teachers kept extra bread with jam and peanut butter in her room and her students were always welcome to get a sandwich if they were hungry, which they did. Another teacher made extra copies of textbooks for students who could not afford to buy the schoolbooks. Last example, a PE teacher allowed Kim, a 'white' Dutch student, to take a shower every morning before class because the hot water in her apartment had been disconnected for months. Through participant observation I obtained a rich description of everyday life in these schools. Unfortunately, the bulk of these experiences could not be written down in this PhD thesis, which is often the case with an ethnographic study.

Directions for further research

The directions for further research based on this study are almost endless. Firstly, I would advocate more ethnographic studies in schools. Ethnographic methods not only provide insights into what people say or say they do, but also into what they actually say and do in a particular location (cf. Malinowski, 1929). It provided me with first-hand observations of and interactions with the ways in which 'white' Dutch girls with low-educated parents developed their aspirations as a minority in multiracial schools. Several school principals also appreciated the use of ethnographic research as they invited me to stay in their schools for a longer period, instead of only "*taking a one-off questionnaire*". Based on these ethnographic findings, I developed the theoretical concepts 'reasons' and 'resources'. These newly developed concepts could help schools to better understand how young people's aspirations work and how they can teach them to express their aspirations more concretely, as is explained in the reasons and resources section on pages 130-134. Empirical examinations using reasons and resources is needed to better understand how students' aspirations may be influenced by gender and ethnicity. Starting with gender, it would be interesting to take a male perspective and study how 'white' boys with lower educated parents are developing their aspirations within, for example, the technical sector. This could also be studied in a more gender-balanced study programme, such as economics. These studies could also be connected to how whiteness is lived and experienced across different contexts and perhaps countries. Furthermore, more empirical insights are needed into how parents transmit advantages and disadvantages in school performances (Keizer, 2016). Severiens and Verstegen (2007) also advocate studying parental involvement, as parents play a crucial role in students' school success. Elaborating upon students' school success, teachers are also essential.

Empirical studies that map teachers' perspectives are needed to enable students to better achieve their aspirations.

What a girl wants

It was a challenge to study the aspirations and experiences of 'white' Dutch female students in multi-ethnic lower vocational schools within a Dutch context where whiteness is not acknowledged as a racialised/ethnicised position (see also Wekker, 2016, p. 2). The girls I studied situated themselves as individual actors without meaningful group memberships or shared struggles in terms of their social class. While their class position implies that they are in a marginalised position, their ethnicity suggests the opposite. Therefore, they were treated differently at first. Hence, their whiteness was interpreted as 'normal' and middle-class not only by themselves, but also by their teachers and others. Consequently, the disadvantages of their social class status were invisible.

The focus on this invisible group also allowed me to reveal structural errors in the lowest levels of the Dutch education system. The most important one is the endless focus on the basic qualification. Driven by the goal of reducing early school leaving, the girls were pushed to achieve this basic qualification. However, passing this threshold did little to help them find a place on the labour market. The newly developed theoretical concepts of reasons and resources were useful in analysing students' aspirations. It is, moreover, hoped that these theoretical concepts could also help students, teachers and parents to improve the development and realisation of students' aspirations. Because, in the end, all these girls wanted was to be able to realise their aspirations, and not to see them blow up in their face like a burst chewing gum bubble.

English Summary

The aim of this dissertation is to understand what 'white' Dutch girls with low-educated parents in lower vocational multiracial schools want in terms of their educational and occupational future goals as they continue their education, transitioning from VMBO to MBO. The study was part of a large-scale international research project on Reducing Early School Leaving in Europe (RESL.eu). The majority of studies on early school leaving and school dropout have focused on the groups most at risk of early school leaving, typically young men from a migrant background in lower educational levels (e.g. Cabus & de Witte, 2016; Elffers, 2011; Rumberger, 1983). Hence, attention is too often concentrated on these young people's individual characteristics, with scant attention being paid to structural conditions (e.g. de Witte, Cabus, Thyssen, Groot, & van den Brink, 2013; Russell, Simmons, & Thompson, 2011). This "categorical thinking" (Ghorashi, 2014) has contributed to the creation of government-dependent categories of people who require help to overcome their disadvantaged position. The problem is perceived as lying with the individual, while structural conditions are left unquestioned (ibid). Moreover, this approach has resulted in a lack of studies on other groups, such as young 'white' working-class women, who remain a blind spot in research into educational disadvantage.

Through ethnographic research, this study provides insights into how these minority 'white' Dutch girls function within the Netherlands' complicated school system. The main empirical findings of this ethnographic study have been published as four separate academic journal articles and were presented as chapter three to six in this book. Although all of these articles can be read separately, they are connected by the main research question:

> How are the aspirations of 'white' Dutch girls with low-educated parents in multiracial lower vocational schools shaped and influenced by macro (educational system and labour market), meso (school and family contexts) and micro (perspectives of themselves) level factors?

Chapter two is devoted to the method and methodology, which is in addition to the specific method elements that are discussed in the empirical chapters for each sub-study. Through the investigation of the above research question, it aims to understand the meanings that 'white' Dutch girls with low-educated parents in multiracial lower vocational schools attach to their attitudes and actions and how these girls understand their own unique positions and both the possibilities that are open to them and the resources available to them as they shape their futures.

Chapter three forms the theoretical basis and presents two new concepts to explain the aspirations of young people in lower vocational education. The chapter starts in the final year of a VMBO school, where pupils were studying for their final exams and making choices about which compulsory further vocational education programme to enrol in. It follows everyday school activities throughout the year and gives us a glimpse of how the pupils interacted with their teachers and each other. These pupils were in what is perceived as the lowest educational level within the Dutch compulsory secondary education system. Nonetheless, they had high, and according to some teachers, "unrealistic" aspirations. These relatively high aspirations were often incongruent with their disruptive behaviour in the classroom. In fact, their disruptive classroom behaviour did little to further the realisation of their aspirations. In view of both the low educational level of the school and the sometimes disruptive classroom behaviour

of the pupils, it was difficult for teachers to take their pupils' high aspirations seriously and to help them to realise their dreams. Following an extensive literature review on pupils' aspirations and on the basis of ethnographic data, the newly developed concepts of 'reasons' and 'resources' (Stam, 2017) are introduced in this chapter.

Chapter four focuses on the Dutch education system in which VMBO and MBO are significant features. In the Netherlands, secondary education is organised through tracking whereby pupils are selected into either an academic, a general or a vocational track at the age of twelve. These hierarchically ranked tracks prepare students for different occupations. The Netherlands has received criticism on this early selection into separate tracks and the highly segregated schools that this process leads to. The aim of chapter four is to unravel how specific features of the Dutch education system influence the ways in which students shape and realise their aspirations. For this, ethnographic and longitudinal data is used to contrast the stories of Melanie, a Dutch girl, and Mandy, who is British. Both girls have similar aspirations (game-maker), racial and ethnic backgrounds, home situations and educational level, but attend different schools: a Dutch VMBO school and an English state-funded comprehensive school. By combining the wider literature on the effects of institutional arrangements with studies on pupils' aspirations, these stories are analysed through the concepts 'reasons' and 'resources' (Stam, 2017). The 'reasons' identified for both girls wanting to become a game developer are very similar and are largely shaped by the global culture around gaming. However, their 'resources' are different and are formed partly by differences in the two school systems. In the end, both school systems seem to restrict opportunities for children from disadvantaged backgrounds in different ways but with very similar results. To overcome the obstacles they were faced with, both Melanie and Mandy

had to carve out alternative routes via preparatory training courses while relying on their own and family resources. Strong aspirations played an important role in forging these alternative pathways.

Chapter five examines the racial and ethnic experiences of 'white' Dutch girls with low-educated parents who form a numerical minority in an ethnically and racially diverse school. How do they deal with their whiteness? And how do their multi-ethnic classmates and in-majority 'white' teachers deal with the racial and ethnic backgrounds of these 'white' Dutch girls? This chapter is set in MBO level 2 classes where race and ethnicity play an important role. From the first day of school, new groups are formed on the basis of racial and ethnic categories, including 'white' Dutch groups only. On average, one out of five students has a 'white' Dutch origin. The whiteness of these 'white' Dutch students implies certain expectations and assumptions, including white privilege which is often considered as being inherent to 'white' people. Chapter five challenges this one-dimensional approach of white privilege and applies an intersectional approach (Crenshaw, 1989) in which race, ethnicity, social class and gender are all taken into account. In ethnographic detail it illuminates how these girls were given privileges on the basis of their 'white' Dutch background by the people in power, in this case their teachers. However, their lower social class position led to these privileges being withdrawn at a later date.

In the Netherlands, internship training is a compulsory[22] part of every MBO study programme, and this is the focus of ***chapter six***. Internships build a bridge between the classroom and the labour market that can help young people to develop and achieve their career aspirations. In this way, internships

22 Background information on the Dutch education system is provided in the introduction chapter.

can be both a 'reason' and a 'resource' for developing and realising students' aspirations. Most MBO level 2 Care students, however, experience a mismatch between their aspirations and the internships available to them as the majority wants to work in parts of the care sector that require more advanced diplomas. Most of them aspire to become a maternity carer or a hospital nurse, but these professions can only be studied at MBO level 3 or higher. This means that level 2 students must first complete this programme before continuing to a higher level. The only internship option open to level 2 students is aged-care, the least aspired-to internship, as all the other options are reserved for higher MBO levels. Instead of helping students to develop or realise their aspirations, these internships are more like a rite of passage that they must undergo. Internships in aged-care are physically and emotionally demanding. They also made the girls realise that it would be extremely difficult to achieve their aspirations to reach higher levels of education, as on average only one in ten students is admitted to a higher level. Consequently, many of the girls lost motivation and some even dropped out of the course. Nevertheless, the majority completed the programme, albeit with great effort and personal frustration. Chapter six focuses on the girls who completed the programme. By obtaining a basic qualification, they passed the early school leaving threshold. Although this basic qualification means they are not early school leavers, they still face a very uncertain future on the labour market.

Conclusion

The concluding and discussion chapter discusses the main empirical findings within the theoretical debates on early school leaving, young people's aspirations and whiteness in education. It contains two figures. One figure demonstrates the promises and pitfalls of the Dutch lower vocational education system as a 'stairway to educational success'. It starts at VMBO and progresses to MBO and completion of an internship,

the final step being attainment of the basic qualification. It is argued that the biggest pitfall is the emphasis on the basic qualification. The newly developed concepts 'reasons' and 'resources' elaborated upon in the other figure demonstrate how to move beyond the basic qualification threshold by investing more in the development and realisation of students' aspirations. Because, in the end, all these girls want is to be able to achieve their aspirations instead of seeing them blow up in their face like a burst chewing gum bubble.

Nederlandse Samenvatting

Het doel van dit proefschrift is om inzicht te krijgen in de manieren waarop de aspiraties van 'witte' Nederlandse meisjes met laagopgeleide ouders op multi-etnische vmbo- en mbo-scholen tot stand komen en al dan niet worden gerealiseerd. In veel grote Europese steden is er sprake van een multi-etnische bevolkingssamenstelling waarbij 'witte' mensen niet langer de demografische meerderheid vormen, maar een van de vele etnische groepen zijn (Vertovec, 2007). Op de scholen waar dit onderzoek plaatsvindt, is in mbo-niveau 2 klassen gemiddeld 1 op de 5 studenten van 'witte' Nederlandse afkomst en in de vmbo-basisklassen is gemiddeld 1 op de 10 leerlingen van 'witte' Nederlandse afkomst. Vanwege de schoolsegregatie in de grote Nederlandse steden, zijn deze cijfers geen uitzondering op die scholen in de grote steden. Toch wordt er nauwelijks onderzoek gedaan naar deze 'witte' Nederlandse jongeren op multi-etnische scholen. Vandaar dat het huidige onderzoek specifiek naar deze doelgroep kijkt.

De studie is onderdeel van een internationaal onderzoeksproject dat zich richt op het terugdringen van vroegtijdig schoolverlaten (VSV) in Europa (RESL.eu). Eerdere onderzoeken naar schooluitval hebben aangetoond dat er een oververtegenwoordiging is van jongens, met een migratieachtergrond, en een lagere sociaaleconomische status (e.g. Cabus & de Witte, 2016; Elffers, 2011; Rumberger, 1983). Veel van deze onderzoeken en de daarop voortbordurende beleidsmaatregelingen richten zich dan ook op specifieke risicogroepen om VSV te verminderen; en met succes. De uitvalcijfers in Nederland zijn de afgelopen jaren drastisch afgenomen (CBS, 2017). De focus op risicogroepen zorgt er tegelijkertijd voor dat er voornamelijk naar individuele en groepskenmerken wordt gekeken en minder naar de

onderliggende structuren waarbinnen de uitval plaats vindt. Hierdoor ontstaan er blinde vlekken voor niet-erkende risicogroepen, zoals bijvoorbeeld 'witte' Nederlandse meisjes. Terwijl zij ook tegen problemen aanlopen binnen het complexe Nederlandse lager en middelbaar beroepsonderwijs.

Ik heb op etnografische wijze de overgang van de 'witte' Nederlandse meisjes van het vmbo naar het mbo onderzocht door te vragen welke beroepsaspiraties zij hebben en in hoeverre zij deze waar kunnen maken. Deze overgang vindt plaats in een context waarin 'witte' Nederlandse jongeren als een van de nieuwe minderheden op een multi-etnische school zich bewust worden van hun 'witheid'. Dit proefschrift bestaat uit vier deelstudies, gepresenteerd in de empirische hoofdstukken drie tot en met zes. Deze deelstudies kunnen apart worden gelezen en vormen tegelijkertijd een geheel waarin de volgende onderzoeksvraag centraal staat:

> Op welke manier zijn de ambities van 'witte' Nederlandse meisjes met laagopgeleide ouders in multi-etnische vmbo- en mbo-scholen gevormd en beïnvloed door macro (onderwijssysteem en arbeidsmarkt), meso (school en familiecontexten) en micro (individuele) factoren?

Hoofdstuk twee bespreekt de onderzoeksmethoden en methodologie van dit proefschrift. De etnografische methode die wordt gehanteerd, is erop gericht om de ervaringen en gezichtspunten van 'witte' Nederlandse meisjes op multi-etnische scholen weer te geven die hun beroepsaspiraties proberen vorm te geven.

Hoofdstuk drie vormt de theoretische basis waarin twee nieuwe concepten worden gepresenteerd om de beroepsaspiratievorming van jongeren in het lager en middelbaar beroepsonderwijs nader te verklaren. In het

examenjaar op *Holland High*, een multi-etnische vmbo-basis en kaderschool, maken scholieren naast hun schoolexamens een keuze voor hun verplichte[23] vervolgopleiding op het mbo. In dit hoofdstuk wordt onderzocht wat de aspiraties van deze scholieren zijn en hoe deze worden gevormd. De meeste scholieren hebben relatief hoge aspiraties ten opzichte van hun huidige opleidingsniveau. Ze willen bijvoorbeeld advocaat, dokter en architect worden. Deze "*onrealistische*" aspiraties worden dan ook niet serieus genomen door de leerkrachten. Het storende gedrag tijdens hun lessen en het lage opleidingsniveaus van de leerlingen zijn de voornaamste redenen hiervoor. Hoewel deze aspiraties willekeurig lijken, blijkt uit dit proefschrift dat er vaak een diepere betekenis achter zit. Via aspiraties proberen scholieren bijvoorbeeld een positieve bijdrage te leveren aan hun vaak moeilijke thuissituaties. Zo wil de een dokter worden, omdat haar moeder chronisch ziek is of de ander advocaat om haar vader uit de gevangenis te halen. Door de vele miscommunicaties tussen scholieren en hun docenten komen deze achterliggende redeneringen vaak niet aan het licht. "*Dan mogen ze eerst wel eens beter opletten tijdens de lessen*", aldus een leerkracht. De leerkrachten zien het storende gedrag van scholieren als teken van desinteresse in school en nemen daardoor de "*onrealistische*" beroepsaspiraties niet serieus. Ook neemt de bereidheid van de leerkrachten af om degenen die het storend gedrag vertonen, te ondersteunen in hun relatief hoge beroepsaspiraties. De scholieren zelf leggen echter geen link

23 Scholieren van 16 tot 18 jaar verplicht zijn onderwijs te volgen als zij geen diploma havo, vwo, mbo-niveau 2 of hoger hebben. Deze zogenoemde kwalificatieplicht komt na de leerplicht, die loopt tot en met het einde van het schooljaar waarin de scholier 16 jaar wordt. De kwalificatieplicht duurt tot de dag dat de scholier een startkwalificatie hebt gehaald. Of tot de dag dat de scholier 18 jaar wordt. Scholieren tussen de 18 en 23 jaar zijn niet meer verplicht om een startkwalificatie te halen of naar school te gaan, maar worden wel gerekend als voortijdig schoolverlaters als ze geen startkwalificatie hebben behaald. Bron: website Rijksoverheid.

tussen hun storend gedrag tijdens de lessen en de afname aan bereidheid en geloofwaardigheid van hun leerkrachten. Het leidt tot grote teleurstellingen van de scholieren in zowel de school als in zichzelf. Ook weten de scholieren vaak niet wat hun beroepsperspectief dan wel is en wat daarvoor nodig is om het te bereiken. De achterliggende redenen [reasons] en de benodigde middelen [resources] om aspiraties te kunnen realiseren vormen de twee nieuwe theoretische concepten die worden gepresenteerd op basis van de etnografische data en in aansluiting op de huidige literatuur op het gebied van beroepsaspiratievorming van jongeren in het lager en middelbaar beroepsonderwijs (Stam, 2017).

In ***hoofdstuk vier*** staat het Nederlandse onderwijsstelsel centraal. Het vmbo en mbo waar deze studie plaatsvindt, is een kenmerkend onderdeel hiervan. In Nederland wordt het voortgezet onderwijs gekenmerkt door vroege selectie, waarbij leerlingen op twaalfjarige leeftijd worden ingedeeld in vmbo, havo of vwo op basis van de Citoscore en het schooladvies. Deze selectie heeft belangrijke gevolgen voor de gehele schoolloopbaan van jongeren. Deze voorselectie heeft de laatste jaren veel kritiek gekregen (zie onder meer: Van der Werfhorst, Elffers, & Karsten, 2015). Dit hoofdstuk bestudeert welke invloed het Nederlandse onderwijsstelsel heeft op de aspiratievorming van 'witte' Nederlandse meisjes met laagopgeleide ouders. Hiervoor is een vergelijkbaar etnografisch onderzoek uitgevoerd op een middelbare school in Engeland, waar men een ander onderwijsstelsel kent. Jongeren worden hier niet via een eenmalige vroege selectie ingedeeld, maar elk jaar opnieuw en per schoolvak. In hoofdstuk vier volgen we de Nederlandse Melanie en de Engelse Mandy op school, tijdens de lessen en thuis. Zij zijn vergelijkbaar op gebied van beroepsaspiraties (game-ontwikkelaar), raciale en etnische kenmerken, thuissituaties en opleidingsniveau, maar gaan naar scholen met een verschillend onderwijssysteem.

Aan de hand van de in hoofdstuk drie ontwikkelde concepten 'reasons' en 'resources' zijn hun aspiratievorming en schoolervaringen met elkaar vergeleken. De 'reasons' van beide meisjes om een game-ontwikkelaar te worden, leken veel op elkaar en zijn grotendeels gevormd door de wereldwijde cultuur rond gaming. De 'resources' waren echter verschillend en zijn gedeeltelijk gevormd door de verschillen in de twee schoolsystemen. De twee schoolsystemen bleken de kansen voor kinderen uit kansarme milieus op andere manieren te beïnvloeden, maar met zeer vergelijkbare negatieve uitkomsten. Om de hindernissen van beide systemen te overwinnen, moesten de meisjes alternatieve manieren zoeken om hun aspiraties te kunnen verwezenlijken. Sterke beroepsaspiraties en ondersteuning van thuis spelen een belangrijke rol bij het uitzoeken van deze alternatieve mogelijkheden.

Hoofdstuk vijf analyseert de ervaringen van 'witte' Nederlandse meisjes als nieuwe demografische minderheid op multi-etnische scholen. Hoe gaan zij om met hun raciale en etnische kenmerken en hoe gaan hun klasgenoten en leerkrachten hiermee om? Dit hoofdstuk speelt zich af in mbo-niveau 2 klassen waar afkomst een belangrijke rol speelt. Vanaf de eerste schooldag zitten de studenten in hun eigen raciale en etnische groepjes en blijven dit gedurende het schooljaar aanhouden. De meesten voelen zich prettig "*om gewoon bij je eigen groep te zitten*" en zien hier dan ook geen probleem in. In deze klassen is gemiddeld een op de vijf van 'witte' Nederlandse afkomst. Verondersteld wordt dat 'witte' mensen kunnen profiteren van hun 'witzijn' door middel van bepaalde voordelen op basis van hun etnische en raciale kenmerken, ook wel witte privileges genoemd. Dit is bevestigd in diverse studies naar 'witte' privileges die voornamelijk 'witte' middenklasse groepen, zoals universitair studenten (Perry, 2002; Essed & Trineken, 2008) of vrouwen uit de middenklasse onderzoeken (Frankenberg, 1993).

Echter, in de studies naar en over de 'witte' arbeidersklasse worden privileges nauwelijks onderzocht (Willis, 1997; MacLeod, 2008). Dit hoofdstuk bekritiseert de eenzijdige en statische benadering van het begrip witte privilege vanuit een intersectionaliteitsbenadering (Crenshaw, 1989) waarbij ras, etniciteit, gender en sociale klasse samen zijn gevoegd. De privileges van 'witte' Nederlandse meisjes met laagopgeleide ouders in multi-etnische klassen is geen zwart-wit verhaal. In etnografische detail laat hoofdstuk vijf zien hoe hun witte privileges mede wordt toegekend en in stand gehouden door mensen in een machtspositie, in dit geval de leerkrachten, op basis van hun raciale en etnische positie. Hun sociale klasse positie zorgde er daarentegen voor dat deze privileges later weer werden afgenomen.

Hoofdstuk zes bestudeert de 'witte' Nederlandse meisjes tijdens hun stage en volgt hen ook in de jaren daarna. Stages worden gezien als de mogelijkheid om beroepsaspiraties verder te ontwikkelen. Een stage kan hiermee zowel een 'reason' als een 'resource' vormen voor de aspiraties van jongeren. De meisjes in dit onderzoek lopen stage als verplicht onderdeel van de mbo-2 opleiding Helpende Zorg. Zorg is nog altijd de meest populaire opleiding onder meisjes, maar het is ook de opleiding met de meeste schooluitval onder meisjes (ECBO, 2011). De meeste van hen willen graag werken in de zorg, zoals kraamzorg of verpleegkundige in het ziekenhuis. Deze beroepen kunnen echter pas vanaf mbo-niveau 3 en hoger worden gekozen. Dit betekent dat studenten eerst een niveau 2 opleiding moeten afronden, voordat ze kunnen doorstromen naar niveau 3 en hoger. Stagemogelijkheden voor de gewenste richtingen van kraamhulp en ziekenhuis zijn daarom pas beschikbaar voor niveau 3 en hoger op het moment dat deze opleidingen worden aangeboden. Stages voor niveau 2 zijn voornamelijk beschikbaar in de ouderenzorg; een richting die het minst wordt geambieerd door de studenten en die dus niet aansluit

op hun aspiraties. De stages in de ouderenzorg zijn fysiek en emotioneel veeleisend. Ongeveer een derde van de studenten haakt vroegtijdig af. De meerderheid behaalt met veel moeite de stage en een niveau 2 diploma. Hoofdstuk zes focust op de studenten die niet vroegtijdig zijn uitgevallen, maar die grote inspanningen hebben geleverd om hun opleiding af te ronden. Maar ondanks hun startkwalificatie, blijven zij kwetsbaar op de arbeidsmarkt. De gedroomde doorstroom naar niveau 3 en hoger is in de praktijk lang niet voor iedereen weggelegd. De enkeling die wel voor een verzorgende baan in de ouderenzorg wil gaan, kan ook daar meestal niet terecht met een niveau 2 opleiding. Niveau 3 is een minimale vereiste binnen de ouderenzorgorganisaties vanwege de zelfstandigheid van het werk. De niveau 2 werkzaamheden die beschikbaar zijn, worden uitgevoerd door de stagiaires. Het gevolg is dat deze studenten zijn opgeleid voor niet-bestaande banen, ook al wordt hun diploma beschouwd als een startkwalificatie voor de arbeidsmarkt.

Conclusie

In dit conclusie en discussie hoofdstuk worden de belangrijkste empirische bevindingen besproken binnen het theoretische debat over voortijdig schoolverlaten, beroepsaspiraties van jongeren en diversiteit binnen het onderwijs. Het resulteerde in twee figuren. Een figuur toont de beloften en valkuilen van het Nederlandse lager (vmbo basis) en middelbaar (mbo niveau 1 en 2) beroepsonderwijs aan in de vorm van de 'trap naar succes in het onderwijs'. Op deze trap beginnen we in het vmbo, vervolgens maken we de verplichte overgang naar het MBO, voltooien we de bijbehorende stages met als einddoel het verkrijgen van de startkwalificatie. Er wordt geconcludeerd dat de grootste valkuil is de sterke focus op die startkwalificatie. De nieuw ontwikkelde concepten 'reasons' en 'resources' uitgewerkt in de andere figuur en laat echter zien hoe we voorbij een startkwalificatie kunnen handelen

door meer te investeren in de ontwikkeling en realisatie van de beroepsaspiraties van jongeren.

Tot slot

Het was een uitdaging om de beroepsaspiraties en ervaringen van 'witte' Nederlandse meisjes met laagopgeleide ouders op multi-etnische vmbo- en mbo-scholen te bestuderen in de Nederlandse context waar witheid niet wordt herkend als een raciale of etnische positie (Wekker, 2016, blz. 2). Deze meisjes zien zichzelf als individuen zonder betekenisvolle groepslidmaatschappen of gedeelde worstelingen in termen van hun raciale of etnische achtergrond, gender of sociale klasse. Hoewel hun sociale klasse positie veronderstelt dat zij zich in een gemarginaliseerde positie bevinden, suggereert hun raciale en etnische positie precies het tegenovergestelde. Vanwege hun raciale en etnische kenmerken is de positie in hun sociale klasse en de daarbij behorende structurele onderwijsachterstand lange tijd onzichtbaar.

Het bestuderen van deze relatief onzichtbare groep stelde mij tevens in staat om de structurele gebreken binnen de laagste onderwijsniveaus in Nederland bloot te leggen. Hierbij is de voornaamste conclusie dat er veel nadruk wordt gelegd op het behalen van de startkwalificatie om voortijdig schoolverlaten te voorkomen. Hoewel Nederland succesvol is gebleken in het terugdringen van voortijdig schoolverlaten, laat dit proefschrift zien dat een startkwalificatie van een mbo-2 opleiding Helpende Zorg niet voor iedereen de gewenste beroepsmogelijkheden oplevert. Tegelijkertijd wordt er, wellicht door de focus op de startkwalificatie, te weinig geïnvesteerd in de ontwikkeling en realisatie van beroepsaspiraties van studenten. Dit kan deels worden verklaard doordat jongeren moeite hebben om hun aspiraties te uiten en hiermee de achterliggende gedachten van bepaalde aspiraties vaak niet goed overkomen.

Daarnaast zorgt het storende gedrag tijdens de lessen voor een afname van de geloofwaardigheid en de bereidheid van de leerkrachten om hen, die het storend gedrag vertonen, te ondersteunen in hun relatief hoge beroepsaspiraties. De nieuw ontwikkelde theoretische concepten 'reasons' en 'resources' zijn nuttig gebleken bij het analyseren van de studentenaspiraties. Deze nieuw geïntroduceerde concepten kunnen ook in de praktijk worden gebruikt om een bijdrage te leveren aan het realiseren van de beroepsaspiraties van jongeren.

Wat een meisje wil?

Zij wil niet dat haar beroepsaspiraties als een kauwgombel uit elkaar spatten.

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About the Author

Talitha Stam holds a bachelor's degree in Journalism from the School of Journalism in Tilburg and has participated in an honours programme in Media Studies at Stellenbosch University in South Africa. After working for various Dutch media, she obtained her master's degree in Cultural Anthropology from Utrecht University. For her multi-award-winning master's thesis, entitled: "Kids on the Frontline of Haiti's Fault line – Children's Perspectives on Their Earthquake Relocation", she conducted six months of ethnographic field research in Haiti immediately after the 2010 earthquake. After graduation, Talitha continued her research at the IS Academy Human Security in Fragile States at Wageningen University for which she travelled to various (post) disaster regions, including Haiti, North Uganda and South Sudan. She combined her studies with journalism reports, producing professional blogs, radio reports and two short documentaries. In April 2013, Talitha joined the European Union's Seventh Framework research project: Reducing Early School Leaving in Europe (RESL.eu) at the Sociology department of Erasmus University Rotterdam. Initially, she worked as a researcher, managing longitudinal quantitative and qualitative data collection in the Netherlands. From April 2014 to January 2018, she also conducted an ethnographic study on the aspirations of minority 'white' Dutch girls in multi-ethnic lower vocational schools as a PhD student. Talitha has published research articles in various international peer-reviewed journals and contributed to several academic book chapters. Since February 2018, she has been working as a postdoctoral researcher at the Department of Public Administration and Sociology at Erasmus University Rotterdam.