

Effects of the homophily principle on social capital development for ethnic minorities and women: potential differences and implications for access to leadership positions

A recurring question for researchers of equality and diversity at work is the comparability of causes and consequences of domination imposed on groups like women and ethnic minorities, and the implications for management. What we do know from the literature is that promotion to leadership positions is, beyond human capital, linked to one's social capital, i.e. one's membership in networks that give potential access to resources through one's contacts portfolio (Bourdieu, 1986). These resources include membership benefits such as "insider information", emotional and instrumental support for career development (Ibarra, 1993). The most powerful networks are known as the "old boys' networks", i.e. largely informal networks mostly made up of white males (Kanter, 1977). This tendency to network with people "similar" to oneself is called *homophily*; in previous research investigating this principle, the homophile divide of ethnicity is found to be stronger than sex (McPherson et al. 2001).

This suggests that to be included in powerful networks, i.e. the ones that facilitate access to leadership positions, we have to act on what is considered as a determinant divide. This action is considered possible insofar as the divides are social constructions and are changing through time. However, as previous research shows a hierarchy of the divides, it also hints at the possibility of differential effects of homophily on diverse groups; further, the question of intersectionality of divides cannot be avoided in that debate. Consequently, this leads to reconsider the often-made assumption that there is a single solution for bettering access to leadership positions for women and minorities, and more generally for emancipating all dominated from a "super-dominant" group.

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Florence Villesèche is a PhD candidate in Management and is research associate for a SNF-funded research project on network steering with Pr. Emmanuel Josserand at the University of Geneva. Her research interests include networks, social capital, gender and power.