



Cultural stereotypes and professional self-socialisation in the transition from education to work

Julia Orupabo

To cite this article: Julia Orupabo (2018) Cultural stereotypes and professional self-socialisation in the transition from education to work, *Journal of Education and Work*, 31:3, 234-246, DOI: [10.1080/13639080.2018.1459513](https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080.2018.1459513)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080.2018.1459513>



© 2018 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 09 Apr 2018.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 186



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Cultural stereotypes and professional self-socialisation in the transition from education to work

Julia Orupabo 

Institute for Social Research, Oslo, Norway

ABSTRACT

A key insight from studies of gender segregation is that the allocation of different groups to different positions in the labour market is strongly related to ascribed status. Shared gendered cultural beliefs generally portray men as more competent and of a higher status than women, and position some workers as more suited than others to perform different types of work and tasks. Yet, although much work has been done on status and gender segregation, this research tends to overlook the intersections of gender, race, and ethnicity. This study contributes to the literature by examining how skills and competence are valued in traditionally gender-segregated professions that have seen an increased influx of immigrants and ethnic minorities. Drawing on 66 qualitative interviews with Norwegian students, the study analyses, first, how gender, racial, and ethnic stereotyping of tasks and competencies affect the students' aspirations in transition from education to work, and second, how the intersection between race, ethnicity, and gender plays out quite differently in different professions. Theoretically, I develop the concept of 'professional self-socialisation', which points to the process whereby individuals adapt and redefine their aspirations to the gendered, ethnic, and racial hierarchy of suitability within their profession.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 1 March 2017
Accepted 28 March 2018

KEYWORDS

Aspirations; cultural stereotypes; gender segregation; intersectionality

Introduction

A substantial body of research has sought to explain the persistence of gender-segregated labour markets. Sociological research clearly demonstrates that power and privilege in the labour market is not only a result of variations in human capital but also a matter of the position different groups inhabit and possess in the gendered, racial, and ethnic structure in society (Browne and Misra 2003). Ascribed statuses, the social attributes that are mapped onto gendered, and racialised bodies, are crucial in producing boundaries that position some workers as more suited than others to perform different types of work and tasks (McDowell 2009, 14). A difficult challenge lies in specifying how the processes that jointly create gender inequality intersect with those that produce inequality based on race and ethnicity (Ridgeway and Kricheli-Katz 2013, 294). This study explores a question that has achieved little attention, namely how skills and competence are valued in traditionally gender-segregated professions facing a changing ethnic composition of students and workers, and how such valuations influence different categories of individuals' professional self-socialisation, i.e. the ways individuals adapt and redefine their aspirations to the gendered, ethnic, and racial hierarchy of suitability within their profession.

CONTACT Julia Orupabo  jor@socialresearch.no, jor@samfunnsforskning.no

© 2018 The Author(s). Published with Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

While the scholarly work on gender-segregated labour markets has come a long way in documenting the gendered nature of hierarchies of suitability and opportunities, my starting point is that any attempt to understand processes of inequality in the gender-segregated labour market needs to address two factors. First, we must address the *supply side* of the issue, thus focusing on how men and women make different choices and have aspirations for different kinds of work (cf. Correll 2004). Understanding the gendered nature of career choice processes is of crucial importance. If men and women make different career-related choices throughout their lives, the labour force will continue to be segregated by gender (Correll 2001, 1725). Second, as proposed by McCall (2011), in order to explain change and stability in the gender-segregated labour market, we need to understand the intersecting structures of gender and race. Following this line of reasoning, I focus on self-socialisation processes among Norwegian students in three gender-segregated professions that have seen an increased influx of immigrants and ethnic minorities over the past years – nursing, computer science, and biomedical science. By exploring how Norwegian students adapt and redefine their identities and form their aspirations in relation to the cultural stereotypes about their profession, the study specifies how and under what conditions ethnicity, race, and gender become salient in determining processes of self-socialisation. The analysis illustrates that gender, racial, and ethnic stereotyping of tasks and competencies affects how students perceive their own competencies and career possibilities as professionals. Regardless of formal qualifications, there are gender and ethnic differences in the students' aspirations and to some extent in their choice of specialities within a professional field.

Theoretically, the study contributes to the literature on intersectionality and labour market outcomes by specifying the conditions under which intersections of ethnicity, race, and gender are neutralised or amplified. The relationships between categories are not predefined nor do they have an inherent value. The ways in which processes of gender, race, and ethnicity play out depend on how the concepts of competence and hierarchies of suitability are defined within a *specific professional context*. Students are active participants in these processes, and the intersections of gender, racial, and ethnic stereotypes both constrain and enable their professional self-socialisation in the transition from education to work.

Gender segregation and intersectionality

One strand of research on gender segregation has focused on the *devaluation* of traditionally female activities and jobs. A variety of studies have documented the processes that culturally devalue and lower the rewards associated with roles historically held by women, thus affording them low social status (Levanon, England, and Allison 2009; Reskin and Roos 1990). Gendered cultural beliefs usually portray men as more competent and of a higher status than women (Ridgeway 2011). A key insight from these studies is that the allocation of different groups to different positions in the labour market is strongly related to *ascribed status* (Ridgeway 2011). As Weber (1968) emphasised, status is an important mechanism in the making of inequality. Status can be understood as a ranking and valuation of different groups and individuals, where some categories of people are seen as more socially significant and worthy of respect than others.

A problem with the devaluation approach is that although it may help explain how men and women have different opportunity structures in the labour market, it fails to explain the changing character and contextual significance of gender stereotypes. The valuation of gendered skills and the work associated with such skills might vary between different occupations and organisational contexts. As Kaufman (2010) argues, previous explanations of segregation build their argument on an indirect assumption that white men, and the skills associated with them, always will be preferred in all types of occupations. Although gender plays a role in the evaluation of women and men (Levanon, England, and Allison 2009; Ridgeway 2011), these processes might operate differently in different disciplinary contexts and historical times.

Furthermore, there has been little exploration of how gender can intersect with other categories of difference in gender-segregated professions. Social distinctions are produced in complex combinations and multiple sites. Scholars disagree whether intersectionality exists at all times and places (e.g.

Collins 1993), or whether one category might supersede others in determining opportunities under some conditions (e.g. Brah 1996). Whether the intersections of gender, ethnicity, and race create multiple disadvantages for minority women (or privileged white men) is an empirical question and must be studied by focusing on how social identities and ascribed statuses might become more or less salient in interactions between individuals and in the evaluation of their competence within specific professional contexts.

Segregation and the subtle mechanisms of selection

A key argument in the literature on status distinctions and segregation is that cultural beliefs shape people's expectations both for themselves and others, and their consequent actions in social contexts (Ridgeway 2013). Yet, most work on segregation has examined how gender and ethnic stereotypes influence gatekeepers' perceptions and actions, such as teachers (Francis and Archer 2005) and employers (Friberg and Midtbøen 2017). Jobs carry racialised and gendered labels that identify them as 'appropriate' or 'inappropriate' for different categories of people, influencing employers' judgements about the suitability of particular workplace presences and performances (Friberg and Midtbøen 2017; Van Den Brink and Benschop 2012). However, demand-side processes cannot fully account for gender and ethnic segregation in paid labour. The self-selection processes that happen *prior* to these observed labour market outcomes, such as individuals' career choices and preferences, are also part of the observed outcomes, and these are poorly understood (Correll 2004). This study shifts the attention to the supply side and asks how cultural beliefs about gender, race, and ethnicity influence students' perceptions of their abilities at crucial decision-making junctures. To explore how culture and different professional contexts enable or constrain aspirations, I deploy Bourdieu (1984) and 'status characteristics theory' (Correll 2001) and develop the theoretical concept of *professional self-socialisation*.

Bourdieu (1984) introduces a sophisticated approach to the study of indirect exclusion by demonstrating how much educational selection occurs through self-selection or self-elimination. A key argument is that objective limits (e.g. power and status relationships between groups) become transformed into a subjective sense of one's place in the social world (Bourdieu 1990). Such embedded perceptions make certain choices obvious and others unthinkable, according to where you stand in the class structure (Ball et al. 2002). When individuals encounter a field that is not familiar, this disjuncture might lead them to exclude themselves from the situation or position where they feel 'out of place'.

Although Bourdieu draws sociological attention to the subtle mechanisms of exclusion by arguing that culture constrains or limits what individuals deem possible, *how* the reproduction of inequality occurs is still a key question (Lareau and Horvat 1999, 37). Correll's (2001, 2004) work on status characteristics and gender represents a novel attempt to identify *how* the reproduction of gender inequality occurs. She claims that cultural beliefs about gender that accord men higher status than women can evoke gender-differentiated standards for attributing performance to ability. This, in turn, biases the assessments men and women make of their own competence and how they form their aspirations and career choices. The strength of the status characteristics theory is that it specifies the conditions under which status characteristics have their effect. A status characteristic is only predicted to impact behaviour or self-evaluation when it is salient in the setting. Although much work has been done on status characteristics theory and inequality in terms of gender, this research tends to overlook the intersections of gender, race, and ethnicity. Furthermore, it is essential to investigate the *variation* in the ways in which gender, ethnic, and racial beliefs might constrain or enable an individual's career aspirations and choices.

In order to grasp the ambivalence and variability of gender, ethnicity, and race as social forces, it is helpful to point to moments of 'social inclusion' and 'social exclusion' (Lareau and Horvat 1999). To understand the character of these moments, one needs to look at the *context* of social interaction. In this article, I use the term professional self-socialisation to specify how different professional contexts influence students' aspirations. Self-socialisation refers to an active process whereby young people, as well as adults, constantly integrate experiences of social selection and organisational participation into

their aspirations and skills in order to shape their careers (Heinz 1999). This implies an understanding that developing aspirations and making related decisions is an active learning process. Professional self-socialisation means that individuals adapt and redefine their aspirations to their positions' limitations in a professional field, regardless of whether the individuals lose or gain through such adaptations. This study analyses how students in three gender-segregated professions, nursing, computer science, and biomedical science, adapt and redefine their identities and form their aspirations in relation to the gendered, ethnic, and racial hierarchy of suitability in their professions.

The Norwegian context

Norway is a welfare state with high rates of social fluidity and generous universal social policies (Esping-Andersen 1999). Due to an extensive system of work-family policies (e.g. the availability of childcare for young children), women's employment rates are high compared to those in other Western countries (Aboim 2010). A symmetrical family model where women and men share paid and unpaid work equally is a national political objective. However, despite high gender-equality ambitions, Norway has a strongly gender-segregated labour market, with high numbers of women working in the public sector in health, social work, and education and high numbers of men working in the private sector in manufacturing and finance (Reisel and Teigen 2014).

Norway did not become a net immigrant country until 1967. Since the late 1960s, there have been varying levels of labour, refugee, and family migration from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, and in 2004 those immigrants were joined by large numbers of free-moving labour migrants from Central and Eastern Europe (Brochmann et al. 2012). In 2017, immigrants and their children made up almost 17 percent of the Norwegian population (Statistics Norway 2017). Immigrants are concentrated in unskilled work and are overrepresented in industries such as cleaning and public transportation, as well as in the taxi industry (Reisel and Teigen 2014).

Methods and research design

This article draws on 66 in-depth interviews with 36 students in a two-stage research design. I conducted interviews with the same individuals before their final exams and one year after graduating. The informants hold a bachelor's degree in either nursing, biomedical science, or computer science from an urban university college in Norway. These are professions characterised by strong gender segregation. Ninety percent of the students in nursing and biomedical science are female, while only 10 percent of individuals in computer science are female. These are also educational fields that are popular among people with an ethnic minority background in Norway. For instance, biomedical science is one of the professions with the highest percentage (60%) of students with an ethnic minority background at the university college.

Informants were recruited by visiting lectures, seminars, and advisor meetings. The sample consisted of 21 women and 15 men, of whom 14 had immigrated themselves or have parents who immigrated to Norway from Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Lebanon, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Turkey, and Poland. Due to restricted access while recruiting students in computer science (eight informants) and biomedical science (eight informants), the majority of the students in the sample were nurses (20 informants). 30 of the 36 informants were interviewed twice. In this article, I mainly use interview data from the first stage (before transition from education to work). In other publications (Orupabo 2016), I have focused on how the students experience recognition from employers or have to compromise their aspirations after the transition to work. All the interviews were transcribed in full. I used an open-ended and inductive interview technique to ask students to draw boundaries between what they consider necessary/unnecessary skills, attractive /nonattractive jobs, and important/irrelevant professional experience. Other questions concerned how the students experienced the curriculum in their area of study, the student environment, and future possibilities as professionals.

By addressing the students' local categorisations, the analysis avoids relying on pre-determined categories and rather focuses on the ways hierarchies of suitability are defined within a *specific professional context* (cf. Rodriguez et al. 2016). Ethnicity and gender as categories of difference were brought into the interviews towards the end of the conversation by using documents from the university college and my own field observations. While some students still started the interview by positioning themselves in gendered or ethnic ways, I believe that this was a useful strategy to contextualise difference and to make available alternative positions and narratives for the informants in that the interview setting (cf. Holstein and Gubrium 1995).

Cultural stereotypes and professional boundaries

Although the students were in their final year of education and were soon to enter the labour market, they experienced the process of becoming professionals differently. Some of them embraced their professional identity and looked forward to embarking on their careers, while others felt insecure about their competence, educational choice, and future labour market chances. This difference, I argue, had to do with the students' experiences of inclusion or exclusion in relation to cultural beliefs about their competence in their educational context. In other words, gendered, racial, and ethnic stereotypes either constrained or enabled their aspirations. In the following section, I distinguish between students who experienced inclusion and adopted a *hegemonic position* and students who experienced exclusion and adopted a *marginalised position*. In the processes of inclusion and exclusion, gender, race and ethnicity can be made significant or insignificant.

A hegemonic position

The students who embraced their professional identity and looked forward to entering professional life described common experiences of acknowledgement and inclusion. These experiences reflected two distinct, but intertwined, processes of inclusion. First, this group was positioned as competent by fellow students, and the group members also presented themselves as those who 'fit in' and are truly professionals. The informant group also used notions of an 'ideal competence' to delegitimise the presence and competence of certain groups of students. The symbolic boundaries and notions of competence that define the 'ideal worker' empowered this informant group. Second, most had experience with inclusion in a labour market context. Some had already been hired, while others had received recognition and positive feedback from supervisors and leaders during their internship period. In sum, these experiences of inclusion in the professional context led these individuals to adapt a hegemonic position before their transition from education to work. However, the types of competence and the groups seen as inheriting these competencies varied between the different fields of computer science, biomedical science, and nursing.

Computer science

In most industrial countries, women constitute a clear minority in the field of computer science in higher education as well as in the job market (Sørensen, Faulkner, and Rommes 2011). Over the past 20 years, the level of gender segregation in computing has even increased in Norway (Jensberg, Mandal, and Solheim 2012). Studies show that men dominate in prestigious areas in the organisation that offer the best career prospects (e.g. computer programming and systems architecture), while women tend to hold jobs and perform tasks with lower technological status, those that lead them away from the technological core area and career advancement (e.g. user-friendly applications and interfaces, administrative roles) (Holth, Almasri, and Gonäs 2013). A key argument in the literature is that these differences relate to the masculinisation of competence, and that such gender stereotypes about competence exclude women (Corneliussen 2003).

The computer science students in my study relate and adapt to the cultural stereotypes about their profession. Yet, their ranking of different groups and individuals as competent not only pertains to

gender but also to ethnicity and race. The male informants, irrespective of ethnic background, assumed and identified with a technical competence ideal. They positioned themselves as competent by taking ownership of formal and informal technical competence. Formal competence refers to skills in computer programming, while informal competence refers to men's experiences, knowledge, and ways of being. This masculinisation of competence became evident when the male students talked about their female peers. One man with an ethnic minority background said during the interview:

There's nothing socially wrong with them [girls], but they are in a field that they might have misunderstood. What is a computer engineer? Perhaps they believed that they could learn everything here.

Technical competence was seen as something that the men possessed before they entered higher education. Previous studies have conceptualised this competence as a 'boy's room competence' (Corneliussen 2003). The male informants presented this 'natural' ability and knowledge as an important resource in becoming professional computer scientists. By presenting themselves as natural computer talents, the male informants attached technical competence to men's inherent knowledge, genes, and destiny. By emphasising a range of distinctions (from those who are truly interested in computing to those who are not, from abstract thinkers to practical thinkers, etc.), the male informants positioned themselves as a group who simply were competent in computing. Although not all the men in my study were excellent in computing or possessed the 'boy's room competence', the cultural understanding about men's competence gave them a sense of safety and belonging in the industry.

How does this masculine ideal intersect with race and ethnicity? Men with both ethnic minority and majority backgrounds use this masculine competence to inscribe their professional self with value. For the women I interviewed, as I will show later, it was quite a different story. Irrespective of their ethnic background, the women had experiences of being 'out of place' and not 'fitting into' the standards that were defined as important and valuable. In computing, the symbolic boundaries that define the 'ideal worker' empower *all* categories of men and marginalise *all* categories of women. These intersections of gender, race, and ethnicity also became evident when the students described their labour market possibilities. As one male informant said, 'Unlike other industries, immigrants don't struggle with discrimination in computing, because the Indians have such a good reputation'. By referring to Indian people in computing, he uses an ethnic stereotype of Indians as brilliant and hard-working computer engineers. This stereotype is also used to position the computer industry as including. The male students with ethnic minority backgrounds perceive the computer industry as open for 'people like them', people with immigration background, brown skin, and a foreign name. In contrast to other industries, brown bodies are seen as normal, or even a 'bonus', in computing. The experiences of inclusion affected this informant group's aspirations and perceptions of their own opportunities in the labour market. They aspired to jobs as programmers and system analysts, and some dreamed of becoming a modern James Bond who protects national interests against foreign computer attacks. Regardless of ethnic background, the male students in computer science perceived that they had good opportunities in the labour market. The male students' identification with technical competence gave them self-value, a strong sense of professional belonging, and high aspirations for their careers.

Biomedical science

The second profession, biomedical science, is a highly female-dominated profession. In contrast to computer science and nursing, to my knowledge, there are no previous empirical studies of status distinctions or gender segregation in the literature on biomedical science. This might explain why the students did not know in advance that this was a female-dominated profession. Both male and female informants in this study were surprised by the large proportion of female students when they started on their bachelor's degree in this area.

The informants who experienced inclusion in this professional context were female. Regardless of ethnic background, the female students positioned themselves as technically competent. They did this partly by distancing themselves from the male students with an ethnic minority background and by emphasising their capacity to speak Norwegian fluently. As one of the female students with an

ethnic majority background explained: 'They misunderstand everything and keep falling behind. It's a language problem. And then it's ... many of them just aren't interested in biomedical science. But we are'. The female informants positioned male students with an ethnic minority background as a group who lacked language skills and who had a different approach to biomedical science; they were not seen as truly interested. Similar to the male students in computer science, the female informants drew boundaries between those who were truly interested and competent and those who were not. However, where technical competence was framed as masculine among the computer science students, it was interpreted and attached to specific forms of 'Norwegianness' among the female biomedical engineers. The ideal 'good worker' was established through ethnic boundaries. At the same time, this ideal was gendered in a way that made it possible for female students with an ethnic minority background to use the ideals in their boundary making. One female student with an ethnic minority background emphasised culture and a moral aspect when she described her fellow male students:

You have to constantly check things twice to make sure things are right. (...). Honesty is so important. Everybody makes mistakes, but you shouldn't blame others. These things get me so angry. Most of them are competent. But some of them aren't. When they work with girls, they are constantly checking if we got it right, because they don't trust us. That is not okay ... They're from Somalia and stuff ... They are very nice to us, but that they might have a different view of women, you know. I don't like people looking over my shoulder and checking everything I do.

Technical analyses in the lab requires accuracy and reliability. The honour in 'getting it right' and the social trust between professionals are important values and attributes among biomedical scientists. As the above quote illustrates, the female students positioned the ethnic minority men as lacking trust in women. Still, the female students used such narratives to position themselves as competent. When minority men kept 'checking everything' the female students did, they did not have the ability to impose their criteria of evaluation, or to disqualify women. Instead, the women, as the dominant student group and the ones who defined value in this profession, viewed this interfering behaviour by the ethnic minority men as backward. The ways-of-being and professional practices which the women perceived as important and valuable were seen as something that ethnic minorities, and ethnic minority men in particular, lacked. The female students also problematised what they perceived as the minority men's conflicting attitudes toward gender equality and attitudes against women:

We get to know quite a bit about each other when we go out in practice and how they behave. When someone perhaps can't be bothered to greet people by shaking hands in the workplace, then people talk about it. It's like, it's not exactly a good thing.

The above quote encapsulates the story of a male student from an ethnic minority background who would not shake hands with a female leader in the workplace, which was told by other informants as well. Previous studies have illustrated how gender equality is an important distinction of Norwegianness (Sümer, Halsaa, and Roseneil 2014). In Norway, the majority population is depicted as representing equality and modern values, while the minority is associated with patriarchal and unmodern values. In this context, the lack of language skills becomes a *moral category* that contains several attributes, such as accuracy, reliability, and honesty, creating ethnic and racial boundaries that distinguish suitable professionals from the unsuitable. Through establishing these boundaries, the women inscribed their professional selves with value by attaching traits such as commitment, accuracy, and reliability to their own practices and ways of being. In this way, their experiences of inclusion affected this informant group's aspirations and perceptions of their own opportunities in the labour market. Similar to the male computer students, the female informants saw a bright future for themselves in the biomedical science job market.

Nursing

Nursing, the third profession in this study, is one of the most gender-segregated professions in Norway. Research shows that men earn more than women and dominate in the prestigious areas that offer the best career prospects (e.g. anaesthesiology and surgical intensive care) (Karlsen 2012). Previous studies describe how female-dominated work has a feminised ideal of worth and competence. Some studies describe how the feminisation of skills creates a 'glass escalator' which pushes men into administrative

or managing positions, thereby advantaging men (Simpson 2004). Another theme in this literature theorises how men are dominated by women and excluded and marginalised by gender stereotypes (Harding, North, and Perkins 2008). What the literature in the nursing field has in common is that it describes how female-dominated work is feminised and that this gendering either excludes or advantages men.

The nursing students in my study do relate to gender stereotypes about their profession. Yet, their ranking of different competencies and notions of worth do not reflect the feminisation of skills which previous research has described as central in this profession. To the contrary, the students stereotyped the ideal competence as *masculine*. The ideal competence was seen as technical and involved using instruments, equipment, and standardised procedures in a hospital context rather than having a purely caring relationship with a patient in a nursing home. The students' interpretation of competence differs from traditional representations of nursing as 'high touch' care work that draws on traditional feminised skills of empathy, care and servicing others. However, the shifting ideals in nursing might be understood as an orientation towards medical doctors and ideals in the medical field. Auxiliary nurses are increasingly taking over tasks that traditionally were seen as core tasks for nurses, such as care and patients contact (Lund 2012), and medical students prefer technical procedures and patients that can be cured (Album and Westin 2008).

Both males and females associated men with technical competence and careers such as anaesthesiology and surgical intensive care. As one of the females stated, 'you won't find male nurses where there are only elderly people, patients that can't be cured, or where nothing happens'. However, *both* the male and female informants, regardless of their ethnic background, used this masculine competence ideal to present themselves as ambitious and competent nurses. Various categories of students used it to create a sense of belonging in the educational context. In contrast to the other two professions, the female nursing students, who constitute the majority group, did not use their gender status to disqualify men. In order to position themselves as competent, the female students disidentified with identities and competencies they perceived as feminine. They told me they were not 'good' girls, they were not 'girly' or 'respectable', they had 'never held a washcloth', and they presented themselves also as a 'rough' type that did not appear as caring.

These findings illustrate how the devaluation of activities or identities associated with women also can take place within a female-dominated profession. More importantly, it demonstrates that cultural stereotypes about competence (e.g. masculinisation of technical skills) are not necessarily significant in determining inequality between groups when individuals use them as *inclusive collective identities* that transcend one's sex. Despite the cultural masculinisation of competence, the ideal competence became a shared symbolic resource that students of both sexes could deploy in the educational context in order to position themselves as competent and create belonging in their professional community. This, I believe, explains some of the optimism among the nurses. The nurses in this study generally felt that they had good opportunities in their transition to work. A common feature was that they aspired to work in hospitals.

A marginalised position

The students who experienced marginalisation before the transition to work were insecure about their own competence and opportunities in the labour market. This had to do with the students' experiences with subtle and direct forms of exclusion. First, the informants had experiences of being 'out of place' and not 'fitting into' the standards that were defined as important and valuable by the student groups who occupied a hegemonic position. Second, the students had experiences with exclusion in a labour market context. In sum, these experiences of exclusion in a professional context led this informant group to adapt to a marginalised position in their transition to work.

In contrast to the other two professions, none of the informants in nursing described experiences with exclusion and marginalisation. However, as I have described in other publications (X 2016) in the labour market, the students with ethnic minority backgrounds experienced exclusion. They did

not get jobs in hospitals but worked in nursing homes. In my material, it was only the nurses with an ethnic majority background who managed to get jobs in hospitals and experienced inclusion in the labour market. In the educational context, all categories of people in nursing described experiences with inclusion and had a strong sense of professional belonging. However, this was not the case for the students in computer science and biomedical science where several students experienced exclusion in the educational context.

Computer science

In computer science, women from ethnic majority and ethnic minority backgrounds placed themselves outside what they considered to be the ideal competence and the professional community they associated with it. This partly had to do with feeling inadequate in computer programming, that is, lacking formal competence in that area. However, it was also based on experiences of not fitting into what they perceived as the more informal requirements of behaviours and interests in this field of study. Here, the 'boy's room competence' – for example, men's preferences, experiences, and knowledge of computer technology during childhood and adolescence, were emphasised. Even though some of the female students also had experience with computing during their childhood, the female students in computer science described a feeling of being 'out of place' in their choice of professional career. In other words, the gendering of competence constrained the female students' assessment of their own competence. Whilst one of the male students thought that he only needed to work a little bit harder when he received a bad grade in programming, one of the female students was convinced that she had chosen the wrong profession. As previous research has illustrated, when gender is salient and defined as relevant to performance, men assess their competence as higher than their equally qualified female counterparts (Correll 2004). The gender differences in self-evaluation of computing competence, in turn, constrained the female students' aspirations. One student with an ethnic majority background, who would soon complete her computer science education, felt that she had few opportunities in the labour market:

And actually, I've begun to look at other things, too, like stuff that doesn't have to do with computers. If I'm going to work with computing, I think I'll work with something that has to do with universal design. There are a lot of people who are a bit uncertain, like me, when it comes to their labour market chances. And I know one of them is going to start at the Police Academy. She isn't going to invest in a computer science career at all ... I think a degree in computing is nice to have anyway; it can be used for a lot of things. Lately, we have actually talked about it, as I said earlier, we feel that we are not qualified for very good jobs, you know. We are prepared to start pretty far down on the bottom.

It was unclear whether the informant's 'we' referred to other female students in general. Still, this example illustrates how the marginalised group in the field of computer science, the women, experienced ambivalence and felt insecure about their future prospects as professionals. Processes of self-socialisation are also embedded in structures in the labour market. One of the female students with a minority background took off her hijab and changed her religious markers in order to be recognised as competent. In contrast to the other informants, she was doing a master's degree. As she did not find relevant work after her bachelor's degree, she pursued higher education. While ethnicity was neutralised or used as a resource in the self-evaluation of the hegemonic group (men) in computing, it is the intersection of gender and ethnicity that constrain the female informants' self-evaluation and aspirations:

I wore the hijab when I finished my bachelor's degree as a computer scientist. It was written on my forehead that I was Muslim. I applied for many programming jobs, but I didn't get any. It was an incredibly tough period for me. [...] It's the computer industry that standardises people. If you wear a hijab or look different, it isn't any opportunities. They don't tell it in your face, but it's more like indirect racism. So I took off my hijab, but still, it is no guarantee. Because, first of all, I will compete with boys. And second, I have an immigrant background.

This informant represented a drastic example of the professional self-socialisation process in the labour market. The example also illustrates how gender, ethnicity, race, and religion intersected and constrained the female student in her transition to work. As previously illustrated, the male students with minority backgrounds include racial minority bodies in their perception of the ideal computer

engineer. This female informant, on the other hand, positioned her ethnic identity as out of place. She believes that she is losing 'double' by being an ethnic minority woman in the computer science industry.

Biomedical science

In the biomedical science educational context, markers of Norwegianness, such as ethnicity and language fluency, and moral boundaries, such as attitudes toward gender equality, excluded men with an ethnic minority background. This became particularly evident when the biomedical science students had to collaborate in the laboratory or on academic assignments. In these situations, male students with ethnic minority backgrounds were the least preferred partners. Even when teachers put students from different ethnic backgrounds together in working groups, collaboration seemed difficult. This informant group of male students with ethnic minority backgrounds also experienced exclusion in the labour market while the majority of the female students had part-time jobs at hospitals, jobs the students often got through collage training practice networks. Several male students did not get such relevant jobs in their practice placements. The men with ethnic minority backgrounds told me that they were concerned about whether they would get a 'job within their discipline' and believed the practice placement did not advance their opportunities because of discrimination and racism. The symbolic boundaries that defined the truly professional in biomedical science marginalised *all* the minority men in my sample. That means that ethnic, racial, and gender stereotypes also constrained the aspirations of men who told me they received good grades and spoke almost fluent Norwegian, and who shook hands with me, a female researcher. Although the students would soon have completed a three-year Norwegian degree, they were discouraged in terms of their own opportunities in the labour market. As one ethnic minority student explained:

At first, I was optimistic. I didn't think that it would be so difficult to get a relevant job. But now, I do. You send several applications, but never got any calls back. When you have a foreign background, they don't even call you in for interviews. It doesn't matter if you have good references, grades, or have impressed those you meet in the training practice. My name is Mohammed, but I don't use it any more. I use my middle name instead, because that name gave me problems. But still, I don't get a job using a different name either ... Now I've stopped being concerned about my future. And I think that's a problem. Because if you are concerned, I think you'll always try a little bit harder to get a job.

Several experiences with exclusion led to demotivation and a feeling of not having any possibilities at all. The informants who experienced exclusion in an educational context and in the labour market commonly felt ambivalent and insecure in their professional belonging and educational choices. A common feature was that these informants lowered their aspirations and felt that they needed to start in a job with low status, or appeared to be discouraged by the thought of getting a job that was relevant even before they had completed their educational degree.

Conclusion

The processes of exclusion and inclusion in higher education and in the transition from education to work represent important stages in the development of individuals' images of themselves as professionals. Students' face-to-face interactions with institutional structures and cultural symbols in education and working life set important grounds for professional self-socialisation. However, one influential strand of literature on aspirations and educational attainment, demonstrate how socioeconomic factors influence individuals' aspirations and mobility (Bourdieu 1984; Goldthorpe 2000). Although socioeconomic status is crucial for understanding young people's aspirations and choices, I wish to additionally highlight the importance of the *cultural context* in education and the labour market. Cultural and social capital, material constraints, and professional self-socialisation are all at work in the processes of choice and aspiration. Given the importance of these processes for reproducing inequality, this is fertile ground for future research.

This study illustrates how gender, racial, and ethnic stereotyping of competence constrain and enable students' aspirations. The outcome of these self-socialisation processes was *similar* for people in

the three professions, in the sense that students who experienced inclusion felt entitled and had high aspirations, while students who experienced exclusion had low aspirations and felt 'out of place' in their professional field.

Yet, although the outcome of the processes of self-socialisation was similar in the three professions, the *mechanisms* behind those processes differed between contexts. The intersection between race, ethnicity, and gender played out quite differently in the three professions. We have seen how the students occupying a hegemonic position, the gender majority in computing (men) and biomedical science (women), used their gender status to inscribe their professional selves with value and disqualify the gender minority group. For the student groups occupying a hegemonic position, this was also a process where gender outplayed the significance of ethnicity and race in determining the students' self-evaluations and aspirations. For the ethnic minority men in computing and the ethnic minority women in biomedical science, ethnicity was seen as irrelevant or treated as a bonus when they positioned themselves as professionals and drew boundaries of suitability. In contrast, it was precisely the intersection of gender, race, and ethnicity that constrained the marginalised students' aspirations. The men with ethnic minority backgrounds in biomedical science were constrained by gendered, racial, and ethnic boundaries, as was the case for the ethnic minority women in computing. The third professional context, nursing, stands out. Here the gender majority, women, disidentified with their gender status, and both men and women, regardless of their ethnic background, used the cultural stereotypes of men's competence to position themselves as competent. These results imply that while stereotypes may constrain action, they can also be drawn on as resources that different groups can deploy to gain worth.

The literature on status distinctions and gender-segregated labour markets give important insights into how gendered hierarchies of suitability reproduce inequality between women and men (Correll 2004; Ridgeway 2011). What is less discussed, and consequently less understood, is what happens to hierarchies of suitability when new categories of difference enter the playing field. Building on students' perceptions and actions in gender-segregated professions that have seen an increased influx of ethnic minorities over the past years, I suggest that the intersections of categories of difference must be studied by zooming in on the *specific context of social inclusion and exclusion*. The relationship between categories are not predefined but are closely related to concepts of competence and hierarchies of suitability within different professions. By addressing how social hierarchies of suitability are created and reproduced through students' cognitive, emotional, and interactional processes within specific professional contexts, I have developed the concept professional self-socialisation. Intersections of gender, race, and ethnicity can both be neutralised and amplified – it depends on how individuals negotiate and define value and label competence in their profession. Such processes of professional self-socialisation can operate as an 'invisible hand' that produces and reproduces segregated labour markets.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Jorun Solheim, Jon Rogstad, Mette Løvgren, Arnfinn Midtbøen, Marjan Nadim and the research group Equality, inclusion and migration at Institute for Social Research, for valuable comments on an earlier draft of the article.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Funding

This article is the result of the research project 'Integration, exclusion and job mobility in different types of Norwegian work organizations' (Project number 412.056), funded by the Research Council of Norway (RCN), and CORE- Centre for Research on Gender Equality [Project number 412078].

Notes on contributor

Julia Orupabo, (PhD in sociology) is Senior Research Fellow at Institute for Social Research in Norway. Her research interests are ethnic and gender segregation within the labour market and education. She is the author of the book *Women's jobs, men's jobs and immigrant's jobs [In Norwegian: Kvinnejobber, mannsjobber og innvandrerdjobber]*.

ORCID

Julia Orupabo  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8935-0327>

References

- Aboim, S. 2010. "Gender Cultures and the Division of Labour in Contemporary Europe: A Cross-national Perspective." *The Sociological Review* 58 (2): 171–196. doi:10.1111/j.1467-954X.2010.01899.x.
- Album, D., and S. Westin. 2008. "Do Diseases have a Prestige Hierarchy? A Survey among Physicians and Medical Students." *Social Science & Medicine* 66 (1): 182–188.
- Ball, Stephen J., Jackie Davies, Miriam David, and Diane Reay. 2002. "'Classification' and 'Judgement': Social Class and the 'Cognitive Structures' of Choice of Higher Education." *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 23 (1): 51–72. doi:10.1080/01425690120102854.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. London: Routledge.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1990. *The Logic of Practice*. Oxford: Polity Press.
- Brah, Avtar. 1996. *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*. London: Routledge.
- Brochmann, Grete, Anniken Hagelund, Karen Borevi, Heidi Vad Jønsson, and Klaus Petersen. 2012. *Immigration Policy and the Scandinavian Welfare State, 1945–2010, Migration, Diasporas and Citizenship*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Browne, Irene, and Joya Misra. 2003. "The Intersection of Gender and Race in the Labor Market." *Annual Review of Sociology* 29: 487–513.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. 1993. "Toward a New Vision: Race, Class, and Gender as Categories of Analysis and Connection." *Race, Sex & Class* 1 (1): 25–45.
- Corneliusson, H. 2003. "Male Positioning Strategies in Relation to Computing." In *He, She and IT Revisited*, edited by Merethe Lie, 103–134. Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk.
- Correll, Shelly J. 2001. "Gender and the Career Choice Process: The Role of Biased Self-Assessments." *American Journal of Sociology* 106 (6): 1691–1730. doi:10.1086/321299.
- Correll, Shelly J. 2004. "Constraints into Preferences: Gender, Status, and Emerging Career Aspirations." *American Sociological Review* 69 (1): 93–113. doi:10.1177/000312240406900106.
- Esping-Andersen, Gösta. 1999. *Social Foundations of Postindustrial Economies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Francis, Becky, and Louise Archer. 2005. "British-Chinese Pupils' Constructions of Gender and Learning." *Oxford Review of Education* 31 (4): 497–515.
- Friberg, Jon Horgen, and Arnfinn H. Midtbøen. 2017. "Ethnicity as Skill: Immigrant Employment Hierarchies in Norwegian Low-wage Labour Markets." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*: 1–16. doi: 10.1080/1369183X.2017.1388160.
- Goldthorpe, J. H. 2000. *On Sociology: Numbers, Narratives, and the Integration of Research and Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Harding, T., N. North, and R. Perkins. 2008. "Sexualizing Men's Touch: Male Nurses and the use of Intimate Touch in Clinical Practice." *Research and Theory for Nursing Practice: An International Journal* 22 (2): 88–102.
- Heinz, Walter R. 1999. "Job-entry Patterns in a Life-course Perspective." In *From Education to Work. Cross-national Perspectives*, edited by Walter R. Heinz, 214–234. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Holstein, J. A., and J. F. Gubrium. 1995. *The Active Interview. Qualitative Research Methods*. Vol. 37. London: Sage.
- Holth, Line, Abdullah Almasri, and Lena Gonäs. 2013. "Career Patterns for IT Engineering Graduates." *Economic and Industrial Democracy* 34 (3): 519–535. doi:10.1177/0143831X13492832.
- Jensberg, H., R. Mandal, and E. Solheim. 2012. *Det Kjønnsdelte Arbeidsmarkedet 1990–2010: Kontinuitet Eller Endring?*. Trondheim: SINTEF.
- Karlsen, Hilde. 2012. *Not So Unconventional after All: A Quantitative Study of Men in Careoriented Study Programmes and Professional Occupations in Norway*. Oslo: Avhandling (ph.d.) - Høgskolen i Oslo og Akershus.
- Kaufman, Robert L. 2010. *Race, Gender, and the Labor Market: Inequalities at Work*. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Lareau, Anette, and Erin Mc Namara Horvat. 1999. "Moments of Social Inclusion and Exclusion. Race, Class and Cultural Capital in Family-school Relationships." *Sociology of Education* 72 (1): 37–53.
- Levanon, Asaf, Paula England, and Paul Allison. 2009. "Occupational Feminization and Pay: Assessing Causal Dynamics Using 1950–2000 U.S. Census Data." *Social Forces* 88 (2): 865–891. doi:10.1353/sof.0.0264.
- Lund, E. C. 2012. *Virke Og Profesjon. Norsk Sykepleieforbund Gjennom 100 år (1912–2012)*. Vol. 2. Oslo: Akribes.

- McCall, Leslie. 2011. "Women and Men as Class and Race Actors." *Gender and Society* 25 (1): 94–100. doi:10.1177/0891243210389812.
- McDowell, Linda. 2009. *Working Bodies: Interactive Service Employment and Workplace Identities, Studies in Urban and Social Change*. Chichester: Wiley.
- Orupabo, Julia. 2016. *Kvinnejobber, Mannsjobber og Innvandrersjobber*. Oslo: Cappelen Damm Akademisk.
- Reisel, Liza, and Mari Teigen. 2014. "Det kjønnsdelte arbeidsmarkedet." In *Kjønnsdeling Og Etniske Skiller På Arbeidsmarkedet*, edited by Liza Reisel and Mari Teigen, 11–25. Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk.
- Reskin, Barbara, and Patricia Roos. 1990. *Job Queues, Gender Queues: Explaining Women's Inroads into Male Occupations*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Ridgeway, Cecilia L. 2011. *Framed by Gender. How Gender Inequality Persist in the Modern World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ridgeway, Cecilia L. 2013. "Why Status Matters for Inequality." *American Sociological Review* (Feb) 70 : 1–16. doi: 10.1177/0003122413515997.
- Ridgeway, Cecilia L., and Tamar Kricheli-Katz. 2013. "Intersecting Cultural Beliefs in Social Relations." *Gender & Society* 27 (3): 294–318. doi:10.1177/0891243213479445.
- Rodriguez, Jenny K., Evangelina Holvino, Joyce K. Fletcher, and Stella M. Nkomo. 2016. "The Theory and Praxis of Intersectionality in Work and Organisations: Where Do We Go from Here?" *Gender, Work & Organization* 23 (3): 201–222. doi:10.1111/gwao.12131.
- Simpson, R. 2004. "Masculinity at Work: The Experiences of Men in Female Dominated Occupations." *Work, Employment and Society* 18 (2): 349–368.
- Sørensen, K. H., W. Faulkner, and E. Rommes. 2011. *Technologies of Inclusion: Gender in the Information Society*. Trondheim: Tapir forlag.
- Statistics Norway, 2. March. 2017. Innvandrere og norskfødte med innvandrerforeldre. In *1.Januar 2017*. <https://www.ssb.no/befolkning/statistikker/innvbef/aar/2017-03-02>.
- Sümer, Sevil, Beatrice Halsaa, and Sasha Roseneil. 2014. "Gendered Citizenship in a Multidimensional Perspective: The Challenges Facing Norway within the Nordic Model." *NORA – Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* 22 (4): 283–298. doi:10.1080/08038740.2014.964769.
- Van Den Brink, Marieke, and Yvonne Benschop. 2012. "Slaying the Seven-headed Dragon: The Quest for Gender Change in Academia." *Gender, Work & Organization* 19 (1): 71–92. doi:10.1111/j.1468-0432.2011.00566.x.
- Weber, Max. 1968. *Economy and Society*, edited by G. Roth and C. Wittich. Vol. 1. Berkeley, CA: California Press.