

Ethnic minority students' career expectations in prospective professions: Navigating between ambitions and discrimination

Abstract

This study sheds light on how ethnic minority students in Norway seek to navigate occupational opportunities after graduating from professional bachelor programmes. Students' career ambitions and career expectations are investigated. The study adopts a comparative approach and includes students of Asian origin, Western minority students as well as majority students. The findings show that ethnic minorities have higher career ambitions than majority students, but their career expectations are not correspondingly high. The study identifies ethnicity both as a resource (ethnic capital) and as an obstacle in the pursuit of a professional career. Structural disadvantages such as perceived discrimination seem to curb the utility of ethnic capital in capitalising on occupational opportunities, particularly for managerial positions. Ethnicity as a resource seems to play a role among both Asian and Western minority students, and appears particularly strong in the development of career ambitions and in the efforts to pursue educational qualifications.

Keywords

Career ambitions / career expectations / ethnicity / ethnic capital / discrimination / minority student / occupational attainment / occupational inclusion / professions / social capital /

Introduction

The aim of this study is to reveal how ethnic minority students in Norway set out to navigate the occupational opportunities they will face after completing their professional bachelor programme. The focus is on minority students' career ambitions and two dimensions of career expectations: occupational inclusion and attainment. For the most part, studies on non-Western minorities have focused on labour market behaviour and career outcome. Less is known about the career expectations and ambitions of minorities and, in particular, the impact of ethnicity in the process of shaping a professional career. Existing empirical evidence does, however, suggest that ethnicity has a negative influence on career planning and expectations (Metz et al., 2009; Kirton, 2009). These results refer mostly to expectations regarding the type of occupation and largely exclude occupational integration.

The present study will add knowledge to the literature on the integration of ethnic minorities into professional careers. The focus is on students of Asian origin¹ in the final semester of their professional bachelor programmes. Professions are of particular importance because of increasing recruitment of ethnic-minority graduates to professional fields. Several questions arise frequently: Do ethnic minority students pursue careers in the professional fields in which they are trained? What kind of careers do they seek? Do they aspire to reach the top positions? To answer such questions, the study explores ethnic minority students' expectations of obtaining a relevant job after graduation, and their expectations of achieving a managerial position and a master's degree. The analytical emphasis is on how occupational opportunities and barriers are perceived by ethnic minority students and the resulting influence on their career decisions.

An important context for the study is the intergenerational transmission of social and cultural capital. The answer to the educational success of ethnic minorities, and especially students from South Asia is, according to Shah et al. (2010) found within the family and community structure. Ethnicity may become a distinct form of social capital built on culture endowments like obligations, expectations and norms. This specific form of social capital is called ethnic capital (Modood, 2004) whose essence is verbal support and encouragement aimed at promoting collective social mobility through education. Several studies confirm that ethnic minority youths receive tremendous support from their family and their ethnic community (Basit, 2012; Zhou, 2005). Previous research has mostly investigated the role of ethnic capital on minorities' educational attainment. In this article, the concept of ethnic capital is employed to understand the influence of ethnicity on minority student career ambitions and expectations. The results will shed light on whether ethnic capital plays a significant role in how ethnic minorities shape their professional careers.

The findings from this study contribute knowledge to the discrimination literature as well. The study do not only explores ethnicity as a resource, but also as an obstacle in the pursuit of a professional career. Although education is widely viewed as a means of countering ethnicity-related disadvantages in the labour market (Dale et al., 2002), highly educated non-Western minorities still seem to face considerable discrimination (Heath and Cheung, 2007). Minorities' lower returns on educational qualifications than majority with respect to employment are commonly interpreted as discrimination (Hermansen, 2013). However, this interpretation assumes that career ambitions are equal. This study compares the career ambitions of two minority groups and the majority group and, in so doing, explores the influence of ethnicity on students' career expectations — both through and beyond the effect of career ambitions. The "beyond" effect refers to the impact of ethnicity on

career expectations assuming an equal level of ambition among minorities and majority students. Only the beyond effect is relevant regarding ethnic discrimination.

This study adopts a comparative approach and includes three different groups of students: students of Asian origin, students of European and North American (EuNA) origin and majority students. Most studies on minorities and their expectations of a prospective career examine only minorities while ignoring the differences between the minority and majority groups (Kirton, 2009; Metz et al., 2009; Shah et al., 2010). A comparative design that includes both majority and minority is needed to identify the role of minority background. Including two (or more) different groups of minority students is preferable as it helps to reveal the influence of ethnicity over a comparison of minority and majority status alone. The present study includes 2 500 final-year students in bachelor programmes at several university colleges in Norway. Close to 100 of these students originate from Asian countries (mainly from Vietnam, Pakistan, Iran, South Korea, India and Turkey) and about another 100 students are from EuNA-countries (mainly from Sweden, Denmark, Bosnia, Lithuania, the United Kingdom, the United States and Germany). All students (73 per cent are female) attend a study programme in one of the following areas: health-related professions, pedagogy, social work, economics, engineering, and media studies.

Theoretical perspectives and research questions

Two concepts are particularly relevant to this article: the concepts of career ambitions and career expectations. In the literature, these concepts (as well as career aspirations and career preferences) are frequently used interchangeably. In line with scholars like Metz (Metz et al., 2009), we argue that distinctions among these concepts should be made. A distinction between career ambitions and career expectations is expected to add knowledge to understanding the process of individuals' career decisions and the barriers that influence such decisions. While ambitions are assumed to be developed relatively early in this process, career expectations are more closely connected to career decisions. A common assumption is that high ambitions are followed by high expectations and, conversely, that low ambitions are followed by low expectations. This pattern, however, might not pertain to all groups. Remaining aware of potential differences in ambitions between minorities and majority students is crucial for the interpretation of minorities' career expectations and particularly of how perceived discrimination affects their expectations. In the present study, differences in ambitions are taken into account by controlling for students' career ambitions in analyses of career expectations.

In this article, we understand career ambitions as the expressions of a desired end which is supposed to reflect an individual's inner wishes for a future career. We use student responses to gauge the importance of (1) 'opportunities for advancement' and (2) 'high income' in seeking a prospective job, as a basis for determining students' career ambitions. Career expectations are clearly more down to earth than career ambitions, and are assumed to take more account of oppositional factors likely to play a role, such as discrimination, family formation and demand for labour, etc. According to Johnson (1995), career expectations are closely related to career choice and achievement. He claims that career expectations represent career pursuits that an individual considers realistic and accessible. In the present study, we focus on students' expectations regarding occupational inclusion and attainment in their prospective professions. The analyses are based on

the responses of students in their final semester to the question of how likely they feel they are to have achieved a relevant job, a managerial position or a master's degree ten years into the future.

Previous studies indicate a strong relationship between students' choice of education and their career orientation. Rosenberg (1957) claimed that job values sort individuals into different occupations because they want to realise their own values and seek employment where the opportunity for realisation is most likely. The career interests and career plans among students in professional bachelor programmes are assumed to be fairly equal due to the close link between educational programme and future work tasks and regarding occupational opportunities as well. The assumptions of equal career plans and ambitions may, however, not apply to all students, but vary between majority and ethnic minority groups. Although they are students in the same country, they have different experiences growing up due to a variety of factors, some of which are important for their career decisions.

In Bourdieu's work on the reproduction of inequalities between classes, he identified cultural and social resources as the most important forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Social capital is acquired through social networks or group membership while cultural capital usually relates to individuals' educational achievements. Cultural capital covers symbolic expressions and behavioural dispositions which allow parents to become insiders in the society's educational and cultural institutions. Families of working-class origin possess fewer of the cultural resources needed to guide their children through the educational system and they may also place lower value on such effort (Bourdieu, 1986). However, the cultural capital class theory does not seem suited to explain mobility as is the instance with the Asian ethnic minorities whose success in education runs counter to the theory (Modood, 2012). Although minority students tend to have parents with a relatively low socioeconomic background, several studies show that families and communities of ethnic minority youths are tremendously supportive regarding the pursuit of education (Shah et al., 2010; Basit, 2012). Zhou (2005) seeks to understand the high educational achievements in some Asian communities regardless of socioeconomic background. She argues that the presence of dense co-ethnic networks can serve as a distinct form of social capital. This specific form of social capital is called ethnic capital (Modood, 2004). Strong pressure concerning norms in the community allows the group to monitor and enforce their children's educational activity. As such, the parents' socioeconomic class is less important for the children's educational trajectories.

In previous research, ethnic capital is primarily linked to educational achievements. But does ethnic capital also play a significant role in enabling occupational success? A study of ethnic minorities in Britain (youths and their parents) supports the idea that parents succeed in transmitting career aspirations to the next generation (Basit, 2012). The youths were at the stage where they make critical decisions about their careers and most of them had a clear vision of the type of career they wanted and how to pursue it. All parents in the study expressed high career aspirations for their children, with attaining a career as the main driver to social mobility. They were highly involved in their children's decisions concerning education and a career regardless of their cultural capital. Because of the strong motivational force in improving the life chances of young minorities independent of parents' cultural capital, Basit (2012) introduces the notion of aspirational capital.

The most relevant question, however, concerns the utility of ethnic (or aspirational) capital in achieving a career. Shah et al. (2010) argue that the utility of ethnic capital in social mobility depends on structural constraints such as ethnic discrimination by employers. This indicates that the utility of ethnic capital in career-related decisions is variable in the face of employer preferences. Scholars agree that ethnic minorities face considerable problems in the labour market, particularly

regarding occupational inclusion (Heath et al., 2008). However, the degree of penalty may vary between ethnic minority groups. Such penalisation is shaped by two main interrelated factors: the visibility of the group (measured by skin colour), and the cultural proximity to the hegemonic culture. Khattab (2009) claims that ethnicity, per se, is not an important factor but operates as a proxy. Arguably, skin colour and culture (religion) play a greater role as the prime motivator reinforcing disadvantage among certain groups while facilitating social mobility among others.

Based on recent research on minorities in professional careers, ethnic capital seems to be more valuable for professionals than for other employees. In professions like medicine, dentistry and nursing, research has demonstrated that the success among ethnic Asians in Norway is equally or even more common than among the ethnic majority population. The findings have shown income levels of minorities to be on par with, or slightly above, the majority's earnings (Drange, 2013; Karlsen, 2012). In professions with the highest degree of regulation, treatment of minorities appears to be egalitarian. Results concerning equal career development (income levels) among minorities and the majority in some professions are particularly relevant for the current study. This might be linked to the privileged position of professions in the division of labour. The professions have established 'social closure', with access to their social groups regulated through the educational system (Murphy, 1984). The weight given to education-dependent professions may downplay any distinctions based on ethnicity.

Professions are, however, not isolated from the biases and attitudes that underpin ethnic stereotypes and discrimination in society. As the media often cover stories on highly educated immigrants who are unable to find any employment or employment matching their qualifications, there is reason to believe that ethnic minority youths are more concerned about the transition from education to work even when educated domestically, and that they form opinions about which trajectories remain open or closed to individuals of ethnic minority origins (Orupabo, 2010).

The perception of ethnic discrimination and a greater inaccessibility to the labour market for ethnic minorities must be taken into consideration when interpreting career expectations among ethnic minorities. A strategy used in the present study to identify how perceived discrimination affects students' career expectations involves distinguishing between occupational attainment dependent on employer preferences (advancement to a managerial level) and attainment exclusively dependent on graduates' interest and efforts (achievement of a master's degree). Presumably, both are highly related to students' ambitions for a professional career.

Research questions

Research on the influence of ethnic capital on minorities' mobility project has typically focused on immigrants from Asian countries, particularly those in the Chinese, Vietnamese and Pakistani communities (Modood, 2004; Shah et al., 2010). A relevant question is, however, whether ethnic capital is a resource in other ethnic minorities as well and not restricted to Asian groups. Empirical knowledge in this area is insufficient. In the present study, we investigate the role of ethnicity as a resource and as an obstacle in two ethnic minority groups, among students of Asian origin and students of EuNA origin.

A major strength of the study is the ability to control, to a great degree, for human capital effects. Because the study programme and parents' level of education may substantially influence student career ambitions and expectations, it is important to control for such factors. Furthermore, we control for gender, family situation and age. To identify how ethnicity affects career expectations

both as a resource and as an obstacle, we also have to control for students' career ambitions. Controlling for career ambitions allows the estimates of the analyses to reveal the influence of ethnicity beyond career ambitions.

The research questions posed in the present study concern how Asian ethnicity affects students' career ambitions and career expectations relative to others.

- 1) Do minority students have higher career ambitions than majority students?
- 2) Do minority students have lower career expectations than majority students?
 - 2a) Does ethnicity affect student expectations of occupational inclusion and attainment differently?
 - 2b) Does ethnicity affect student expectations of achieving a managerial position and a master's degree differently?

It has to be accentuated that the category Asian origin are broader than in most previous studies of ethnic capital (Mamood, 2004; Zhoë, 2005; Shah et al., 2010). In the present study, minority students of Asian origin come from a variety of countries. This might have consequences for the results because the role of ethnicity may vary between countries of origin within the same grand category. It is beyond the scope of this study to investigate this heterogeneity empirically, but it must be taken into account when interpreting the results.

The Norwegian context

The backgrounds for immigration from EuNA and Asian regions to Norway differ considerably. Immigration from the EuNA regions are dominated by labour migrants accompanied by their families, with the exception being the large number of refugees migrating from the Balkan conflict in the 1990s. The former Yugoslavians are among the most successful integrated refugees received to Norway, mainly because of the specific settlement policy that secured employment and housing at an early stage. Compared with the average among non-western immigrants, Bosnians are distinguished by high employment levels among men and women, high incomes and a high level of participation in tertiary education by first generation immigrants (Henriksen, 2007).

Immigrants from Turkey, Pakistan and India came as labour migrants in the 1970s and immigrants from Vietnam and Iran came as refugees in the late 70s and 1980s. Since then, immigration has continued through the family-immigration programme. Norway does no longer accept regular labour migration from non-Western regions. Turkey is included in the Asian category because their background and living conditions in Norway is very similar to that of other Asian immigrants of that period (Henriksen, 2007; Blom and Henriksen, 2009). The division in main categories are made with reference to the different socio-economic status and different immigration regimes pertaining to the two groups. Some immigrants come to Norway solely for educational purposes, but the general rule is that exchange students shall return after graduation. It is unlikely that this study covers exchange students because of the language barrier: the questionnaire was in Norwegian and the study programmes surveyed are generally taught in Norwegian and include practice periods.

The definition of ethnic minorities based on own and parents' country of birth is not affected by citizenship. Immigrants and their Norwegian-born children may become naturalised citizens, but specific conditions apply, and the rate of naturalisation is relatively low and virtually zero among Europeans and Americans (Pettersen, 2013). Most ethnic minorities with legal and permanent resident status have denizenship that gives them the same social, economic and civil rights as Norwegians, and non-nationals can find employment in the civil serviceⁱⁱ (Brochmann and Hagelund,

2010; see also Heath and Cheung, 2007 p. 14). In short, they can access higher education and are eligible for financial support, such as loans and grants, from the Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund on the same level as Norwegian citizens and they are qualified for work in the public sector.

A central theme in Norwegian integration and inclusion policies has been the efforts to equip recent immigrants with the knowledge and resources they need in the labour market to become self-supporting (imdi.no). These policies are of limited relevance to the topic of this study as they target basic skills training, not higher education.

Since 1997, the share of first- and second-generation immigrants in higher education has been expanding (Daugstad, 2010), and from 2005 and onwards, the transition rate from high school to tertiary education has been higher among first-generation immigrants and their descendants than among the ethnic Norwegian population (Fjeldseth and Trewin, 2006). In 2007, 30 per cent of the population aged 19–24 was pursuing higher education, while the corresponding shares for first- and second-generation immigrants were 16 per cent and 35 per cent, respectively. Among the population aged 25–29, 15 per cent were enrolled in higher education, relative to 10 and 16 per cent of the first- and second-generation immigrants (Daugstad, 2010). Participation rates vary with country of origin: the participation rates of students from Vietnam, Iran, India, Denmark, the UK, the US and Germany are at least 20 per cent and 30 per cent in the first and second generations, respectively (Daugstad, 2010).

There is also evidence showing an over-representation of youths from Asia among high-school dropouts (Grindland, 2009). Thus, it follows that the recruitment of ethnic minorities to bachelor programmes is a result of several selection processes, which mainly relate to the migration process—that is, who immigrates to Norway, duration of residence and degree of integration by immigrants in their new country. The recruitment of majority students also reflects selection processes. Majority students who enter professional training broadly represent the socio-economic composition of the population; however, students of medium socioeconomic status attend university colleges to a higher extent than other groups (Helland and Heggen, 2013).

Data, variables and methods

The analyses are based on StudData, a database containing the results of a longitudinal panel survey covering students from 20 bachelor programmes at seven universities and university colleges in Norway. The respondents commenced their studies in the fall of 2004 and graduated in the spring of 2007. The data used in this article are based on a survey (questionnaire) carried out in 2007, a few months before graduation. The response rate was 67%.ⁱⁱⁱ

The data include responses from 2 556 students: 105 students of Asian origin, 93 students of EuNA origin and 2 358 native Norwegians. Most of the Asian immigrants originate from Vietnam (14), Pakistan (14), Iran (13), South Korea (13), India (10) and Turkey (9), and most of the EuNA students originate from Sweden (18), Denmark (14), Bosnia (9), Lithuania (7), the United Kingdom (6), the United States (6) and Germany (5).

Dependent variables

Three aspects of career expectations were investigated. The analyses were based on the students' responses to the following questions posed during the final semester of their educational programme: Imagine your life situation 10 years in the future. How likely are the following

statements to become true? 1) I have achieved a management position; 2) I have completed a master's degree; 3) the education programme is not relevant for my job. Responses were rated on a 5-point scale (1 = very likely, 5 = not likely at all). Inverted scales for statements 1) and 2).

For the variable of career ambitions, two job values were added together. The following statements were posed: How important are the following aspects when seeking a job? 1) high income 2) opportunities for advancement? Responses were rated on a 5-point scale (1 = not important at all, 5 = very important). The variable of career ambitions is used as a dependent variable in Table 2, Model 1 and as an independent variable in Table 2, Models 3, 5 and 7.

Independent variables

The area of origin was categorised into 1) majority students 2) students of Asian origin 3) students of EuNA origin. The reference category is majority students. Immigrants originating from other countries were not included in the analyses.

Gender was coded 0 for males and 1 for females. Age, another dichotomous variable, was coded 0 for respondents up to 30 years and 1 for those 30 years or more. The variable of having children was coded 0 for those without children and 1 for those with children.

The following categories were assigned to the types of education programmes: 1) health professions, 2) pedagogy, 3) social work, 4) economics/engineering, and 5) media subjects. The reference category was health professions.

The level of education attained by the respondents' parents was differentiated between high school and vocational education and between higher education of short and long duration as well. The level of education of parents was categorised into 1) no higher education 2) higher education of short duration 3) higher education of long duration 4) missing values. The reference category was no higher education.^{iv}

Statistical methods

In addition to estimating means and percentages (Table 1), we used ordinary least squares (OLS) linear regression analyses on career ambitions and three aspects of career expectations (Table 2). Dependent variables ranged from 1 to 5, with higher numbers corresponding to higher levels of agreement with statements concerning career expectations and career ambitions. Seven models were carried out, one model for career ambitions and two models for each aspect of career expectations.

Results

Descriptive statistics

Table 1 provides means and standard deviations regarding career expectations and career ambitions for three groups of students in Norway: students of Asian origin, students of EuNA origin and majority students. The results reveal that students of Asian origin reported higher expectations of earning a master's degree 10 years in the future compared with majority students. On a scale from 1 to 5, students who originate from Asian countries reported a mean score of 3.21, which is significantly higher than that reported by majority students (mean score: 2.73). Furthermore, the results show the same levels among all three groups of students in terms of expectations regarding

relevant job and management positions. No significant differences were detected between students of EuNA origin and majority students for any aspects of the career expectations.

[Table 1 about here]

In line with the assumption, students of Asian origin expressed significantly higher career ambitions than the majority students. On a scale from 1 to 5, students originating from Asian countries reported a mean score of 3.99, which is significantly higher than that reported by the majority (mean score: 3.55). Students from EuNA countries also reported higher career ambitions (3.78) than the majority.

The results in Table 1 show a similar gender distribution in the three groups of students (3 of 4 students were women in all groups). However, a greater proportion of EuNA students were older than 30 years and more often had children compared with other students. Further, the education level of the students' parents was not equally distributed in the three groups, with the lowest level of education among the Asian parents and the highest level among EuNA parents.

The types of study programmes pursued by the three groups of students also varied. Students of Asian origin more often enrolled in engineering/economics programmes compared with majority and EuNA students, but enrolment in a social work programme (particularly in comparison with majority students) was relatively rare. Students of EuNA origin were more likely to pursue media studies but seldom pursued pedagogy (compared with majority) relative to other students.

The variations among the three groups of students regarding career ambitions and career expectations may be due to differences among the groups in the types of programmes studied and parents' level of education. In the next section, we identify how ethnicity and other individual factors such as gender, parents' educational level, family situation, age and type of study programme relate to career ambitions and expectations.

Regression analyses

Table 2 shows the results of linear regressions (OLS) on students' career ambitions (Model 1) and career expectations (Models 2–7). Models 2 through 5 display occupational attainment (master's degree and managerial position), and Models 6 and 7 display occupational inclusion (relevance of job to qualifications). All the dependent variables are measured on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 = very low, 5 = very high).

The analyses include several independent variables: gender, region of origin, social background, study programme, age of respondents and number of children. The region of origin variable is divided into three groups: Asia, EuNA and majority. The group of majority students (Norwegians) is the reference group in the analyses. The social background variable, which refers to parents' educational levels, is divided into four categories. Low education is the reference category. Educational programmes are divided into five groups, with health profession study programmes comprising the reference group. Gender and the number of children of respondents are dichotomous variables, with men, younger than 30, and zero children, respectively, constituting the respective reference groups. In Models 3, 5 and 7, individuals' career ambitions (scale 1–5; 1 = very low, 5 = very high) are added as an independent variable in the analyses of career expectations. Several

interaction variables are included for the analysis of career expectations, but no significant results are found.

[Table 2 about here]

The results of Model 1 in Table 2 show that ethnicity significantly affects students' career ambitions. Both Asian and EuNA background have an impact on the level of students' career ambitions. The effects are positive for both (0.38 for Asians and 0.23 for EuNA).

Models 2, 4 and 6 in Table 2 show the effect of ethnicity on students' career expectations before controlling for students' career ambitions. The results show that ethnicity is significant only in relation to students' expectations of obtaining a master's degree. Students of both Asian and EuNA origin exhibit a positive influence (0.51 and 0.28, respectively) compared with majority students. Dramatic changes are detected after controlling for students' career ambitions. The results in Models 3, 5 and 7 show that effect on student career expectations is demonstrated only among the Asian group. The effect of EuNA origin on obtaining a master's degree is still positive but not significant, whereas the effect of Asian origin is still positive and significant (0.37). In addition, the effect of Asian origin on advancing to managerial positions become significant; however, the effect is negative (-0.27). Career expectations of a relevant job are still not significantly affected by Asian origin.

Models 3, 5 and 7 demonstrate that the relationship between individual ambitions and career expectations is strong, particularly with regard to obtaining a master's degree (0.34) and a managerial position (0.45). The relationship between career ambitions and expectations of a relevant job is negative and relatively weak (-0.13). Thus, Asian ethnicity influences students' career expectations significantly both through and beyond the effect of career ambitions.

The results also show the significant effects the type of professional bachelor programme has on career ambitions. Compared with health-related programmes, educational programmes in engineering/economics appear to affect students' ambitions positively. By contrast, programmes in pedagogy and social work have the opposite effect on career ambitions. These programme effects can be a result of selection. Because students of Asian and EuNA origin are overrepresented in the health related programmes, this could potentially influence the effects of ethnicity on ambitions. However, additional analyses show no interaction effect between ethnicity and study programme (not shown). Hence, the positive effects of ethnicity on career ambitions are found independent of professional bachelor programme.

Table 2 also shows that the impact of parents' educational level is not always positive. Parents' educational level does however, positively influence students' expectations of obtaining a master's degree and a job that corresponds to their programme of study. Furthermore, gender, age and having children affect students' career expectations. Despite gender equality in career ambitions, women have stronger expectations regarding obtaining a master's degree and a relevant job than men. On the other hand, women do express lower expectations of managerial positions. However, interactions between gender, ambition and career expectations were insignificant (majority students). A small number of Asian and EuNA students in the data limit the possibility to study interactions effects between ethnicity and gender. Having children affects students' expectations of managerial positions positively, but does not relate significantly to expectations of a master's degree and a relevant job. Further, students who are 30 years or older do have lower

expectations regarding obtaining a master's degree and higher expectations of a relevant job compared with younger students. Compared with majority students, a greater proportion of EuNA students are older than 30 years and have children, which might affect the results of career ambitions and expectations for this group. Further investigations show insignificant differences between majority and EuNA students regarding the effect of age and children on ambition and career expectations, thus the effect of EuNA origin on students' ambitions and career expectations are reflected by the EuNA estimates, adjusted for children and age.

Discussion

The aim of the study is to shed light on how ethnic minority students set out to navigate the occupational opportunities and barriers they will face after completing their professional bachelor programmes. Students' career ambitions and two aspects of career expectations are investigated: occupational inclusion and attainment. The findings show higher career ambitions among ethnic minorities compared with majority students, but minorities' career expectations are not correspondingly high. Ethnicity is identified as significant both as a resource and as an obstacle in the process of shaping professional careers. Expressions of higher career ambitions and expectations of pursuing educational qualifications are more prevalent among minorities than majority students, thus attesting to ethnicity as a resource. Further, minorities' lower expectations of attaining management positions than the majority indicate that ethnicity is an obstacle as well.

The results contribute knowledge to the literature on ethnic capital in several ways. Previous research has focused on ethnicity as a resource primarily within South-Asian (Modood, 2004; Shah et al. 2010) and East-Asian immigrant communities (Zhoe, 2005). The findings in the present study indicate that ethnicity may apply as capital to several Asian minority communities and outside Asian minority communities as well. Minority students both of EuNA origin and of Asian origin express higher career ambitions and higher expectations for a master's degree than the majority students (controlled for parents' educational level, respondents' gender, age and study programme). Present study are however, based on a broad categorisation of countries of origin for both Asia and EuNA. The role of ethnicity on students' career ambitions and career expectations will probably vary within these categories. Such variations have to be taken into account when comparing the results with previous studies that refer to a few countries of origin. The results are however in line with Basit (2012) who identifies aspirational (ethnic) capital within several ethnic minority groups in Britain.

Ethnic capital is primarily linked to educational success (Modood, 2004, Zhou, 2005, Shah et al., 2010). Present results indicate that ethnic capital might also play a significant role in the ability of minorities to succeed in careers as well. However, it might not be regarded as an equally important resource at all stages of a career. The value of ethnic capital appears to be particularly strong in the development of career ambitions and in decisions regarding the continuation of education, which is in line with previous research (Basit, 2012). In contrast, the utility of ethnic capital in career decisions regarding managerial positions seems to be limited. The latter is in accordance with Shah et al. (2010) who argue that the utility of ethnic capital depends on structural constraints such as discrimination, attitudes to gender equality, etc. Less attention has been paid to structural advantages and minorities' utility of ethnic capital. In Norway there is no tuition for attending higher education which may increase the value of ethnic capital regarding educational achievements. The fact that expectation of a master's degree is greater among minority students than majority supports this assumption.

Furthermore, the positive effect of Asian origin on expectations of earning a master's degree may reflect a competitive spirit among immigrants. Possessing a master's degree presumably makes individuals more attractive to employers in the labour market and represents a strategy for avoiding unemployment or employment unrelated to qualifications after graduation. This is in line with a Swedish study showing that minority youths overinvest in education because they expect their entry into the labour market to be more restrictive because of the greater likelihood of encountering discrimination (Nordin and Rooth, 2007).

These findings also contribute to the discrimination literature. High career ambitions among minority students compared with those of majority students have consequences for the interpretation of ethnic discrimination. Differences in return on educational qualifications between majority and ethnic minority groups are commonly interpreted as discrimination (Hermansen, 2013). The present study indicates that the level of discrimination is even more extensive. Based on the significant relationship between individuals' career ambitions and career attainment, the ethnic minorities' higher career ambitions compared with those of the majority implies that they should also have higher occupational attainment. In the absence of discrimination against minority groups, they presumably would have achieved a higher level of career success than the majority.

The effect of ethnicity (Asian origin) on career expectations beyond the effect of career ambitions may be attributed to several mechanisms, with some clearly connected to perceived discrimination in the labour market for professionals. The most evident indication is the negative effect of ethnicity (Asian origin) on expectations of advancement to managerial positions. Compared with students of Norwegian origin, those of Asian origin expect to encounter greater problems in achieving top positions. This seems not to concern students of EuNA origin. The results support a widespread assumption that minorities of Asian origin are more subject to discrimination in the Norwegian labour market than immigrants from Western countries because of skin colour and culture (Khattab, 2009).

However, it is surprising that students of Asian origin, compared with those of Norwegian origin, do not expect to encounter greater problems in obtaining a relevant job after graduation. The present study shows, in contrast to previous research (Heath et al. 2008), that students of Asian origin seem to encounter relatively fewer problems upon entry into the labour market than at later career stages. Research has suggested, however, that in an effort to overcome disadvantages associated with entry into the labour market, minority students work harder in their studies than majority students (Lauglo, 1999).

An alternative explanation is related to choice of study programme. It is important to recognise the variation in study programmes among the three groups of students included in this article. The finding that minority and majority students have the same level of expectations with regard to inclusion in a profession after graduation may be attributed to specific characteristics of specific professions, which calls for a contextualisation of minority students' career expectations.

Because the present study includes specific professions (study programmes) and a specific labour market (Norway), these factors must be taken into account when interpreting the results. As a whole, this study indicates that professions constitute an occupational category in which ethnic differences are mitigated, particularly with regard to occupational inclusion. Several reasons may be relevant, but the high correlation between the specificity of the educational training and the occupational tasks is highly significant. Job matching is thus less of a challenge for prospective employers and employees. Furthermore, occupational closure ensures limits on the number of competitors for jobs. Demand may surpass the supply of labour in certain professions, thus

restricting the opportunities to discriminate. Long-lasting shortages of personnel in the health sector, in primary schools and in engineering might explain why students' ethnicity does not have a major influence on their expectations of occupational inclusion in their prospective professions.

Conclusion

Ethnic minority students in professional bachelor programmes express higher career ambitions than majority students, but their career expectations are not correspondingly high. Naturally, career ambitions are highly correlated to career expectations, but ethnicity appears to play a role in the career expectations of students both through and beyond the effect of career ambitions. However, ethnicity does not have any systematic effect on career expectations. Relatively low expectations of achieving a managerial position among students of Asian may reflect perceived discrimination in professions. High expectations of earning a master's degree may reflect that high educational aspirations as well as high career aspirations are promoted in ethnic Asian communities. A master's degree presumably increases the ability of students of Asian origin to compete in the labour market while enhancing the social status of students' families in the Asian community. In contrast to previous research, the study reveals the same level of expectations of obtaining a relevant job after graduation among minority and majority students. The results might reflect increasing demand for qualified personnel in many professions and certain other specific characteristics of professions.

Ethnicity appears both as a social resource and as an obstacle in the process of shaping careers. The utility of ethnic capital is particularly strong in the development of students' career ambitions and in decisions concerning further education. Structural disadvantages such as perceived discrimination restrict the value of ethnic capital in the process of career decisions, particularly in advancing to positions of management. In contrast, structural advantages like the availability of tuition-free higher education might increase the utility of ethnic capital in achieving a master's degree. Contrary to previous studies, the results indicate that ethnicity is a resource for more minority groups than just those of Asian origin.

Notes

ⁱ Students of Asian origin refers to first- and second-generation immigrants from the Asian continent, and the term "immigrant background" refers to both generations.

ⁱⁱ Except some jobs in the legal service, the police, in prison and foreign affairs.

ⁱⁱⁱ (<http://www.hioa.no/Forskning/FoU-SPS/prosjekter/StudData/StudData-3-fase-2>)

^{iv} We also performed one regression in which we added the highest educational levels attained by mothers and fathers separately, but doing so yielded no significant results.

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Table 1. Descriptive results. Final-year students in professional bachelor programmes (N = 2556).

	Majority students	Immigrants of Asian origin	Immigrants of EuNA origin	All
<i>Career expectations,</i>				
mean (SD),				
scale, 1–5				
Master's degree	2.73 (1.29)	3.21 (1.34)*	2.98 (1.38)	2.75 (1.30)
Managerial position	3.39 (1.09)	3.22 (1.12)	3.39 (1.08)	3.38 (1.09)
Relevant job	3.59 (1.16)	3.44 (1.22)	3.45 (1.19)	3.50 (1.17)
<i>Career ambitions,</i>				
mean (SD),				
scale 1–5				
<i>% Parents' educational level a)</i>				
Low	39	42	33	38
Short higher educ.	42	33	35	41
Long higher educ.	18	18	26	18
Missing	2	8	5	3
Sum	101	101	99	100
<i>% Study programme b)</i>				
Health professions	39	48	40	40
Pedagogy	28	20	16	27
Social work	21	9	26	20
Engineering/ economics/media studies	13	23	17	14
Sum	101	100	99	101
<i>% Individual characteristics</i>				

Have children	16	14	31*	17
Age, 30 yrs or more	18	20	40*	19
Women	73	76	75	73
N	2358	105	93	2556

*Significant difference ($p < 0.05$) from majority

a) Pearson chi-square (2-sided) $p = 0.000$

b) Pearson chi-square (2-sided) $p = 0.001$

Table 2. Career ambitions and career expectations among final-year students in professional bachelor programmes. Linear regression analyses. Unstandardised coefficients (standard error).

	Career ambitions	Expectations of master's degree		Expectations of managerial position		Expectations of relevant job	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Women	0.01 (0.03)	0.17 (0.06)*	0.17 (0.06)*	-0.29 (0.05)**	-0.29 (0.04)**	0.20 (0.05)**	0.20 (0.05)**
Asian origin (ref. majority)	0.38 (0.06)**	0.51 (0.13)*	0.37 (0.13)*	-0.09 (0.10)	-0.27 (0.10)*	-0.16 (0.12)	-0.11 (0.12)
EuNA origin (ref. majority)	0.23 (0.07)*	0.28 (0.13)*	0.20 (0.13)	0.04 (0.11)	-0.06 (0.10)	-0.19 (0.12)	-0.16 (0.12)
Children (ref. no children)	0.14 (0.04)*	-0.03 (0.08)	-0.07 (0.08)	0.24 (0.06)**	0.17 (0.06)*	0.08 (0.07)	0.10 (0.07)
30 years or more (ref. less than 30 years)	-0.13 (0.04)*	-0.24 (0.08)*	-0.19 (0.08)*	-0.01 (0.06)	0.05 (0.06)	0.22 (0.07)*	0.20 (0.07)*
Parent medium education (ref. low education)	-0.09 (0.03)*	0.10 (0.05)	0.13 (0.05)*	0.03 (0.04)	0.07 (0.04)	-0.08 (0.05)	-0.09 (0.05)
Parent long education (ref. low education)	-0.06 (0.03)	0.40 (0.07)**	0.42 (0.07)**	0.04 (0.06)	0.07 (0.05)	-0.19 (0.06)*	-0.20 (0.06)*
Missing education (ref. health)	-0.19* (0.09)	-0.11 (0.17)	-0.03 (0.17)	-0.29 (0.14)*	-0.21 (0.13)	-0.23 (0.15)	-0.25 (0.15)
Pedagogy (ref. health)	-0.20 (0.03)**	0.06 (0.06)	0.13 (0.06)*	0.55 (0.05)**	0.64 (0.05)**	-0.14 (0.05)*	-0.16 (0.05)*

Social work (ref. health)	-0.23 (0.03)**	0.01 (0.07)	0.09 (0.07)	-0.13 (0.05)*	-0.03 (0.05)	0.10 (0.06)	0.06 (0.06)
Engineering/ economics/ media studies (ref. health)	0.19 (0.04)**	0.07 (0.08)	0.03 (0.08)	0.13 (0.07)	0.04 (0.06)	0.12 (0.07)	0.15 (0.07)
Career ambitions, scale 1–5			0.34 (0.03)**		0.45 (0.03)**		-0.13 (0.03)**
Constant	3.68 (0.03)**	2.51 (0.07)**	1.23 (0.15)**	3.42 (0.06)**	1.74 (0.12)**	3.45 (0.06)**	3.95 (0.14)**
<i>N</i>	2490	2472	2472	2480	2480	2480	2480
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	0.069	0.028	0.059	0.080	0.160	0.024	0.030

p* < 0.05, *p* =< 0.01.

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