

# Vocational education and training in Switzerland: A gender perspective. From socialisation to resistance

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## Abstract

In Switzerland, dual vocational education and training (VET), which alternates learning at school and training in a host-company, is the most common educational pathway followed by young people after compulsory school. The active involvement of companies in the system provides a strong tie with the labour market and its logics. Consequently, VET functions as its antechamber by preparing young people for gender segregation and discrimination as they are experienced in everyday working life. Based on a qualitative analysis from 46 interviews, this paper analyses VET as a place of occupational, but also of gender socialisation. During their first experience in VET, young people are confronted with the sexual division of labour and the hierarchy between the sexes. In parallel, they learn gender norms related to a specific occupation in a segregated context. At the working place, in relation to co-workers, socialisation can be quite rough for these young people. Finally, the paper will highlight how the apprentices renegotiate the norms and codes and how they resist these assignments, in particular using gender strategies such as defensive virility or muliebrity.

**Keywords:** VET; gender; sexual division of labour; social norms; socialisation; resistance

**Resum.** *La formació professional a Suïssa: una perspectiva de gènere. Des de la socialització fins a la resistència*

A Suïssa, la formació professional (FP) dual, que combina l'aprenentatge a la institució docent i la formació en una empresa mitjançant un conveni, és la via més seguida pels joves després de l'ensenyament obligatori. La participació activa de les empreses en el sistema dual facilita que s'estableixi un fort vincle amb el mercat laboral i amb les lògiques que el regeixen. En conseqüència, la formació professional funciona com una avantsala del món productiu, on els joves conviuen amb la discriminació i la segregació del treball en funció del gènere. Basat en una anàlisi qualitativa de 46 entrevistes, aquest article pretén analitzar la formació professional com a lloc de socialització laboral, però també de gènere. Durant la seva primera experiència en la formació professional, els joves s'enfronten a la divisió del treball i a les diferents normes existents en funció del gènere. Al mateix temps, aprenen les normes de gènere vinculades a les ocupacions específiques en un context segregat. En el lloc de feina, en relació amb els seus companys, la socialització pot ser bastant abrupta per

als joves. Finalment, l'article posarà en relleu com els aprenents renegocien les normes i els codis, com ells es resisteixen a acceptar aquestes imposicions i, en particular, l'ús de les estratègies de gènere.

**Paraules clau:** formació professional; gènere; divisió del treball; normes; socialització; resistència

**Resumen.** *La formación profesional en Suiza: una perspectiva de género. De la socialización a la resistencia*

En Suiza, la formación profesional (FP) dual, que combina el aprendizaje en la institución docente y la formación en una empresa mediante un convenio, es la vía más seguida por los jóvenes después de la enseñanza obligatoria. La participación activa de las empresas en el sistema dual proporciona un fuerte vínculo con el mercado laboral y sus lógicas. En consecuencia, la FP funciona como una antesala del mundo productivo, donde los jóvenes conviven con la discriminación y la segregación del trabajo en función del género. Basado en un análisis cualitativo de 46 entrevistas, este artículo pretende analizar la FP como lugar de socialización laboral, pero también de género. Durante su primera experiencia en la FP, los jóvenes se enfrentan a la división del trabajo y a las diferentes normas existentes en función del género. Al mismo tiempo, aprenden las normas de género vinculadas a las ocupaciones específicas en un contexto segregado. En el lugar de trabajo, en relación con sus compañeros, la socialización puede ser bastante abrupta para los jóvenes. Finalmente, el artículo pondrá de relieve cómo los aprendices renegocian las normas y los códigos, cómo ellos se resisten a aceptar estas imposiciones y, en particular, el uso de las estrategias de género.

**Palabras clave:** formación profesional; género; división del trabajo; normas; socialización; resistencia

### Summary

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## 1. Introduction

The Swiss context regarding vocational education and training (VET) and the labour market can be characterised by two major aspects. First, unlike in other western countries, upper-secondary level VET is the most common educational pathway followed by young people after compulsory education. In fact, nearly two-thirds of them choose this path (SERI, 2015), and a majority (80%) enter the “dual” VET, alternating practical training at a host company (3.5-4 days a week) and theoretical (and practical) learning at a vocational school (1-1.5 days a week). Second, the importance of gender inequalities in the Swiss labour market in comparison to other western countries must be underlined. Women’s wages are still 18% lower than men’s, they are still con-

centrated in few occupational sectors, overrepresented in the less paid jobs and underrepresented in the higher positions (OFS, 2015).

Due to the active involvement of companies in the dual VET, the system provides a direct link to the labour market and functions in a similar way with respect to segregation, gendered courses and discrimination. Therefore, studying VET allows us to develop a better in-advance understanding of the labour market's logics and to analyse the processes that begin during education and training and continue into employment. In addition to this, VET can be regarded as the antechamber of the labour market. We can also assume that it does not only share the same logics, but it also prepares young people for the world of work along with its inequalities and discriminations. We hypothesise that during VET, apprentices learn much more than their future occupation; they experience occupational and gendered socialisation at the same time. In this way, we can assert that the Swiss system is not free from discrimination or social reproduction (Lamamra & Moreau, 2016), even if little emphasis has been placed in the literature on analysing these aspects. The current paper will therefore mainly examine dual VET from a gender perspective,<sup>1</sup> and analyse it as a place where gender-based social relationships are built. Special attention shall be paid to the sexual division of labour and to the positions held by people of both sexes in the *social relations between the sexes* (D. Kergoat, 2000).<sup>2</sup>

Most studies on the gendered aspects of occupations focus on the labour market as well as on the (adult) workers themselves. It seems essential to look upstream, that is, to consider VET and apprentices in order to understand the mechanisms by which gender-based norms at work are learned. With little or even no mixing,<sup>3</sup> VET serves as a place for secondary socialisation, a space where young people are in the presence of gendered groups: their co-workers, among whom they experience occupational segregation and sexual division of labour for the first time. When relating to the other workers, apprentices acquire knowledge about the job, but they also learn what it means to be a professional where the work is mainly undertaken by those of one sex rather than the other. By extension, they learn what it means to be a woman or a man. This learning process is especially interesting to observe in a *pioneer*

1. As far as possible, the analyses presented here will also cover elements relating to other forms of dominating behaviour.
2. These two concepts are translated by the author. They refer to the tradition of French materialist feminism and their key-concept: "division sexuelle du travail" and "rapports sociaux de sexe".
3. As with the labour market, VET is highly segregated in Switzerland. For example, 92.6% of those entering VET in the health sector are young women, whereas 94.4% of those pursuing engineering and technical subjects are young men. Two areas in particular are more mixed: the arts (57.9% female, 42.1% male), where the numbers are relatively low (around 1,900 young people take part in the first year of training) and business and administration (59.9% female, 40.1% male), which accounts for a very large number of apprentices (around 22,000 young people in the first year of VET). This relatively high degree of mixing, in particular in business, conceals divisions within certain areas of work, with girls and boys not selecting the same specialisms (e.g. secretarial and accounting roles) (OFS, 2015).

*situation* (Croisier, 2002; Vouillot, 2007). In those working environments that may be considered as male bastions, there is considerable resistance to introducing members of the minority sex (Laufer, 2009; Legault, 2001; Lemarchant, 2007); there is also a reinforcement of the gendered nature of the job (Eckert & Faure, 2007; Guichard-Claudic et al., 2008; Molinier, 2000). Whether it takes place in a context of traditional workplace integration or in a pioneer situation, professional socialisation inculcates daily gender norms, especially during interactions between the apprentice and their colleagues.

The aim here is to examine the VET experience, including dropout and resumption, as a period of socialisation (or *acculturation*) at work, that means in particular at social and sexual division of labour. The paper will focus on gender socialisation – involving pressure to conform, reprimands or being brought into line – including situations where the young people are not in a pioneer situation. These mechanisms shall be illustrated in the first section.

The second section of this article shall accord apprentices the position of actors in the process of gendered socialisation. The experience in VET shall be analysed as a space of renegotiation of social norms and of experimentation for different forms of resistance (Eckert & Faure, 2007; P. Kergoat, 2006). Once young people are engaged in VET, they have a choice either to submit to the norms imposed upon them (without necessarily accepting them), or to resist them (by confronting them or sometimes by ending their training).

## 2. Theoretical frameworks

In order to analyse VET from a gender perspective, several sociological fields are necessary. The VET system, particularly in its dual form, must not only be approached from a perspective inspired by the sociology of education, but also that of the sociology of work. In addition, studies on career guidance can be useful. In the current paper, gender is also discussed as the result of a socialisation process, so the sociological literature on occupational socialisation must also be used. Finally, in order to discuss some resistance strategies of the apprentices, studies in the psychodynamic of work are essential to complete the theoretical framework.

Gender studies on education have mostly analysed what occurs in a classroom in terms of relations, interactions between pupils and teachers and among pupils themselves (Mosconi, 1994). They have also analysed the content of teaching in terms of reproduction of stereotypes and norms and finally focused on all that is learned through the “hidden curricula” (Baudoux & Noircent, 1997): gender ways of occupying the space and the position in the social relationships between the sexes. These results are quite useful in this study to understand how certain stereotypes or norms are widely shared, even from the young people (and the young girls) themselves and consequently accepted when transmitted (or reinforced) during the apprenticeship.

In order to analyse dual VET, studies in the sociology of work are also necessary. Actually, VET is not only the continuation of school, but also a new

place with its own rules, strongly tied to those of the labour market. Gender sociology of work focuses on several inequalities, such as recruitment discriminations, segregation processes or the sexual division of labour (D. Kergoat, 2000; Maruani, 2006). The apprenticeship, which can be analysed as an antechamber of the labour market, exhibits the same elements. The current paper will focus on the sexual division of work and hierarchy between the sexes.

Studies on career guidance can be useful (Vouillot, 2007). They give us interesting analyses of traditional (or stereotypical) choices, but also of untypical (or pioneer) choices (Croisier, 2002; Guichard-Claudic et al., 2008; Lemarchant, 2007). Those studies point out a paradox: girls who have good school results go on by choosing less gratifying career paths. This literature will be used in this article in order to understand the pioneer issue.

Analysing VET from a gender perspective requires using the literature on professional socialisation. This socialisation can be distinguished into three types: First, occupational socialisation, that is, the know-how, skills, norms and rules tied to a specific occupation (Dubar, 1996; Monchatre, 2010). Secondly, the socialisation to work, which means the learning of constraints, hierarchy, organisation and division of labour (Heinz et al., 1998; Moreau, 2003). And thirdly, organisational socialisation (Kramer, 2010), which transmits the specific norms, values and culture of a company. This contribution will focus on how gender socialisation can be transversal to all these various types of professional socialisations, or how professional and gender socialisations can be strongly tied.

Finally, the theoretical framework would not be complete without integrating a specific approach focusing on strategies used by workers in order to resist the labour market's constraints, the psychodynamic of work (Dejours, 1998; Molinier, 2000). These authors identify two forms of gendered defensive strategies. The first, named defensive virility, is typical for male-dominated environments. It is based on taking risks, showing off, and putting oneself and sometimes others in danger. The aim is to face up to the danger and to defy it so as to overcome the fear engendered by risk. The second, called muliebriety, is in fact a form of hyperadaptation to the world of work – an *oversocialisation*, whereby people (mostly women) conform to the assumed norms, real or otherwise, of the professional activity. These *gender* strategies will be examined here as forms of resistance used by the apprentices.

Considering the Swiss context as mentioned above and the literature on gender discriminations, as well as the general question of socialisation, the following research questions will be discussed in this paper. First, what is learned during the VET experience, or more precisely, is there a gender socialisation lying behind occupational socialisation? Second, what does this gender socialisation consist of? Third, do the young people resist the norms, the assignments they are confronted with? And how does this resistance take place?

### 3. Methodology

Qualitative research was carried out in two stages<sup>4</sup> in the Canton of Vaud (French-speaking region of Switzerland<sup>5</sup>) to determine the process that leads young people to end their apprenticeship prematurely (Lamamra & Masdonati, 2009) and to better understand their pathways after this termination.

#### 3.1. Data collection and analysis

In the first stage, 46 semi-structured interviews were carried out with young people who dropped out of dual-VET during their first year of apprenticeship. Quotas according to track followed during compulsory school, professional sectors<sup>6</sup> and gender were used. They allowed a certain variety and a parity in the population (23 young women and 23 young men). For the second stage, there was no specific selection, the 46 young people who had been interviewed four years previously were recontacted, which provided information about 42 of them. Several data collection methods were used: interviews (16), questionnaires (6) and administrative records (20).

The secondary analysis mainly concerned the first stage of research. This entailed reviewing the 46 interviews and carrying out a re-coding. The various elements analysed previously were subjected to a new thematic content analysis (Bardin, 1986). This revealed both differences and similarities between the situations experienced by the 23 young women and 23 young men, whether integrated in a traditional or pioneer occupation. Thanks to this secondary analysis, numerous examples of gender socialisation emerged, which was quite original, considering that the project was initially not focused on gender aspects.

#### 3.2. Participants

The young people were contacted via the TEM Association (*Transition Ecole Métier* – school-to-job transition), which is responsible in Canton de Vaud for following up young people who dropped out in order to help them get back into VET. The interviews were carried out on a voluntary basis. The individuals came from a variety of social backgrounds: 11 were from a working-class background (manual labour with or without qualifications), 18 had parents who were employees or in middle management (clerical work, employees and intermediate occupations), 8 had self-employed parents (working in small businesses such as shops) and 6 of them came from academic or managerial backgrounds. In 3 cases, no information was supplied regarding parental occu-

4. The first stage took place between 2006 and 2009, the second from 2010 to 2013.
5. The rate of apprenticeships and dropouts in the Canton of Vaud is quite similar to the national rates. There is no specificity, the choice of this region is due to easy access to the field (the young people were contacted via an association, see “Methodology. Participants”.
6. These sectors are food and catering, business, construction, economy and sales, industry including the automobile industry and crafts, “green jobs” and personal care.

pations, with one case concerning a family of asylum seekers with no right to work in Switzerland.

Most of the young people within the population had entered traditional occupations regarding gender (N=35). The young women (N=14) had taken up positions in sales, in the care sector, in some “green jobs” (florist), in mixed areas such as the service sector (commercial employee) and in some catering roles. The young men (N=21) had obtained positions in industries, including the automobile industry, crafts, green jobs, construction and catering, as well as in mixed sectors such as the economy, sales and service jobs (commercial employee).

Some of the young people made atypical choices in occupations mainly held by those of the opposite sex.<sup>7</sup> This concerned a minority of young men (N=2): one as a pharmacy assistant and the other as a hairdresser. Two types of situations should be distinguished as far as the young women are concerned. First, there are the *pioneers*, who take up positions in occupations that are mainly occupied by men (N=7); secondly, there are those in a *pioneer situation* – in an entirely male environment despite carrying out their apprenticeship in a traditional occupation for their gender (N=2). The pioneers took up the positions of horticulturalist, landscape gardener, bodywork painter and chef. The pioneer situations involved an administrative assistant at a brokerage firm and a sales supervisor at a shop selling audio products for cars, who encountered similar problems at their workplaces to those faced by the actual pioneers.

### 3.3. Decentring the perspective

As already said, VET is a privileged setting for observing the production and transmission of *occupationally gendered* norms. Furthermore, socialisation processes have been observed in relation to termination situations. The challenge is to examine the centre starting at the margins (Hooks, 2000; Mauger, 2006). We consider that the phenomena that we wish to analyse can be enlightened by the specific situation of dropouts, which allows us to view them more clearly. These results are not peculiar to dropout situations, but illustrate, or magnify, phenomena that generally operate in VET. This perspective of decentring explains why – using information that has been collected regarding dropouts – the issues examined here relate to VET more widely as a place of socialisation and a place where norms, especially those relating to gender, are renegotiated.<sup>8</sup> In addition to that, we can make the hypothesis that young

7. For the purposes of this research, we have classified any vocation where the proportion of one gender is below 33% as a *pioneer* vocation, in line with the Québécois model. This level allows us to include those jobs that are in the process of becoming mixed, but where the culture has not yet changed accordingly. Using this higher threshold allows us to demonstrate that, even in those roles where people of one gender take up almost a third of the positions, significant problems remain, and we might talk about pioneers, male or female, as if they are still blazing a trail.
8. The issue of termination of apprenticeship and the processes leading up to it shall only be addressed here indirectly.

people whose occupational choice was tied to gender expectations (in terms of strengthening gender identity or on the contrary in terms of crossing gender boundaries) or whose dropout experience can be connected to gender issues (for instance because they don't fit into the professional gendered norms in a specific occupation) are in a better position to reflect on gender norms and impositions than other young people.

#### 4. Results and discussion

The results<sup>9</sup> are presented together with the discussion in this section. In a first part, I will focus on the process of learning about the sexual division of labour (D. Kergoat, 2000) and about gender norms, as experienced by the female and male apprentices. These gender norms shall be examined both in traditional and in pioneer situations. I will then address the resistance strategies that young people have used during their experience in VET at the very moment of the breach and subsequently.

##### 4.1. Does gender socialisation lie behind professional socialisation?

###### 4.1.1. Learning sexual hierarchy

First of all, we should underline that VET is a setting where girls and boys are confronted with, and therefore come to understand, the sexual division of labour (Lamamra, 2011, 2016). Apprentices take up the least powerful positions in a company's hierarchy and are regularly assigned subordinate tasks, for instance maintenance. This allocation of tasks reinforces both the subordinate position of the apprentice and the sexual division of labour (Devreux, 1992). By focusing on the sexual division of labour, I am emphasising that the allocation of "the dirty work" (Lhuillier, 2005) reflects, above all, a position in social relationships (based on gender and also class) and with respect to the social division of labour. The allocation of "dirty work" provides a means of restating the apprentices' subservient position (Devreux, 1992). The gender analysis shows how the assignation of workplace tasks (maintenance, cleaning tasks) can be seen as an extension of domestic labour, taking a female connotation. In that situation, apprentices of whichever sex can, in a sense, be provisionally assigned the female gender. For the young women, this assignation marks their position in the *social relations between the sexes*. For the young men, on the other hand, it is merely a provisional assignation linked to their apprentice status, which applies only for the duration of their apprenticeship. Indeed, it acts as a spur for them: the challenge is not to end up in a

9. The excerpts stemming from the interviews were selected on the following basis: being representative of the different situations analysed (male or female in a traditional occupation, pioneer); being as diversified as possible (7 females, 5 males, in 9 different occupations); being meaningful with regard to the topics studied (actually, some interviews were quite interesting if considered generally, but no direct quotes could be used because they weren't illustrative enough).



subservient position which means carrying out tasks that are perceived as female work, thus resulting in gender mobility – in their case, a downgrading of status (Guichard-Claudic, et al., 2008).<sup>10</sup> In a mixed situation (either in genuinely mixed vocations or in the case of pioneers joining the organisation), there is a particularly asymmetrical relationship between the sexes. Laetitia, formerly a 16-year-old administrative assistant (Swiss; father unknown; mother: store manager), recounts her experience with a third-year apprentice:

He [the other apprentice] said to me, ‘I’m the boss here; you’re the maid.’

This extract reveals the different elements on which social and sexual divisions of labour are based: the division of spheres of activity, the world of work (the “boss”) being opposed to the domestic environment (“the maid”); the professional hierarchy, with the more experienced third-year apprentice having been relieved of some subordinate tasks; and finally sexual affiliation, with the boy finding legitimacy in no longer being assigned “female” tasks. Here, the sexual division of labour and strategies for avoiding it are learned in parallel (Devreux, 1992). Having provisionally been assigned domestic-type tasks as apprentices, boys learn that the sooner they move on from their apprentice status, the sooner they can get out of doing those tasks and pass them to those in a more subordinate position.

#### 4.1.2. VET, an apprenticeship in gender norms?

In parallel with learning about the job itself and about the sexual division of labour, apprentices also learn the gender norms that apply in different sectors of work.

##### *Men and virility*

In jobs where men are in the majority, there are often exhortations to conform to the norms of *virility*,<sup>11</sup> and in a rather brutal manner. Patrick, formerly a 16-year-old car mechanic (Swiss; both parents teachers) notes a certain roughness in working relationships:

I’m used to the insults... [...] So I’d get slagged off by my workmate every day. Not really hurtful, but it pisses you off after a while.

Becoming used to rough conduct thus seems an essential part of some male working environments. Class violence is also present, and this young man from a middle-class background (his parents are both teachers) was confront-

10. I have borrowed the notion of gender mobility from Guichard-Claudic et al. (2008), who use the term to convey social mobility in cases where the person chooses a non-traditional career path.

11. I distinguish *virility* from *masculinity* in the same way that Molinier does (2000). Given the pressures of the world of work and the exertions required by the job, virility can be used as a defence strategy and may be based on macho one-upmanship (defiant attitudes towards danger, suppression of fear or discomfort) and scorn for anything with female associations.

ed with some working-class male codes of behaviour (Beaud and Pialoux, 1999; Mauger, 2006). Insults from co-workers serve to remind the apprentice of his position in the division of labour. Learning virility seems to mean learning the accommodation of verbal, physical or symbolic violence. Matthieu, formerly a 16-year-old spare parts salesman (French-Swiss; father: policeman; mother: primary school teacher), has been a victim of this:

Well, I imagined it would be, just, more relaxed, that they'd be really into cars and there'd always be a nice atmosphere. Actually, though, I found out that, no, it's not really like that [...] it was rough, it was a rough atmosphere in the garage...

In this example, the young man keeps his distance from his colleagues (Eckert & Faure, 2007) in order to avoid virility identified as rough and associated with the world of mechanics, namely working class. Refusing virility without downgrading of status is only possible by finding a compensation, that is, by using another type of hierarchical distinction: that between white-collar workers (sales staff) and blue-collar workers (mechanics).

So, when young men do not match up to the norms of virility that are imposed upon them in their sphere of activity or if they refuse to conform, some of them attempt to *re-grade* themselves. They look instead to other social hierarchies, such as relationships between employees and workers. This is a form of resistance to the dominant pattern of virility in a working-class environment. By working more closely with women and service staff (working in sales, rather than as a mechanic), and by thus adopting patterns more associated with a middle-class background, this young man has reasserted his desertion from norms of virile behaviour. He has pursued a compensatory approach: what he loses in the gender hierarchy he *gets back* through the class hierarchy.

In male environments, fear, doubt and physical hardship are not discussed. One must be strong. Théo, formerly a 16-year-old horticulturalist (Swiss; father deceased, mother: nurse), comments eloquently on this point:

You've got to take away the garden waste bins. That was fine... Yeah, you get hold of it and it's like... pretty heavy. Sometimes when it's the 70-litre bins or whatever it is they hold... And if it's wet grass as well, that's quite a lot... lifting one of them... that's how it is...

[...]

it's okay... I still think it's pretty good, myself, I'd say it's... Yeah, it's not bad. Yeah, well, it's pretty hard but, em... Yeah, it was cool.

The young man emphasises the physical requirements of his tasks and his ability to carry them out, but also the pleasure that he experiences. This is the phenomenon of inversion: making strenuous work ("dirty work" to some degree) a pleasure (Dejours, 1998).

Young men learn both the gesture of an occupation and the denial of discomfort. There is an aspect of violence that underlies this learning process. Male groups of workers will stigmatise "non-conformists", calling into ques-

tion their virility. This is illustrated by the example of Alessandro, formerly a 19-year-old bodywork painter (Italian-Swiss; father: company manager; mother: nursing assistant):

I was pissed off that my boss was putting me down all the time, and there was this time when he even had a go at my family. He told me my dad didn't have any balls...

[...]

He kept putting me down. He called me stuff like 'useless prick', 'good-for-nothing', things like that...

Here, the supposed lack of virility on the part of the apprentice is extended to his father. As they are no longer considered men, on the basis that they do not have the associated attributes such as courage, bravery and strength, this father and son effectively undergo a downgrading of status in the dominated group of women. In that perspective, learning virility means not only tolerating insults, including those of a sexist nature, but dealing with rough behaviour, fear, hardship and discomfort. The challenge is to avoid non-recognition among the group of men. Co-workers play a key role during the training period, passing on their know-how to the apprentices while also wielding the threat of downgrading their status.

The denunciation of rough verbal behaviour (by the car mechanic) or of the sexist violence experienced (by the bodywork painter) suggests forms of resistance, not necessarily against the virile model of behaviour, but against the way in which it is passed down. Other strategies appear to emerge, in particular a move towards intermediate or feminised jobs, demonstrating a certain rejection of the working-class virile behaviour model.

### *Women who "need to have the right physique for the job"*

In jobs traditionally performed by women, certain exhortations are made in relation to physical conformity. Yasmine, formerly a 16-year-old dental assistant (Swiss; father: chef, then butcher; mother: pharmacy assistant, then housewife), thus learned that the point was not just to be motivated and competent but also to have the "right physique for the job" (Gasparini, 2007):

There was one [employer], he said to the counsellor [for the apprentices]: 'Yeah, I'm not sure, actually, if she were to get onto the chair...' That's discrimination, that, I mean, that shouldn't be allowed. If you have to be a model to get an apprenticeship now, I mean, I don't know where that's heading.

The job of dental assistant seems to be a representational activity (Imdorf, 2007), for which the point is to appear attractive (slim, charming and with perfect personal hygiene). To demonstrate compliance in this particular context contributes to providing patients with a reassuring environment, where the social order between the sexes is respected.

The dress code can be seen as an extension of physical conformity. If there is no uniform for the job, choosing suitable clothing can be a complex matter,

as was pointed out by Tiffany, formerly a 17-year-old administrative assistant (Swiss; father: heating engineer; mother: waitress):

I always dressed in a totally classic style, black and white, a decent suit or something like that, whereas the other apprentices are wearing something low-cut or a crop T-shirt, all the things I'd never wear for going to work...

Her choice is dictated by a certain representation of the image to be adopted in service jobs, but also by the unattractive figure of the female anti-model: the "whore", "bitch" or "slag" (Moulin, 2005, p. 185). The professional woman is hence attractive and appealing, yet without being vulgar. This illustrates the double standards that are typically imposed upon women: to be desirable yet not in a sexualised way (Moulin, 2005). On that basis, the young woman in this case has demonstrated that she quite understands the code of *tastefulness*, which allows her to keep her distance from the "style of working-class young people [low-cut tops, crop T-shirt], opting for that of the middle classes" (P. Kergoat, in press, p. 8). By doing this, she submits the gender norms in order to maintain her job.

When integrated, in a traditional occupation, the prescribed norms seem to be set out most explicitly in male occupations. Whereas failure to correspond to feminine norms leads to women being reprimanded or mocked, not abiding by the norms of virility endangers the individual young male, whose status risks being downgraded.

### *Pioneers, or the "wrong body in the wrong place"*

In a pioneer situation, gender norms have a different function, that of identifying *the Other*, signalling their outsider status and reminding them that they are not in their proper place and that their pioneering choice is a transgressive one. Male-dominated jobs that female pioneers try to enter often function as bastions (Marry, 2007), and those women who attempt to join them have stereotypical and caricatured gender norms imposed on them.<sup>12</sup>

The difficulties, motivations and even strategies of young women who have dared to brave such male bastions have been widely documented (Legault, 2001; Marry, 2007; Guichard-Claudic et al., 2008). Female pioneers must face brutal demands to conform before proving themselves and showing that they have earned a rightful place in the job and indeed among the workforce. These challenges, which are often physical, are meant to demonstrate the pioneer's inability to withstand the rigours of the activity in question, which will then be talked about among co-workers. Agnès, formerly an 18-year-old bodywork painter (Swiss; both parents in disability insurance), was not only

12. Male pioneers, as a very small minority among this population, are not covered here. While being welcomed into their roles (as a hairdresser and a pharmacy assistant), the two male pioneers placed most emphasis on the repetitive, monotonous nature of their job and on their being allocated maintenance tasks. The main issue here seems to be one of downgrading: aside from their status of apprentice, they have entered a feminised, little appreciated and poorly paid role offering hardly any long-term prospects (Croisier, 2002).

made to crouch down even though she had a knee injury; she was also directly confronted by her co-workers:

They [my co-workers] said to me: ‘Yeah, we were convinced that, what with all the crap we put you through, you’d have hated it and you’d have quit, given up and everything’

[...]

It was going okay at the start, but then later they started belittling me, like it was a case of [...] it’s not a job for girls, and I wouldn’t be doing bodywork for long. I was going to have it worse than a guy just because I’m a girl.

This pioneer is sent to a gender category. As she is not a man, she is not able to be a professional in that environment, where professional and sexual identity go hand in hand. This was what confronted Alexandra, formerly a 22-year-old apprentice chef (French, no family information):

The men were really macho, they were all like, ‘Women don’t have any place in this kitchen, and they’d be better staying at home doing the ironing, that would be much better!’

The resistance here is direct. The young woman is made aware that she is not welcome in this professional world. This is a particularly interesting example, as it shows the double-value system in operation. Indeed, whereas women are often urged to return to the domestic environment, and to the kitchen within that environment, chefs must resort to certain stratagems in order to make an association with the domestic sphere. This requires finding an alternative, poorly rated task to assign to the woman so as to confine her to a non-professional world where her work is unrecognised and unpaid. The use of this trick marks the imposition of a new sexual division of labour, using a link with established gendered tasks in the private sphere.

Women pioneers are constantly subjected to a stereotypical representation of femininity, from which they have sometimes sought to distance themselves. Their desire for gender mobility is thus denied. Furthermore, behaviour with a sexual connotation sometimes arises at the heart of the professional activity, sending a message to young women that they are outsiders in a male environment. Julie, formerly a 16-year-old landscape gardener (Swiss; father: mechanic; mother: secretary/receptionist), was subjected to distasteful jokes, lewd insinuations and, eventually, sexual harassment on the part of her employer:

‘Yeah, I saw an ad on the TV yesterday where there was a woman licking an ice cream just like that, and that made me think of you...’

[...] He [the foreman] goes: ‘We’ll finish off this terrace, then I’ll make love to you on the table and then we’ll start again in the afternoon’

In a pioneer situation, attacks are drawn from two registers: first, they adopt features of male virility (setting challenges, physical threats, aggressive acts) to remind the female pioneers that they are not men; secondly, they involve gender violence (sexism, harassment, evocations of the domestic

sphere, discriminatory acts) to confront them with the place that women are accorded in these working environments.

The fact that these pioneers denounced the discrimination to which they were subjected (the bodywork painter), and the macho nature of their working environment (the chef and the landscape gardener) allow us to draw up an interpretation of resistance. These pioneers are certainly pushed to the limit, and they “quit” (in so far as they terminate their training) but they do so without accepting how they have been treated (Mathieu, 1985).

#### 4.2. *Towards strategies of resistance to socialisation*

An outline picture of resistance has taken shape in the first section of these results. The second section that follows will further question the manner in which people respond to exhortations, assignments and reprimands in relation to gender conformity. Thus, two strategies – defensive virility and muliebrity (Dejours, 1998; Molinier, 2000) – employed during VET in response to these issues could be interpreted as forms of resistance.

Defensive virility, as mentioned before, is a strategy typical for male-dominated working environments such as construction and other industries, where the physical risks are considerable. Jacques, formerly an 18-year-old joiner (Swiss; father: retired; mother: home help) attempts to deny his fear in this way:

I had my accident in December 2005. It was okay, and I could still work on the machines, then suddenly, I don't know, it just happened in February-March, and from then on I started getting more and more scared... And as soon as the machine started up, I couldn't go near it. I still went and worked on the machines, but I had a little turn, then I had heart palpitations, I couldn't do it anymore. [...] When I realised I couldn't work anymore, I said to myself: 'I've got to stop!' But I still preferred to carry on, keep going, see how it would go, trying to beat the fear...

Despite his phobia of the machines, this young man attempts to conform to the virile diktat of “beating the fear,” thus demonstrating that he has understood the rules that apply to his job and among the workforce that he hopes to enter. As a collective strategy, requiring unanimous adherence, defensive virility is learned during professional socialisation while in contact with co-workers. In order to be effective, it requires unanimous adherence (Dejours, 1998).

The second strategy, muliebrity, which can be seen as a form of *docility* (Eckert and Faure, 2007), is typical for female-dominated sectors. As Leonora, formerly a 16-year-old dental assistant (Swiss-Kosovar; father: foreman; mother: sales worker), puts it:

I made so much effort, when something needed to be cleaned and when Amélie [not real name] was meant to do it, I'd say to her: 'I can do that if you want,' or if she dropped something, I'd pick it up for her. Even if she told me not to bother, I'd still do it...

These extreme forms of conformity to what may be expected at the workplace are typical of a strategy, which consists “in returning the relationship to the inherent pressures of the sexual division of labour by behaving as if the decisions were voluntary” (Molinier, 2000, p. 40). The female apprentices who adopt this strategy may demonstrate that they are conscious of what is expected in a labour market that has been organised according to the principle of a sexual division of tasks (see above for another example of this strategy: Tiffany’s choice of attire). This awareness may prompt them to take on the expectations that are implicitly placed upon them (submission, docility, kindness, interpersonal skills, care over their appearance and taking on the “dirty jobs”). This underlines the point that, sometimes, behind women’s practice of *pretending it’s okay* in this way, there is a form of resistance. “We also point out that, behind these individual practices of apparent full conformity lie practices of resistance [...] practices whose strength resides in their invisibility” (P. Kergoat, in press, p. 7). In the material gathered here, the forms of resistance that lie behind this supposed conformity were not necessarily apparent.

We notice that these two gender strategies are strategies of accommodation (Lamamra & Masdonati, 2009), that is, strategies that allow someone to continue with their employment or VET. This provides an initial indication of the necessity to conform to the applicable (including gender) norms for the job, in order to remain in it. By adopting such strategies, apprentices are not necessarily accepting these norms, although they are showing that they understand how they fit in. This may be properly described as *successful* occupational and gender acculturation.

## 5. In conclusion

Following this analysis, it appears that professional socialisation *inculcates* social norms, in particular those of gender. All this is transmitted on a daily basis through constant calls to adhere to the norm, reprimands and challenges.

Nevertheless, apprentices react and resist in the face of this socialisation. This resistance is not direct, however, so it is not always easy to identify examples of it. Indeed, some instances take the form of gender displays (Goffmann, 1977), whereby young people will take on the appearance of adopting the inculcated norms. We find the previous strategies of *pretending it’s okay* (P. Kergoat, in press), *hyperadaptation* (Molinier, 2000) or apparent *docility* (Eckert & Faure, 2007). This way of doing shows that apprentices have understood that they had to conform to them in order to pursue their training and maintain the support of their co-workers. But giving up doesn’t always mean giving consent (Mathieu, 1985). Yet this apparent acquiescence sometimes conceals forms of resistance.

One of the most easily identifiable forms of resistance is to denounce acts of discrimination and sexism experienced in VET. In such cases, where gender violence is one of the reasons for dropping out, early termination can be seen as a form of resistance: a refusal to give in and a desire to put an end to the experience of disqualification.

A further interesting strategy of resistance is the subtle play between different social hierarchies. The goal is not to remain in the most subordinate position (that of apprentice). Sometimes the existing hierarchy of seniority between apprentices (3rd year versus 1st year) is exploited; sometimes young people draw upon middle-class norms in order to distinguish themselves from working-class behaviours (codes of attire, social skills); and finally some people will play off the different professional hierarchies (white-collar versus blue-collar) in order to take distance from a specific working environment and its norms.

One final form of resistance sometimes involves terminating the training, although this does not necessarily mean giving in to exhortations. Terminating the training can signify a refusal to be constrained by the norms imposed by the working environment and an intention either to change role so as to pursue an atypical choice (female pioneers), to revert to a more compliant choice (reclassification) or to avoid a downgrading of status (male pioneers).

Young people are rendered particularly vulnerable by their apprentice status, but despite their subordinate position in the work organisation, they are able to renegotiate the codes and norms of the workplace, to make use of them; they've become real actors.

These results highlight the impact of gender norms inherited from secondary education, but most importantly underline the importance of gender socialisation during VET. Analysing vocational education and training provides a better understanding of how young people are "domesticated" in order to go into the labour market's gendered norms. In addition to that, the study has pointed out the violence of that specific form of socialisation. In consequence, these results explain the permanency of discriminations and inequalities in the labour market. Nevertheless, this paper has shown how young people are able to resist the assignments, how they can refuse certain norms. Looking at these young people resistance strategies gives us the opportunity to imagine a possible change. If these strategies could be supported, if certain dropout situations could be better analysed, the VET system could have an impact on avoiding further discriminations in the labour market.

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