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Challenges in School-To-Work Transition: Perspectives on Individual, Institutional, and Structural Inequalities

Editors

Brigitte Schels and Veronika Wöhrer

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Editorial

Challenges in School-To-Work Transition in Germany and Austria: Perspectives on Individual, Institutional, and Structural Inequalities

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Abstract
Transitions between schools, vocational education and training (VET), and work pose important challenges for young people that influence their well-being and social positioning now and in the future. The young people themselves experience the transition phase as the formation stage of their aspirations and goals. In this process, young people are confronted with the expectations and assessments of relevant others—such as parents, teachers, employers, and career counsellors—and by the requirements that are defined in sociopolitical and institutional contexts. In these contexts, criteria of successful transitions and risky transitions worthy of special support are made relevant. German and Austrian employment-centred transition regimes are characterised by relatively high standardisation and segregation as well as a strong VET system linked to the labour market. This thematic issue brings together contributions that examine challenges in these transitions from different perspectives and related facets of social inequality. The articles address different transitions (mostly school-to-VET, but also school-to-school or unemployment to work) and their different phases: aspiration formation, changing aspirations, challenges in transitions, and concrete problems in transition processes like disconnectedness or unemployment. The articles on social inequalities are related to class, ethnicity, gender, and (dis)ability. We also place importance on balancing different methods to bring together findings from quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews, and participatory research.

Keywords
employment-centred transition regime; school-to-work transition; social inequality; vocational education and training; youth

Issue
This article is a part of the issue "Challenges in School-To-Work Transition: Perspectives on Individual, Institutional, and Structural Inequalities" edited by Brigitte Schels (Institute for Employment Research / University of Erlangen-Nuremberg) and Veronika Wöhrer (University of Vienna).

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1. Introduction

For decades, research on school-to-work transition (STWT) has demonstrated the formative power of this life stage in developing social inequalities over the life course (e.g., Heinz & Marshall, 2003; Johnson et al., 2011; Shanahan, 2000). The transitions between schools, vocational education and training (VET), and the labour market pose important challenges for young people that influence their social positioning now and in the future. At the same time, these transitions have become increasingly uncertain and this is moderated, to different extents, by national institutions (e.g., Buchmann & Steinhoff, 2017; Mills & Blossfeld, 2005; Schoon & Silbereisen, 2009; Shavit & Müller, 1998).

Given the existing broad research on STWT, this thematic issue unavoidably falls short of adequately outlining every important facet. Hence, its contribution

is made by examining how young people have met STWT challenges in the past decade, how they form their aspirations and goals, and how they are confronted with the expectations of relevant others, such as parents, teachers, career counsellors, and (potential) employers. To provide a thematic focus, the contributions all investigate STWT in Germany and Austria—two countries with a similar employment-centred transition regime where relevant institutions, in particular schools, VET, the labour market, and further support from the welfare state, primarily prepare youth for working life (Walther, 2006).

2. Institutional, Individual, and Structural Perspectives in the Context of Austria and Germany

Using the examples of Austria and Germany, we look at two countries where STWT is organised in selective and standardised tracks (Kleinert & Jacob, 2019). Key decisions are already made upon completing primary school at the age of about 10, with lasting consequences for further education and labour market positions (Bol et al., 2019). The different track types after primary school can be briefly sketched as an ideal-typical academic track and vocational tracks (Nikolai & Ebner, 2012): The academic track offers eight or nine years of upper secondary education leading to university studies; vocational tracks provide four to six years of compulsory secondary education, which is either followed by vocational education in vocational schools or by apprenticeships, both of which provide occupation-specific training. Apprenticeships combine workplace training with general education at vocational schools (the "dual system") and lead to early labour market integration. They have been particularly well-recognised internationally for easing STWT and improving the match on the market (e.g., Kleinert & Jacob, 2019; Vogtenhuber, 2014). When comparing Austria and Germany, there are some clear differences: The German apprenticeship segment is quantitatively more important, while Austria's school-based vocational track is more differentiated regarding occupational opportunities and attracts more young people than Germany's. The Austrian school-based vocational system also provides direct paths to a university entrance diploma (Graf, 2016).

A smooth transition along the tracks from school to VET and employment is considered the ideal successful STWT, providing continuity through its chronological and social order (e.g., Heinz & Krüger, 2001; Walther, 2006). Such normative ideas about what the STWT should look like are powerful and formative for the sociopolitical perspective on young people. Deviations from the norm, such as unemployment or longer phases of occupational orientation, determine the sociopolitical criteria of "risky" transitions requiring special support, such as publicly funded support programs (Kohlrausch, 2012). Moreover, notions of ideal-typical tracks are also important for young people themselves. Their future orientations are guided by the prevailing norms of what is expected from them and what they can expect to achieve (Walther, 2006).

Unequal transition opportunities depend on several determinants and conditions (e.g., Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011). Market conditions are important because the number of young people facing problems in the transition increase when the markets are tight, either at the regional level or in times of economic crises (e.g., Hillmert et al., 2017), such as the Great Recession (e.g., Schoon & Bynner, 2019) or the Covid-19 crisis (e.g., Bacher & Tamesberger, 2021). Moreover, selection procedures are important, as access to the academic or vocational tracks depends on the achieved school qualification, either because the requirements are formally regulated or as gatekeepers use qualifications as signals in selection processes (e.g., Ludwig-Mayerhofer et al., 2019). In addition, opportunities in the STWT depend on the strength of familial resources and motives that vary across social class as well as by migration background and barriers, such as those related to health and disability, and gender differences (e.g., Achatz et al., 2022; Allait, 2019; Cousins, 1998).

Questions of success, failure, and their causes are often discussed at the policy level in simpler terms of market disadvantages versus social disadvantages than how they may appear and be subjectively experienced by youth (e.g., Allait, 2019; Walther, 2005, 2015). Political definitions may not match the young people's definition of their situation (e.g., Escott, 2012; Fuchs et al., 2018). Thus, further research is needed to expand questions about the persistence of known inequalities.

3. The Research Perspectives of the Thematic Issue

The articles in this thematic issue assemble different research perspectives about transitions in young people's educational and vocational paths. The contributions each address some of the multiple issues and factors that make up the STWT from the perspectives of young people. They enrich the topic by providing more depth through different perspectives according to an article's discipline, methods, and groups of young people in focus. Therefore, we aim to sketch a picture of this life stage through the interplay of the thematic issue's contributions.

The articles address different transitions and phases in the STWT: The transitions between school, VET, and the labour market define critical points of decision making or social positioning. Therefore, some contributions examine the situation of young people at specific transition points. For example, Pessl and Steiner (2022) examine the situation of young people with disabilities (YPWD) two years after leaving secondary education, while Patzina et al. (2022) investigate first employment. Furthermore, several contributions reflect upon the formation of aspirations and competencies before the transition to upper secondary education, as seen in Wicht

and Siembab (2022), Eberhard et al. (2022), and Klein et al. (2022). The study by Yildiz and Ohnmacht (2022) adds that formative experiences, such as discrimination, occur early in the educational career.

Moreover, the life course perspective emphasises the need for using longitudinal analyses to examine transitions as processes. Therefore, several contributions either deal with facets of stability or change in the transition, such as Mühlböck et al.'s (2022) work on occupational aspirations, Fischer-Browne's (2022) article on the compromise formation between occupational aspirations and training occupation, or Valls et al.'s (2022) research on the alignment of occupational and educational aspirations. Furthermore, some articles investigate individual developmental processes in the transition, such as Gellermann and Fuchs' (2022) work on autonomy, Fasching and Felbermayr's (2022) research on cooperation, Wintersteller et al.'s (2022) study on young people's demands, or insecurity by Thoma and Langer (2022). These studies primarily focus on agency and strategies that are developed by young people experiencing transitions.

The articles furthermore focus on different social categories: They investigate class, ethnicity, gender, and (dis)ability to emphasise social structures. By doing so, the studies enrich the literature on the lasting influence of familial background. The studies by Wicht and Siembab, Thoma and Langer, and Yildiz and Ohnmacht look at the aspirations and experiences of young people with "migration backgrounds," while Fischer-Browne shows how parental aspirations can hold children back in the transition to VET. Additional studies highlight currently under-researched social categories, like Klein and colleagues, who focus on incomplete families. Likewise, YPWD or health problems are important groups who have received attention in political discussion, but where evidence remains limited. Fasching and Felbermayr, as well as Pessl and Steiner, focus on YPWD, while the multifaceted consequences of health and sociocognitive well-being are broadly addressed by Patzina and colleagues. The "disconnected youth" is another important group that Gellermann and Fuchs examine; by definition, this group exists outside of institutional settings and is thus also hard to reach. Other contributions that look at young people who deviate from the standard transition include the study by Mühlböck and colleagues on the young unemployed and research by Wintersteller and colleagues on participants in publicly funded support measures for early school leavers. In contrast to these perspectives on disadvantaged youth, Eberhard and colleagues show that deviations from the norm may also mean that youth with higher social backgrounds aspire for relatively low-status occupations.

The thematic issue pays attention to balancing different methods, bringing together findings from quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews, ethnography, and participatory research. The contrasting research perspectives can be used to critically reflect on norms and expectations in the STWT. While it is important to uncover whether social categories translate into different probabilities of success, it is also necessary to understand underlying subjective experiences when ascribing categorisations of "risk groups" to young people or expectations of their success. While, for example, the quantitative study by Wicht and Siembab identifies that having a migration background makes a difference in gender(a)typical occupation choice, qualitative studies by Yildiz and Ohnmacht reflect the construction of migration background in the school context and Thoma and Langer carve out the contextual variations of immigrant insecurity. A further complementary approach can be seen in Pessl and Steiner, whose quantitative analysis demonstrates career disadvantage factors amongst YPWD, whereas the participatory study by Fasching and Felbermayr shows how this group of young people become active agents of transitions. While Gellermann and Fuchs conducted narrative interviews and analyse what factors contribute to the disconnectedness of youth from educational and training institutions, Wintersteller and colleagues involve young early school leavers in the research and describe their demands for educational and training contexts to be more inclusive of diverse life courses and needs.

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Article

Educational and Occupational Aspirations: A Longitudinal Study of Vienna Youth

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Abstract
During their transition from lower to upper secondary education, young people make educational and occupational choices driven by their aspirations. Such aspirations are shaped by the individuals' social environment, their idea of what seems achievable and desirable, and their experiences. Therefore, aspirations can change during the transitional phase. In this article, we explore the development of educational and occupational aspirations of young people over three years. At the start of the study period, the students were attending the lower track in lower secondary education, the so-called *Neue Mittelschule* (8th grade), in the city of Vienna in the 2017–2018 academic year. Drawing on the panel survey data (2018–2020) of the Pathways to the Future project, we simultaneously explore stability and change of educational and occupational aspirations. We describe different patterns of change in aspirations and analyse the influence of sociodemographic characteristics and prior achievement on these patterns. Using latent transition analysis, we identify 11 patterns of aspirations with important differences depending on social background. Most of the students have stable aspirations. However, the results show that school performance, migration background, and the level of parental education play important roles in explaining different levels and patterns of aspirations over time. These longitudinal analyses of educational and occupational aspirations provide important insights into the transition process.

Keywords
educational aspirations; educational transitions; low-qualified young people; occupational aspirations; social inequalities

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1. Introduction

Educational and occupational aspirations are key predictors of outcomes in the process of status attainment and status reproduction (Sewell et al., 1969). The formation of aspirations is therefore a central developmental task in adolescence. In the European context, the formation of aspirations, as well as trajectories after leaving compulsory education, have become less linear and more complex in recent years compared with the past (Hegna, 2014). So far, studies have looked at the development of and changes in either educational aspirations (e.g., Alexander et al., 2008; Bittmann & Schindler, 2021; Gutman & Schoon, 2018) or occupational aspirations (e.g., Basler & Kriesi, 2019; Miyamoto & Wicht, 2020), but not both jointly. The limited number of studies that consider both occupational and educational aspirations examine the relationship at only a single point in

time (Widlund et al., 2020). Research on development in both dimensions is scarce (Beal & Crockett, 2010). However, the alignment of occupational and educational aspirations is an important developmental task in creating coherent life trajectories and plans, setting the foundation for a smooth transition into the labour market (Sabates et al., 2011). Educational and occupational aspirations are linked to different social status positions and opportunity structures. So far, research lacks a longitudinal perspective on when and under what conditions young people develop aligned aspirations. To understand the complexity of the processes underlying young people's decisions, it is necessary to explore both educational and occupational aspirations simultaneously.

In this study based in Austria, we analyse the development of a combined measure of aspirations—the level of educational attainment and the level of occupational status aspired—of a group of young people who transition from the lower track in lower secondary education, the so-called *Neue Mittelschule* (NMS), to upper secondary education. Austria has a strong vocational education and training (VET) system, similar to the systems in Germany and Switzerland. In Austria, there are also tracks to combine vocational education with general education leading to a university entrance degree (Graf, 2016). In this context, the differentiation of occupation and education is particularly relevant as school leavers not only have to decide whether or not to continue education to achieve a university entrance diploma, but also whether they should undertake general education or vocational education. These decisions have lasting consequences for each individual's career as VET credentials are closely linked to later labour market outcomes (Bol et al., 2019).

VET is particularly appealing for young people in the lower educational track and those with lower family educational backgrounds (Becker & Hecken, 2009). This constitutes one facet of social inequality in the transition. Social differences influence key decisions, particularly when these decisions are made early in the educational career as in the group under consideration. NMS students are challenged to develop realistic career perspectives at the relatively early age of about 14, when they have to decide their next step after 8th grade. The international literature on the formation of (mainly educational) aspirations has shown that young people from low socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to lower their aspirations (Hanson, 1994; Johnson & Reynolds, 2013). On the one hand, adolescents may have to "cool down" unrealistically high aspirations (Johnson, 2001), correcting for misjudgements of the opportunities available in the educational system and the labour market. On the other hand, the downgrading of aspirations in low-status groups is a reflection of social inequality, which is independent of school performance; thus, such downgrading represents a loss of talent (Hanson, 1994).

In our study, we address this strand of research. We first describe and analyse the development of adolescents' educational and occupational aspirations in the transition in terms of the highest educational degree they would like to obtain and their desired occupation from lower to upper secondary education. Next, we assess the influence of sociodemographic characteristics and prior achievement on the students' aspirations. Specifically, we ask the following research questions:

1. Which patterns in the development of young people's educational and occupational aspirations can be discerned during the transition from lower to upper secondary education?
2. What is the relative influence of the socioeconomic profile and adolescents' prior school achievement on these patterns?

This study makes three contributions. First, we explore temporal patterns of educational and occupational aspirations jointly and assess whether they develop in parallel or separately from each other. By doing so, we attempt to discern whether social discrepancies are apparent not only in the level of educational and occupational aspirations, as in an isolated analysis, but also in their relational patterns over time. Second, we use three-wave longitudinal panel data from the time young people were in the 8th grade (lower secondary education), before they chose their educational or occupational track, to the 10th grade, when they have transitioned to upper secondary education or the labour market. Third, we study students from NMS (the lower track of lower secondary education), who tend to be underprivileged and to have fewer resources. According to official statistics, about 30% of NMS students have German as their first language versus 64% of all students in the higher track of lower secondary education *Allgemeinbildende Höhere Schule* (AHS; see Statistik Austria, 2016). Relatedly, the proportion of Austrian nationals in NMS is 60% versus 85% for AHS. This difference illustrates the specificity of our target group in relation to their cohort. This "within perspective" (Solga & Kohlrausch, 2013) allows us to investigate the degree of heterogeneity among school leavers from the lower track in lower secondary schools in a highly selective school-to-work transition system (Vogtenhuber, 2014). This focus is important as many social and labour market policy programs are targeted at this group. This study is informative beyond Austria's borders as evidence on the school-to-work transition from countries with a strong VET system is often considered to provide prime examples for reducing youth unemployment and occupational mismatch (e.g., Cefalo et al., 2020) and integrating lower qualified youth (e.g., Haasler, 2020).

Before we elaborate on the theoretical foundations of this study, we briefly introduce the Austrian educational system. Then we describe our data and methods and present and discuss results.

2. The Austrian Educational System and School-to-Work Transitions

The Austrian educational system is characterised by early tracking after four years of primary school. For lower secondary school, pupils are divided into the general track of lower secondary school (NMS) or the lower cycle of academic secondary school (the AHS, also called Gymnasium). Only students with good grades are admitted to the academic track. In the school year 2017–2018, 60% of students in the 5th grade were in the general track (NMS) in the whole of Austria, compared with 43% in Vienna (Statistik Austria, 2021a). Especially in Vienna, students in NMS include a high share of disadvantaged pupils, with about two-thirds of them having a non-German mother tongue (Statistik Austria, 2018). After four years of lower secondary education, young people transition to upper secondary education with different choices. Students who want to enter the labour market early have to continue in a one-year preparatory class (*Polytechnikum*) before starting an apprenticeship to become a skilled worker. The upper cycle of academic school (AHS) and colleges for higher vocational education (*Berufsbildende Höhere Schule*) prepare students for university entrance but require good grades. Furthermore, there is a three-year school-based track for vocational education (*Berufsbildende Mittlere Schule*) that does not entitle a student to study at a university. In sum, all students other than those who plan to enter AHS are confronted with occupational choices. AHS is the only path that does not include vocational training.

In Vienna, the majority of students in upper secondary education are in vocational education, and about 38% attend the upper track of academic secondary school in the 9th grade (Statistik Austria, 2019). Furthermore, only 8% of the pupils completing NMS shift to the academic track in upper secondary education (Statistik Austria, 2021b). In sum, our population is highly selected and comprises rather disadvantaged students that mainly enter vocational education. Therefore, most of these students are confronted with pressing occupational decisions that chart future educational and occupational trajectories.

3. Theoretical Background

3.1. Concepts of Educational and Occupational Aspiration and their Alignment

In the mechanistic model of status attainment (Sewell et al., 1969), occupational and educational aspirations are important channels through which status attainment takes place. Both types of aspirations are influenced by academic achievement, which varies according to social origin and by significant others (e.g., parents, peers, teachers).

Educational and occupational aspirations still differ substantially from each other in terms of the alternatives they offer. Educational aspirations are related to decisions on educational investments and decisions between different educational tracks, such as an academic or a vocational pathway at the intermediate level. In contrast, occupations are hierarchically differentiated in terms of prestige or socioeconomic status (SES), which also implies that there are finer distinctions between occupations that may be reflected in the aspirations.

A crucial point for consideration is the relationship between educational and occupational aspirations which has been addressed in concepts of alignment (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999). Some authors characterise students who know which career they want and the education they need to achieve that career as having aligned ambitions (Kim et al., 2019). The perspective on the alignment of occupational and educational aspirations may differ in the Austrian context where both occupational and educational aspirations are partly intertwined. As mentioned earlier, the educational choice to strive for a university entrance degree in AHS is not related to any occupational choice. These students know which educational certificate they want to achieve, although they may not have decided about their preferred future occupation. However, the NMS track in the Austrian system forces young people to choose, but if they regularly receive feedback on their performance and opportunities, they might have already formed appropriate aspirations (Buchmann & Park, 2009). A longitudinal perspective on alignment and different potential relations between occupational and educational aspirations seems promising in this respect.

3.2. Development of Aspirations in the Transition

Concerning the stability of or the change in aspirations, the literature contains differing traditions. One strand of research addresses the strong social imprinting of aspirations and its association with a relatively high stability of aspirations (Paulus & Blossfeld, 2007). This stability may be reinforced in a tracked educational system, owing to young people adapting their aspirations to the track they are in (Buchmann & Park, 2009; Geven & Forster, 2021). The composition of peers in a track in terms of social background, attitudes, and academic outlooks can shape aspirations (Nygård, 2017). School performance regulates the access to upper secondary education tracks and selection procedures in companies and vocational schools. Anticipating this regulatory function, young people's school performance mirrors their aspirations. Various researchers have observed that students in lower tracks develop negative attitudes toward school, see little future payoff of education, have lower educational aspirations, and have more pronounced feelings of futility than students in higher tracks (Lee, 2014). However, these effects are not uniform across all students on the same track, as Geven (2019) points out.

Socio-psychological concepts explicitly address the processual formation of career aspirations during

adolescence (Gottfredson, 1996). Adolescents make compromises within a field of occupations, which they previously deemed socially acceptable, and limit their goals to alternatives that they perceive as achievable and accessible. At this stage, young people increasingly look at their opportunity structures and evaluate them. This may imply that the formation of aspirations is accelerated during "hot stages" when decision deadlines approach (Heckhausen & Tomasik, 2002), such as the transition from lower secondary education to upper secondary education. Patterns of educational and occupational aspirations in this transition may thus be largely dependent on the youth's anticipation of opportunities. Gottfredson frames this as a process of social interaction with feedback from relevant others, such as teachers, parents, or career counsellors, that influences information gathering and career orientation (Gottfredson, 1996). These influences are likely to be stronger, the younger people are when they have to make decisions. Research findings suggest that there are group-specific formation processes. Studies from Germany for school leavers from the lower track who apply for VET indicate stability between aspirations from school days and the target occupations of the applications, with changes being rather observable in the group of young people with poorer school performance and low social background (Heckhausen & Tomasik, 2002; Schels & Abraham, 2021). Findings for the lower secondary school track in Germany show that youth increasingly develop aspirations in line with their school performance to avoid the risks of over- and under-aspiration (Heckhausen & Tomasik, 2002). A study from Switzerland, covering changes in the occupational aspirations over several years in the transition from youth to young adulthood, shows in particular how strongly the school track shapes aspirations, both for school attendance at ages 15–16 and for later changes (Basler & Kriesi, 2019).

The literature suggests that there are different developmental patterns of occupational and educational aspirations among school leavers from the lower track of secondary schools that may depend on the degree to which NMS students have explored their opportunities. Young people that have investigated their options may already have well-aligned aspirations. For others, the aspirations may align with their growing experience in the educational system. If aspirations before leaving school result from a lengthy orientation process taking account of opportunity structures, these aspirations are likely to be stable.

3.3. Social Differences

Social differences come into play in the formation of both types of aspirations. The process of developing aspirations is likely to reproduce social inequality because it is based on resources that are not equally distributed. The familial background—parental education, information, and migration background—is an important dimension of social inequality in the transition. First, families can differ in how well they support their children through the process and, second, they can have different motives for occupational and educational choices. Parents are a key source of information in the process of career orientation (Bryant et al., 2006), but the resources and support they can provide depend on their social status (Dietrich & Kracke, 2009). Overall, parents with higher education have a better understanding of the system and can better advise their children (Biewen & Tapalaga, 2017). This factor is significant for the formation of their children's aspirations and accordingly the adjustments thereof (Buchmann & Steinhoff, 2017).

Rational choice approaches address the class-specific cost-benefit analysis of educational alternatives. School performance as well as family financial possibilities, information, and motives play a role in the assessment (Boudon, 1974). In contrast, according to Bourdieu (1973), aspirations are subculturally shaped by the family of origin because they derive from past experiences and socialisation processes and are related to cultural capital and influenced by structural constraints. Although approaches highlighting social differences in aspiration formation are mainly rooted in research on educational choices, they are also applicable to occupational aspirations (Wicht & Ludwig-Mayerhofer, 2014).

The reasons for high aspirations at the end of young people's school years may differ depending on the individuals' social background and the type of school. In families with high cultural capital, aspirations are high because young people try to avoid intergenerational social downward mobility (Breen & Goldthorpe, 1997). Thus, for them, there is limited scope for changes in aspirations. Further, low SES students may have less knowledge about the relationship between educational options and occupations (Perry et al., 2016). However, recent empirical studies from other countries with rather comprehensive educational systems have found an increasing number of students with low SES aspiring to obtain skilled jobs that require university degrees (Frostick et al., 2016) and opting for educational investment (Baudelot & Establet, 2000). If these aspirations are unrealistically high, young people from low SES backgrounds will experience strong checks and balances after leaving lower secondary school. This situation leads to further adjustments of their aspirations and a tendency to downgrade them (Jackson et al., 2012). With our study, we test if these findings are transferable to the Austrian context.

Important differences also exist according to students' migration backgrounds (Geven & Forster, 2021). In general, despite lower educational achievement, adolescents with a migration background have higher idealistic and realistic educational aspirations (Engzell, 2019; Hadjar & Scharf, 2019). Moreover, they also have higher occupational aspirations (Wicht & Ludwig-Mayerhofer, 2014). Even when social background and school performance are controlled for, students with a migration

background tend to have higher aspirations than students from the national majority (Salikutluk, 2016). One explanation is that a familial desire for upward social mobility drives "immigrant optimism" (Kao & Tienda, 1995). At the same time, youth from migration families have deficits in information and knowledge about the educational system (Kao & Tienda, 1998), particularly because few countries of origin have a comparable vocational training system (Tjaden & Hunkler, 2017). Hence, we can also expect that processes of downgrading aspirations are present for youth with migrant backgrounds.

4. Data and Methods

4.1. Data

This research is based on longitudinal data from the Pathways to the Future project based at the Department of Sociology at the University of Vienna. The survey panel data were collected from 2018 to 2020 in a population of young people who were attending an NMS (8th grade) in the city of Vienna in the 2017–2018 academic year.

In the first wave of the project, all NMS schools in Vienna were invited to participate and further to gain consent from parents and students themselves. The population for the study includes all adolescents attending their final year in NMS in Vienna in the winter term 2017–2018. A multi-stage recruitment strategy via schools was used. All 117 NMS schools in Vienna were contacted, with a total of 351 classes and about 8,000 students. Ninety-six schools agreed to participate, constituting a 75% cooperation rate. In total, 3,078 young people from 236 classes started the survey and 2,854 completed it (for further information see Vogl et al., 2020). In the subsequent waves, 805 adolescents participated in wave 2 and 725 in wave 3; 1,000 students participated in at least two waves of the panel (Table a1, Supplementary File). As with all panel studies, sample attrition was a problem (Table a2, Supplementary File), which is particularly an issue in youth studies when adolescents change schools and have to be individually tracked for further panel participation. The greatest loss of the sample occurred between wave 1 and wave 2, during the transition from lower secondary to upper secondary education, when young people go to different schools. To deal with the missing data, we used full information maximum likelihood (FIML), and the final sample for analysis included 2,545 adolescents. Students were only eliminated from the analysis if they were missing on all observed variables used in the analysis. FIML is robust for missing at random data with the inclusion of missing-data-relevant variables in the model.

A comparison of official statistics from the school authority in Vienna on the cohort of students at NMS schools in Vienna in the winter term 2017–2018 with our sample shows little difference in the distribution of socio-demographic variables. Gender is equally distributed (Table a3, Supplementary File), while the place of birth has more variation, with the share of respondents born in Austria being 6% higher than in the population. According to official data, about two-thirds of students in the NMS cohort in Vienna were born in Austria and 26% of them have German as their first language. However, in our sample, 56% speak German with their mother, 58% with their father, and 93% with their friends. The official statistics and our study are not directly comparable because we refer to "mainly used language" while the official statistics refer to "first language." It is reasonable to assume that language barriers might have caused a bias towards fewer first-generation migrants—either at the respondents' level or due to missing consent from a guardian (e.g., if the parents were not able to read or understand the consent form). Accordingly, languages spoken by the respondents are biased towards German (Table a4, Supplementary File). Nevertheless, overall there are only minor deviations between the population and the sample, at least based on the limited number of socio-demographic variables available for comparison.

Furthermore, for investigating panel attrition and missing cases, we employed bivariate analyses and a RLog analysis with dummy coded dependent variable ("responded W2" vs. "missing"; or "responded W3" vs. "missing"). These analyses investigate whether missing cases are explained by educational or migration background or if they are distributed equally among the different groups. In our case, missing cases did not have any specific profile, either in wave 2 or in wave 3, and are thus considered to be missing at random. However, there were differences by gender and by mathematics grades in wave 2 and by English grades in wave 3. Therefore, we included these variables in the analysis. Including variables related to missingness as auxiliary variables reduces the risk for biased results (Graham & Donaldson, 1993).

4.2. Variables

Respondents were asked in every wave which highest educational degree they would like to obtain (*educational aspirations*). The response options were the following: "I would like to study" (university or university of applied sciences); "I would like a Matura" (without further study); "I would like to finish a school for intermediate vocational education"; "I would like to obtain a diploma of apprenticeship"; "I would like to have a compulsory school leaving certificate"; "I would like to have some other degree"; and "I don't know."

The desired occupation (*occupational aspirations*) was recorded in an open format in each wave of the panel. The responses were classified using the International Socio-Economic Index of Occupational Status (ISEI) from 2008 (Ganzeboom et al., 1992). ISEI is an established continuous measure of occupational stratification based on information about required educational qualifications and expected income and is expressed in a 10–90 metric. However, to include

students who did not know which occupation they aspired to, we categorised the variable on the basis of the distribution of responses in the sample: ISEI ≤ 40; ISEI = 41–56; ISEI = 57–70; ISEI ≥ 71; "I do not have a desired occupation"; "I do not know"; or "I would prefer not to work." Alternative approaches with established status categories such as EGP (Erikson & Goldthorpe, 1992) were tested and led to similar findings, but they were not nuanced enough, especially in the middle occupational segment, to reflect changes at the occupational level. Through the categorisation of the variable, some variance was lost on the ISEI scale. However, we conducted further analyses on occupational aspirations only with a metric measure, and we found little variation within the individuals across the waves.

Respondents indicated whether they were male or female (*gender*). There was a "diverse" option, but we did not include the category in the analysis because of the small number.

The variable *parents' educational level* captured the highest parental educational level: compulsory education, secondary education, or higher education.

The variable *migration background* included non-migrant background, generation 1 (not born in Austria), generation 2 (parents not born in Austria), and generation 2.5 (one parent not born in Austria).

Students were asked to report their school grades (*school grades*) in mathematics and English in the last report card. The possible answers were 1 (excellent) to 7 (fail).

4.3. Analytical Strategy

The current study examines youth's aspirations starting in 8th grade and the following two years using latent transition analysis (LTA) to explore the development of aspirations (Figure 1). This method is a type of latent Markov model (Abarda et al., 2020), and it is also an extension of the latent class analysis (LCA). LCA identifies unobservable groups within a sample using observed variables (Collins & Lanza, 2010). Therefore, LTA enables the analysis and description of stability or change in latent categorical variables over time. Furthermore, LTA models include multiple latent class variables from multiple time points and provide the transition probabilities of changing from one class to another, from a one-time point to another (Nylund et al., 2007). The use of a LTA model enables determining the change between groups over time. This method is useful for modelling categorical variables for which other longitudinal methods (e.g., growth modelling) are not well-suited. In this sense, for our analysis, the method has the advantage that we can describe the longitudinal patterns of aspirations including those for the undecided students. Another advantage of the LTA models is that covariates can be included in the calculation of the probabilities (initial probabilities of membership to a specific group and transition probabilities).

A three-step method was used to prevent changes in the number of classes at each time point (Asparouhov & Muthén, 2013): (a) explore measurement model for each time point, (b) explore measurement invariance, and (c) explore structural LTA model and specify the final model. Thus, we performed a series of LCAs and evaluated the appropriate number of latent classes in each wave based on the Akaike information criterion, the Bayesian information criterion, the sample-size-adjusted Bayesian information criterion, and the entropy value. In this way, one-class to seven-class models were estimated without covariates to assess the variance between indicators (Table a7, Supplementary File).

Once the number of classes was selected, we analysed the LTA model and the longitudinal measurement invariance of the model. In addition, the following covariates were introduced into the model: gender, parents' educational level, migration background, and school performance. To perform the analyses, we used MPlus 8 and maximum likelihood with robustness for non-normality of data to estimate the models and FIML to deal with missing data. We used a large number of random starts to ensure a global solution.

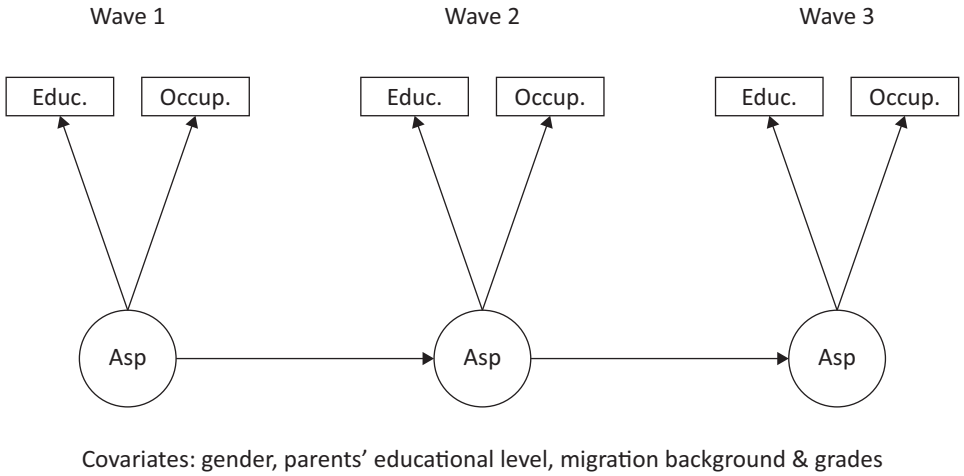

Figure 1. Conceptual model of latent class and LTA.

5. Results

5.1. Aspirational Classes

Based on the variables for the occupational and educational aspirations, the parameters suggested that a five-class model would be the optimal solution in each wave: (a) *high aspirations*, that is, students who aspire to a university degree and an occupation with an ISEI of more than 71; (b) *medium-high aspirations*, that is, students who aspire to Matura (university entrance certificate) and an occupation with an ISEI between 57 and 70; (c) *low aspirations*, i.e., students who aspire to have a diploma of apprenticeship or a compulsory school leaving certificate and an occupation with an ISEI of 40 or less; (d) *medium-low aspirations and educational indecision*, for students who aspire to an occupation with an ISEI between 41 and 56 and do not know about their desired education; and (e) *indecision*, that is, students who do not know which degree they would like to achieve and do not have a desired occupation (Table 1).

5.2. Longitudinal Patterns

After measurement of the longitudinal invariance of the aspiration classes in each wave, the LTA results with the covariates yielded 11 patterns in aspirations across the three waves of the panel (Table 2). These results show that 75.5% of the respondents did not change their educational and occupational aspirations over the three waves.

In this way, the main pattern is one of high stability. The high stable-aspiration trajectory accounts for about 27.8% of respondents; the low stable trajectory accounts for 23% of respondents, and the medium-high stable trajectory for 8.4%. In addition, 7.9% of the students consistently did not have concrete aspirations. Furthermore, about the same share of surveyed students had increasing (6.6%) or decreasing aspirations (7.2%). In addition, 4% were undecided in both educational and occupational aspirations and moved to high/low aspirations, while another 4% moved from high/medium aspirations to indecision. These results indicate that indecision does not simply dissipate over time.

A multinomial logistic regression was applied to predict individuals' membership in a pattern type, and we calculated the average marginal effects (AME) for an easy interpretation of the coefficients (Table 3). Our analysis of the impact of covariates on the development of aspirational patterns reveals that the mathematics and English grades are significant for some aspirational trajectories. The lower the grades (i.e., the poorer the performance), the lower the likelihood of having high stable aspirations; and the lower the grades, the higher the likelihood of having low stable aspirations. However, even controlling for school grades, the results show important differences

Table 1. Aspiration classes by wave.

	Wave 1		Wave 2		Wave 3	
Class	N	%	N	%	N	%
High	768	30.2	763	30.0	969	38.1
Medium-high	609	23.9	326	12.8	214	8.4
Low	617	24.2	660	25.9	708	27.8
Medium-low and educational indecision	287	11.3	341	13.4	343	13.5
Indecision	264	10.4	455	17.9	311	12.2
Total	2,545	100	2,545	100	2,545	100

Table 2. Types of aspiration patterns over time.

	N	%
High stable	708	27.8
Medium-high stable	214	8.4
Medium-low indecision stable	214	8.4
Low stable	585	23.0
Indecision stable	201	7.9
Increasing	167	6.6
Decreasing	184	7.2
Indecision-high	58	2.3
Indecision-low	34	1.3
High or medium to indecision	110	4.3
Other patterns	70	2.8
Total	2,545	100.0

Table 3. Covariate effects of the aspiration patterns.

	High stable	Medium-high stable	Medium-low indecision stable	Low stable	Indecision stable	Increasing	Decreasing	Indecision-high	Indecision-low	High or medium to indecision
	AME (S.E.)	AME (S.E)	AME (S.E)	AME (S.E)	AME (S.E)	AME (S.E)	AME (S.E)	AME (S.E)	AME (S.E)	AME (S.E)
Parents' educational level (ref. higher education)										
Secondary education	−0.18 (0.02)***	0.03 (0.02)*	−0.07 (0.02)***	0.10 (0.02)***	0.01 (0.01)	0.03 (0.01)**	0.07 (0.01)***	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)
Compulsory or less	−0.14 (0.03)***	−0.03 (0.02)*	−0.06 (0.02)**	0.07 (0.02)**	0.00 (0.02)	0.11 (0.02)***	0.10 (0.02)***	−0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	−0.02 (0.01)
Migrant background (ref. non-migrant)										
Generation 1	0.19 (0.03)***	0.06 (0.01)***	0.04 (0.01)**	−0.06 (0.03)*	−0.04 (0.02)**	0.02 (0.02)	−0.07 (0.02)***	−0.05 (0.01)***	0.00 (0.01)	−0.05 (0.01)***
Generation 2	0.08 (0.02)**	0.10 (0.01)***	0.05 (0.01)***	−0.15 (0.02)***	−0.02 (0.02)	−0.03 (0.02)	−0.02 (0.02)	−0.05 (0.01)***	0.00 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
Generation 2.5	0.02 (0.03)	0.10 (0.02)***	0.08 (0.02)***	−0.11 (0.03)***	0.00 (0.02)	−0.02. (0.02)	−0.01 (0.02)	−0.06 (0.01)***	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.02)
Grades										
Grades_Maths	−0.05 (0.01)***	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.08 (0.01)***	0.00 (0.00)	−0.01 (0.00)*	0.01 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.01)	−0.01 (0.00)**
Grades_English	−0.04 (0.01)***	−0.02 (0.01)***	0.00 (0.00)	0.06 (0.01)***	−0.01 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.01)	0.01 (0.00)**
Gender (control)										

*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001.

according to sociodemographic variables. In reference to the impact of the parents' level of education, we observed that students whose parents had compulsory education or less and students whose parents had secondary education were more likely to have low stable or changing aspirations (i.e., increasing or decreasing), rather than a high stable pattern. Specifically, students from lower social backgrounds (i.e., parents with compulsory education) were on average 14% less likely to have high stable aspirations, 3% less likely to have medium-high stable aspirations, and 6% less likely to have medium-low indecision stable aspirations than students with parents with higher education. Students with lower SES were on average 7% more likely to have low stable aspirations, 11% more likely to have increasing aspirations, and 10% more likely to have decreasing aspirations in comparison to students whose parents had higher education. On the other hand, young people whose parents had secondary education were more likely to be in the stable intermediate aspirations (on average 3% more likely than those whose parents had higher education; i.e., medium-high stable), to have low stable aspirations (10% more likely), to have increasing aspirations (3% more likely), and to have decreasing aspirations (7% more likely) in comparison with those whose parents had higher education. Therefore, students whose parents had higher education were less likely to have low stable and changing aspirations—that is, increasing or decreasing—and more likely to have high stable aspirations than students whose parents had compulsory education or less. Finally, indecision patterns were not clearly associated with parents' educational level.

Furthermore, concerning migration background, young people from generations 1 and 2 were more likely to have high stable aspirations than non-migrant students—on average 19% and 8% more likely, respectively. Moreover, generation 1, 2, and 2.5 students were more likely to have medium-high stable (generation 1: 6%; generation 2: 10%; generation 2.5: 10%) and medium-low indecision stable (generation 1: 4%; generation 2: 5%; generation 2.5: 8%) than non-migrant students. Students with migration background were less likely to have low stable aspirations (generation 1: 6%; generation 2: 15%; generation 2.5: 11%) and to change from indecision to high aspirations (generation 1: 5%; generation 2: 5%; generation 2.5: 6%) in comparison with non-migrant students. Specifically, if we look at generation 1, they were on average less likely to have indecision stable (4%), decreasing (7%), and high or medium to indecision aspirations (5%) than non-migrant students. Therefore, non-migrant students were overall more likely to have low stable aspirations and change from indecision to high aspirations.

6. Discussion

In this article, we applied LTA on panel data to explore how occupational and educational aspirations of students from the lower track of secondary schools in Vienna develop over a three-year period. The results reveal a range of longitudinal patterns of aspirations. Three-quarters of students had stable aspirations over the study period. We found a smaller number of students who had changing aspirations or patterns of undecidedness. Our study shows a high degree of alignment between educational and occupational aspirations, that is, educational and occupational aspirations have corresponding levels. Young people most often aligned their occupational and educational aspirations before the transition to upper secondary education (8th grade in this study). We only found a misalignment in the specific form of intermediate occupational aspirations but undecidedness about educational goals. The reason could be that young people may decide later whether they want to continue to a university entrance diploma.

Our interpretation is that aspirations are strongly shaped by options in the highly segmented tracks in upper secondary education. The majority of students from NMS show stable patterns because aspirations have been pre-adjusted during NMS and therefore there is no further "need" for adjustments. This could be due to the fact that they are in a strongly tracked educational and VET system in which they receive ongoing feedback on their performance and opportunities (Buchmann & Park, 2009; Geven & Forster, 2021). At the same time, this also means that young people at the lower school track are locked in, which may limit their social mobility in the future. Previous research on the development of occupational aspirations in Switzerland and Germany came to similar conclusions (Basler & Kriesi, 2019; Schels & Abraham, 2021).

School performance played an important role in the development of the level of aspirations. These results are in line with recent studies (Widlund et al., 2020) and show that obtaining good grades in mathematics is associated with a higher probability of a pattern of high stable aspirations and low stable aspirations when students have low grades. English grades in our study show the same statistically significant effect as mathematics grades for high and low stable patterns. However, even with controlling for grades, the results show important differences in patterns according to sociodemographic variables. On the one hand, migration background and a high level of parental education were particularly associated with different levels of high and intermediate stable aspirations. One possible explanation for these findings is that migrants anticipate discrimination at the lower occupational level that they can avoid with higher education (Tjaden, 2017). Moreover, non-migrant students and low parental education were related to the likelihood of being in the low stable trajectory. On the other hand, the changes in patterns were more likely among non-migrant young people and with those whose parents have compulsory education or less. Therefore, the lower the educational background, the more likely young people were to change aspirations after finishing NMS,

both downwards—as also pointed out by Jackson et al. (2012)—and upwards.

Young migrants from generation 1 were more likely to have high stable aspirations. Although previous research has highlighted the high aspirations of young migrants (Engzell, 2019; Hadjar & Scharf, 2019; Salikutluk, 2016) and less knowledge of the educational system (Kao & Tienda, 1998), our results indicate that young non-migrants were the ones who were more likely to have low stable and decreasing aspiration patterns. This finding is in contrast with our expectation that students with a (first-generation) migration background would adjust their aspirations downwards the longer they are in the educational system.

Furthermore, with regard to the high stability of aspirations of adolescents attending NMS during lower secondary education, social differences were particularly linked to a different level of aspirations and less to the likelihood of misalignment of occupational and educational aspirations. Concerning social inequality, however, this also means that young people's aspirations are locked in. Further research is needed to determine whether adolescents can also realize their aspirations, but it is obvious that even among young people with weaker resources, social differences continue to have a clear impact.

To conclude, our findings are exploratory and show development patterns of aspirations for the selected group of school leavers from the lower track of secondary schools in Vienna, Austria. Thus, the generalisation of findings and transferability to other contexts might be limited. In addition, some of the groups with clear changes in their aspirations had only low case numbers, which limits conclusions about these groups. Still, our results raise important questions for future research. First, the formation of educational and occupational aspirations of students in higher school tracks may differ because these students have more time until they have to make occupational choices. This raises the question of whether forms of misalignment and/or indecision are more prevalent when the transition to upper-secondary education is far away. Second, comparative studies between countries with a comprehensive education system, such as England or the United States, on the one hand, and countries with VET systems that are less intertwined with opportunities to achieve university entrance diploma than in Austria, such as Germany, could provide clarity in the question of aspirations (mis)alignment and indecision. Our results contribute to the debate on the development of aspirations in the transition from lower to upper secondary education and provide insights into the role of academic performance and sociodemographic characteristics of young people in explaining the different patterns of aspirations. Research is needed to explore the development of aspirations from the beginning of lower secondary education on a longitudinal basis in early tracking systems. In addition, there is also a need for further qualitative exploration of subgroups or mechanisms behind these patterns.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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Article

Pushing Higher or Lower? Divergent Parental Expectations and Compromises in Occupational Choice

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Abstract
Many adolescents in Germany are unable to realize their realistic occupational aspirations when they transition from school to vocational education and training (VET). However, little is known about the underlying circumstances and what the compromises look like when these adolescents come to take up a VET occupation. As parents perform an important socialization role, which is also influential in occupational orientation, this article examines the role of divergent parental expectations. Are parental expectations, which differ from adolescents' realistic occupational aspirations, related to the probability that adolescents will take up different occupations than they originally aspired to? Are relatively higher or lower parental expectations associated with a corresponding direction of compromise formation? Are there differences between men and women in the relationship between divergent parental expectations and compromise formation? This empirical analysis is based on a sample of 1243 VET entrants from the starting cohort 4 of the National Educational Panel Study (NEPS). The compromise formation of the adolescents is measured by comparing their realistic occupational aspirations from ninth grade with their first VET occupation. Results from multinomial logistic regression models show that adolescents adjust their occupational choices to their parents' divergent expectations. Women are more likely to make compromises that accommodate their parents' higher expectations.

Keywords
occupational aspirations; occupational choice; parental expectations; school-to-work transition

Issue
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1. Introduction

Which occupation adolescents aspire to is the result of a long process of occupational orientation that already begins in early childhood. Adolescents aim to find an occupation that matches their interests and abilities and meets the expectations of their social environment (Gottfredson, 2002). At the same time, occupational choice is a particularly important decision, as it significantly structures future life. This is especially true in Germany, where due to the strict segmentation and high standardization of the vocational education and training (VET) system, occupational mobility in the labor market is lower than in other countries once an occupation has been chosen (Müller & Shavit, 1998). This means that especially adolescents who leave the general school system after lower secondary education, usually aged 15 to 16, are faced with a far-reaching decision at a relatively young age. In this phase, adolescents aim to realize their occupational aspirations, but many do not succeed (Ahrens et al., 2021; Schels & Abraham, 2021). While there are some studies showing that unfulfilled occupational aspirations are associated with an increased risk of dropping out of VET (Ernst & Spevacek, 2012), unemployment (Gjerustad, 2016), depression, and job dissatisfaction (Creed & Blume, 2013; Hardie, 2014), few address the underlying circumstances and the compromises made.

The concept of compromise in occupational choice is rooted in the theory of circumscription and compromise (Gottfredson, 2002), which describes how occupational aspirations develop and change over the life course, distinguishing between idealistic and realistic occupational aspirations. In contrast to idealistic occupational aspirations, realistic occupational aspirations, also referred to as expectations, are "tempered by knowledge of obstacles and opportunities" (Gottfredson, 2002, p. 91). According to Gottfredson (2002), individuals begin to perceive occupations in early childhood based on their gender typicity, field of work, and associated prestige. Based on these dimensions, they compare the perceived occupations with their self-concept and the valuations of the social environment and form a zone of occupational alternatives by excluding those that appear unacceptable to them based on these comparisons. As they approach the age when occupational choices must be made, individuals become increasingly aware of opportunity structures and restrictions. In Germany, in their role as gatekeepers, training companies and vocational schools often set certain school grades and qualifications as selection criteria. At the same time, the German training market is subject to economic fluctuations, and some training occupations are more popular among adolescents than others, resulting in fluctuations in the supply-demand relationship (e.g., Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung, 2019). By anticipating external restrictions, individuals gradually exclude those initial "idealistic" occupational aspirations that they consider to be inaccessible, and instead develop less desirable but more accessible "realistic occupational aspirations." In line with this, studies of German students show that many adolescents adjust their aspirations to their school performance shortly before the transition to VET (Heckhausen & Tomasik, 2002; Schels & Abraham, 2021). This phase intensifies when the first occupational choice must be made, usually shortly before entering the labor market, when adolescents are looking for apprenticeships and engaging with the application process. The process of compromise ends with the (first) entry into the VET system, which requires an occupational decision.

Gottfredson (2002) defines compromises in occupational choice primarily as adaptations to market or structural influences, while parental valuation is an important reference for many adolescents when shaping aspiration levels. In fact, parents convey occupational values and goals to their children (e.g., Bryant et al., 2006), which often relate to social status (e.g., Schulenberg et al., 1984), leading parental expectations to often strongly predict children's occupational aspirations (e.g., Schoon & Parsons, 2002). However, the aspirations of adolescents are not always in line with their parents' expectations, which is known to be an obstacle to adolescents' occupational development. While congruence is related to stronger parental support (Sawitri et al., 2013), adolescents perceive the feeling of not meeting their parents' expectations as very stressful (Wang & Heppner, 2002). Therefore, in addition to structural influences, deviating from parental expectations may also be a reason for compromise formation. Pruisken (2018) investigated the importance of parental influence on the realization of occupational aspirations among German trainees. Contrary to his expectations, he found that the importance they attached to parental suggestions was not significantly related to the probability of realizing their aspirations. However, the perception of occupational choice as an independent decision by adolescents must be critically questioned, as they do not always perceive the indirect influence of their parents on their choice, and they tend to prefer to believe that they have chosen their occupation on their own. Subconsciously, many adolescents are aware that their parents will later evaluate their occupational choices (Dombrowski, 2015, p. 82).

To find out whether divergent parental expectations, in addition to structural factors, prevent adolescents from realizing their occupational aspirations during the transition to VET, an analysis is needed which relates adolescents' occupational aspirations both to their actual VET occupation and to the expectations explicitly expressed by their parents. This article therefore examines the relationship between parents' expectations and adolescents' realistic occupational aspirations and compromises in occupational choice. The focus lies on differences in realistic and not idealistic occupational aspirations in order to investigate the extent to which adolescents deviate from occupational aspirations that they deem realizable when their parents have divergent expectations. Concerning the terminology for realistic occupational aspirations, I follow the straightforward recommendation of Haller (1968). Although realistic occupational aspirations and expectations are often used interchangeably in the literature, Haller recommends using "expectation" when referring to a person's (realistic) occupational aspiration for another person. The term "realistic occupational aspiration," on the other hand, should be used when referring to a person's realistic occupational aspiration—for him or herself (Haller, 1968, p. 485). Therefore, by "parental expectations" I refer to parental realistic occupational aspirations for their child, while by "aspirations" I refer to the adolescent's realistic occupational aspirations—for him or herself.

I contribute to the existing literature by examining (a) how divergent parental expectations are related to the probability of adolescents taking VET occupations that are different from those they originally aspired to, and (b) whether relatively higher or lower parental expectations are associated with a corresponding direction of compromise in occupational prestige. Do comparatively higher parental expectations discourage adolescents from realizing their occupational aspirations and instead push them into more prestigious occupations? Do comparatively lower parental expectations, conversely, push adolescents into occupations of lower prestige than they originally aspired to? Since previous

studies suggest that parents influence their daughters' and sons' occupational orientation and choices differently, indicating that women involve parents more in their occupational choices (e.g., Makarova & Herzog, 2014), I also examine whether (c) divergent parental expectations are more strongly related to the compromise formation of women than of men.

To answer these questions, this article uses longitudinal data on 1243 VET entrants from the National Educational Panel Study (NEPS) starting cohort 4 (Blossfeld et al., 2011). These data are particularly suitable for the research project because they not only survey adolescents from the ninth school year onwards (semi-)annually and record the educational and employment trajectories of adolescents beyond the general education system, but also survey one parent. This means that parental occupational expectations are recorded directly.

2. Theory and the State of Research

2.1. Parental Expectations and Compromise Formation

Parents perform an important socialization role, which is also influential in occupational orientation and choice (Bryant et al., 2006), where they can support their children both in developing realistic occupational aspirations and in realizing them. For many adolescents, their own parents are the first and most important contacts for questions about occupational choices and they can provide them with useful occupation-related information and knowledge, for example on job content and conditions, career opportunities, entry requirements, or the regional availability of apprenticeships (e.g., Bryant et al., 2006, p. 155; Dombrowski, 2015, p. 84). In addition to providing active support, for example in writing applications or using their own occupational networks, many parents are also a source of emotional support during the transition phase, strengthening their children's self-efficacy and encouraging them in the choices they have made (Bryant et al., 2006).

However, the extent to which parents are involved in or able to support their children's occupational choice depends on various factors, such as the general availability and accessibility of parents (e.g., Bryant et al., 2006), their occupational position, their occupational field and associated networks, as well as their proximity to the VET system (Dombrowski, 2015) and the gender constellation of the parent–child relationship (Fobe & Minx, 1996). In addition, parents' occupational expectations might also be important in this regard, as they can be seen as a reason for parental involvement in the occupational choice process of adolescents (Pruisken et al., 2016, p. 67). According to common theoretical approaches, parental expectations, especially concerning the social status to be attained, are an important factor driving occupational and educational decisions (e.g., Sewell et al., 1969). Gottfredson's (2002) theory of circumscription and compromise describes that individuals, in turn, take into account their parents' valuation in forming their occupational aspirations. Here occupational prestige plays a major role, as it determines whether the family will accept or reject the choice made (Gottfredson, 2002, p. 98). For this reason, according to Beck et al. (1979), adolescents have social limits to their occupational flexibility. These limits exist for occupations associated with a social status that is judged too low or too high by the family, since both imply a greater distance from the milieu of origin (Beck et al., 1979, p. 586).

Socialization theories suggest that parents do not unilaterally influence their children's occupational choices. In general, Kracke and Noack (2005) describe the interaction between parents and individuals in the process of occupational choice as a reciprocal feedback process in which parents can support and encourage their children's occupational orientation. Adolescents may thus perceive parental expectations, but they may also distance themselves from them or convince their parents of their own occupational aspirations. However, particularly determined expectations on part of the parents can cause adolescents to withdraw from this interaction and develop or adhere to occupational aspirations that deviate from their parent's expectations (Kracke & Noack, 2005, p. 186).

Parental expectations that differ from adolescents' occupational aspirations should represent an obstacle to the realization of the latter. Even though most adolescents perceive their occupational choice as an independent decision, many of them are aware that their parents will later evaluate their decision (Dombrowski, 2015). In particular, when adolescents choose an occupation with too low a status, according to Beck et al. (1979, p. 587) they experience social decline that is associated with long-term rejection by the family and is difficult to cope with. Moreover, it can be assumed that if their occupational aspirations deviate from parental expectations, they will receive less support from their parents in realizing them and may even be more likely to be steered in their parents' desired direction. Consistent with these considerations, Sawitri et al. (2014) show that Indonesian 10th graders whose career goals are congruent with those of their parents receive more support and benefit from more involvement from their parents in career planning. German studies also show that parents who are more open to their child's occupational choice promote occupational exploration and choice by discussing possible (dis-)advantages of certain occupations, giving suggestions, helping their child write applications, rebuilding them after setbacks, or encouraging them in their choice (e.g., Dietrich & Kracke, 2009; Kracke & Noack, 2005; Maschetzke, 2009). When their children's occupational orientation deviates from their own expectations, qualitative research shows that parents try to block their children's occupational orientation, for example, by subtly criticizing their children's deviant aspirations (Küllchen, 1997, p. 212) and trying to

push their child in the occupational direction they want (Maschetzke, 2009).

I, therefore, expect that adolescents whose parents have expectations for them that are different from their own will realize their aspirations less often than adolescents whose aspirations correspond to their parents' expectations (H1a). In addition, I expect that adolescents whose parents have higher (or lower) prestige expectations than their own will switch to an occupation of higher (or lower) prestige more often than adolescents whose aspirations correspond to their parents' expectations (H1b).

Not all parents involve themselves in their children's occupational choices. Qualitative studies that asked adolescents about the influence of their parents report that some do stay out of their children's occupational choices (Dimbath, 2003; Maschetzke, 2009). The reasons for this are manifold; in addition to actual lack of interest, these include, for example, the feeling of being overwhelmed by the decision, a lack of urgency from the parent's point of view in dealing with the topic, or burdens in other areas of life (Dietrich & Kracke, 2009, p. 111). According to Maschetzke (2009, p. 189), adolescents in this situation often feel insecure because they must orient themselves under high levels of uncertainty and make the decision on their own. They lack both important informational and emotional support, as well as parental expectations, which for many are an important source of guidance (Dombrowski, 2015, p. 81) that may help them to develop occupational aspirations. Consistent with this argumentation, studies show that under these circumstances, adolescents are less engaged in occupational exploration (Dietrich & Kracke, 2009) and have more problems making decisions (Dimbath, 2003).

Therefore, I assume that a lack of parental expectations destabilizes adolescents as they attempt to realize their own aspirations. They should therefore be less likely to realize their occupational aspirations than adolescents whose aspirations are congruent with the expectations their parents have for them (H2).

2.2. Gender Differences

According to gender-specific socialization theory (Eccles & Hoffman, 1984), women are socialized to deal differently than men with challenging life situations, such as the transition from school to VET. While men are raised to be independent, women are encouraged to rely more on others in critical situations (Eccles & Hoffman, 1984, p. 385). Previous research also shows that daughters involve their parents more than sons in occupational choices. Daughters talk more often with their parents about occupational choice and are more often encouraged by them in their occupational orientation (Kracke & Noack, 2005). For Indonesian trainees, Sawitri (2019) shows that daughters are more likely than sons to feel that their occupational goals match their parents' expectations.

I, therefore, assume that incongruence between adolescents' aspirations and their parents' expectations is more important for the occupational choices of women than for men. The negative effect of divergent parental expectations on the realization of aspirations expected in H1a should therefore be stronger for women than for men (H3a). Similarly, the adjustments towards the higher (or lower) occupational expectations of parents postulated in H1b is assumed to be more likely among women than among men (H3b).

If parents are not involved in their children's occupational choices, I also assume, following the gender-specific socialization theory of Eccles and Hoffman (1984), that women should be more destabilized in their occupational choice than men. The negative effect of a lack of parental expectations on the probability of realizing aspirations should therefore be stronger for women than for men (H4).

3. Data and Sample

This article uses data from the NEPS starting cohort 4. From 2008 to 2013, NEPS data were collected as part of the Framework Programme for the Promotion of Empirical Educational Research funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF). As of 2014, the NEPS survey is carried out by the Leibniz Institute for Educational Trajectories (LIfBi) at the University of Bamberg in cooperation with a nationwide network. The data come from a representative sample of 16425 ninth-graders at regular schools in Germany in the fall of 2010. Information on the educational attainment of adolescents in general and vocational schools comes from (semi-)annual surveys. In addition, one parent of each student was invited to participate in a parental survey.

The analysis sample consists of 1243 students who attended the lower secondary or intermediate secondary school branch of a general school in the ninth grade in autumn of 2010, and remained in the general school system at least until the 10th grade. All named an occupational aspiration in the ninth grade and entered VET within the next six years (i.e., within the observation period of the 10 survey waves). To obtain a homogeneous sample of ninth-graders who found themselves in similar starting conditions regarding the timing of the transition into VET and post-educational options, some students had to be excluded from the analyses. This concerns students attending special needs schools and private schools, as well as students from school tracks leading directly to a university entrance degree, encompassing upper secondary schools (*Gymnasium*) or upper secondary tracks (*Gymnasialzweige*) in comprehensive schools (*Gesamtschulen*). Also, students whose parents did not participate in the survey had to be excluded because parents' occupational expectations are central to the analyses. I also excluded students who entered VET immediately after the ninth grade, since

the aspirations were measured in the ninth grade and are thus too close to the transition to VET to be considered unaffected by the ongoing application processes. Furthermore, I excluded students who did not report an occupational aspiration, or who did not start VET. The same applies to students who reported unclear aspirations, or VET occupations that did not provide enough information to code them according to the German Classification of Occupations (*Klassifikation der Berufe* [KldB 2010]) and the Magnitude Prestige Scale (MPS). The same is true for students whose parents reported uncodable occupational aspirations for them, as these codes are needed to operationalize compromises and divergent parental expectations. Finally, students with implausible information on education or VET entry, as well as missing information on control variables were also excluded from the analysis data. Incomplete cases, with the exception of students with missing information on school grades, were excluded by listwise deletion. Since the variables needed for the analyses had a low frequency of missing values overall, the exclusion did not lead to a systematic bias in the sample (see Table A1 in the Supplementary File). For adolescents with missing information on school grades, mean imputation and additional control for the initially missing response are used to include them in the analysis sample (Section 4.3.).

4. Operationalizations

4.1. Compromise Formation

The adolescents' compromise formation is measured by comparing their occupational aspirations from the ninth grade with their first VET occupation. Occupational aspirations were measured towards the end of the ninth school year (May–July 2011) by the question: "Consider everything you know right now. What will probably be your occupation in the future?" First VET occupation is defined as the first vocational training after school, which, if successfully completed, leads to a vocational qualification. Both dual and full-time school-based VET programs are considered.

The compromise is operationalized by comparing the occupational aspiration and the first VET occupation using their five-digit code according to the KldB 2010 and their score in the MPS. The KldB 2010 is a systematic classification of occupations with a hierarchical structure developed by the German Federal Employment Agency and the Institute for Employment Research. Each occupation is described using a five-digit code, with the first digit describing the occupational area, the second the occupational main group, the third the occupational group, the fourth the occupational subgroup, and the fifth the occupational type or requirement level (Paulus & Matthes, 2013). The MPS is a well-known and often applied measure in German sociology for operationalizing the social prestige of occupations, which was developed based on representative occupational assessments and specifically for the German hierarchy of occupational prestige (Becker & Blossfeld, 2022; Wegener, 1992). The scale ranges from 20 (*unskilled worker*) to 186.8 (*judge*).

The compromise variable comprises four categories, with the first category, (a) "aspiration realized," containing adolescents who have realized their occupational aspirations according to the KldB 2010. The other three categories map adolescents' prestige compromises to the MPS. In line with a threshold used by Becker and Blossfeld (2017), compromises in terms of entering a (b) "less prestigious occupation" are observed when adolescents enter an occupation that is at least 10% less prestigious than their aspiration. Compromise in terms of entering a (c) "more prestigious occupation" accordingly refers to adolescents who enter an occupation that is at least 10% more prestigious than their aspiration. Compromises towards (d) "similarly prestigious occupations" are observed if adolescents' entered occupations are associated with a less than 10% difference in prestige.

4.2. Divergent Parental Expectations

Divergent parental expectations are measured by comparing the aspirations of ninth-grade students with the expectations their parents have for them. Parents' occupational expectations were measured in the first wave of the parent survey (January–July 2011): "What kind of vocation do you think [Name of target child] should learn?" This question was asked only if parents already indicated they had already thought about their child's occupational choice.

Similar to the compromise indicator, divergent parental expectations are also operationalized by comparing parental occupational expectations with the adolescent's occupational aspirations using the KldB 2010 and the MPS. My measure of divergent parental expectations contains six categories: (a) adolescents with parents who stated the same occupation as them according to the KldB 2010, (b) those with parents who stated they should follow their own aspirations, and (c) those whose parents had no expectations for them. The last category also includes cases where parents have not yet thought about their child's occupational choice, or where the answer "don't know" was provided in response to questions about expectations. Among parents who named a different occupation to that of their child, a distinction is made between parents with expectations that are associated with (d) similar, (e) lower, or (f) higher prestige according to the MPS. Divergent parental expectations are categorized in a similar way to adolescent aspiration compromises, with parental expectations being considered congruent with adolescent aspirations if there is a less than 10% difference in prestige associated with occupations preferred by adolescents and their parents, and divergent if the difference is more than 10%. Parents who stated that their child should follow his or her own

aspiration had previously stated that they had already thought about their child's occupational choice but did not name a specific occupation when asked about it. Therefore, this group can neither be assigned to the group of parent–adolescent dyads with congruent expectations and aspirations, nor the group of adolescents without parental expectation.

4.3. Control Variables

Characteristics of the interviewed parent (occupational position; status as a single parent; relationship to the adolescent) and the adolescent (highest school degree when entering VET; last school grades in German and math; the prestige of his or her aspiration; educational background, region of residence; gender; migration background) are used as control variables. Information on the operationalization of the control variables is provided in Table A2 in the Supplementary File. Holding these variables constant allows me to examine which compromises adolescents make in relation to their parents' expectations under similar conditions regarding school achievements and aspiration levels, as well as parental resources and sociodemographic characteristics. Table A3 in the Supplementary File gives an overview of the sample.

5. Analyses

To examine the relationship between divergent parental expectations and adolescent compromise formation in occupational choice, I apply multinomial regression analysis. Table 1 shows the results. Average marginal effects (AME) were predicted for the different outcomes of compromise formation between adolescent aspiration and first VET occupation: aspiration realized, compromises by changing to a less, similar, or more prestigious occupation than originally aimed for. AME represent the estimated differences in the probability of making a particular form of compromise compared to all other outcomes.

5.1. Parental Expectations and Compromise Formation

First, I compare the compromise formation of adolescents whose aspirations are congruent with their parents' expectations with the compromise formation of those whose parents have a divergent expectation for them.

As assumed in H1a, results for the outcome "aspiration realized" show that adolescents whose parents do not share their children's aspiration are less likely to realize said aspiration. Significant differences are found for all forms of divergent parental expectations. The difference is particularly large for adolescents whose parents expect a more prestigious occupation. Compared to parents with congruent expectations, they are 22 percentage points less likely to realize their aspirations. Similarly, adolescents whose parents' expectations are lower than their own regarding occupation prestige are 17 percentage points less likely to realize their aspirations than the reference group.

H1b assumed that when parental expectations are divergent from adolescents' aspirations, adolescents are more likely to enter an occupation that is more in line with their parents' expectations. Consistent with this hypothesis, the results for the outcome "less prestigious occupation" show that adolescents whose parents expect an occupation with lower prestige than that targeted by their child are 15 percentage points more likely to enter a less prestigious occupation than adolescents whose aspirations are congruent with the expectations of their parents. Conversely, the results for the outcome "more prestigious occupation" show that adolescents whose parents have higher prestige expectations are 11 percentage points more likely to choose a more prestigious occupation than they originally aspired to. Both effects are statistically significant.

Table 1. Differences in compromise formation by divergent parental expectations.

	Aspiration realized		Less prestigious occupation		Similarly prestigious occupation		More prestigious occupation	
Parent's expectation (ref.: congruent with aspiration)								
follow own aspiration	−0.175	(0.037)***	0.046	(0.030)	0.073	(0.031)*	0.056	(0.028)*
less prestigious expectation	−0.165	(0.053)**	0.152	(0.045)***	0.008	(0.046)	0.005	(0.047)
similarly prestigious expectation	−0.140	(0.050)**	0.035	(0.043)	0.132	(0.046)**	−0.026	(0.033)
more prestigious expectation	−0.215	(0.044)***	0.040	(0.040)	0.070	(0.039)+	0.105	(0.035)**
no expectation	−0.211	(0.038)***	0.087	(0.033)**	0.055	(0.033)+	0.068	(0.030)*
Control variables	yes		yes		yes		yes	
Observations	1243		1243		1243		1243	

Source: Own estimations based on NEPS Network (2019). Notes: Multinomial logistic regressions; AME; robust standard errors in parentheses; significance levels: + p < .1 * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001; control variables: parents' occupational position, single parent, parent's relationship to the adolescent, adolescent's highest school degree, adolescent's last German grade, adolescent's last math grade, adolescent's information on grades available, prestige of adolescent's aspiration, adolescent's educational background, residential region, adolescent's migration background, adolescent's gender; for the complete table see Table A4 in Supplementary File.

It has been argued that divergent parental expectations should result in adolescents not realizing their own occupational aspirations and instead being directed by their parents into an occupation that is more in line with their parents' expectations. Although the results indicate that adolescents adjust their occupational choices to their parents' divergent expectations, the share of adolescents who do not realize their own realistic occupational aspirations and instead take the exact VET occupation expected by their parents is comparatively small in the present study sample. Depending on the definition of the match at the five- or three-digit level of the KldB 2010, the share is three or four percent. Thus, the results suggest that in the case of divergent parental expectations, adolescents are less likely to adopt their parents' exact occupational expectations, but that an additional negotiation process takes place in which adolescents try to shift towards an occupation more acceptable to their parents.

Secondly, I compare the compromise formation of adolescents whose aspirations match their parents' expectations to the compromise formation of adolescents whose parents did not name any expectations for them because they had not yet thought about their child's occupational choice at the time of the interview. The results for the outcome "aspiration realized" confirm the statistical differences expected in H2. The probability that adolescents with parents without expectations realize their own aspirations is 21 percentage points lower than in the reference group. A similar difference can be seen regarding the group of adolescents whose parents stated that they should follow their own aspiration. Compared to the reference group, they are also 18 percentage points less likely to realize their aspiration.

5.2. Gender Differences

To test H3 and H4, an interaction term of divergent parental expectations and the gender of the adolescent was additionally included in the regression model. Table 2 shows the effects of different forms of divergent parental expectations on compromise formation by gender.

The results for the outcome "aspiration realized" show that both men and women realize their aspiration less often if it is not in line with their parent's expectations. The gender differences in the strength of the effects expected in H3a are only partially evident here. While the predicted probability of realization in the case of congruence is about the same for men (43%) and women (41%), it decreases less within the group of men in the case of higher parental expectations than for

Table 2. Gender-differences in the effects of divergent parental expectations on compromise formation (selected findings).

	Aspiration realized						
	male			female			contrast of AME
	AME (se)		PM	AME (se)		PM	Chi²
Parent's expectation							
(ref.: congruent with aspiration)	*Ref.*		0.426	*Ref.*		0.406	*Ref.*
follow own aspiration	–0.142	(0.050)**	0.284	–0.212	(0.056)***	0.194	0.85
less prestigious expectation	–0.143	(0.073)*	0.283	–0.189	(0.078)*	0.217	0.19
similarly prestigious expectation	–0.153	(0.069)*	0.273	–0.140	(0.071)+	0.267	0.02
more prestigious expectation	–0.147	(0.062)*	0.279	–0.281	(0.059)***	0.126	2.44
no expectation	–0.183	(0.051)***	0.243	–0.251	(0.056)***	0.156	0.80
	Less prestigious occupation						
	male			female			contrast of AME
	AME (se)		PM	AME (se)		PM	Chi²
Parent's expectation							
(ref.: congruent with aspiration)	*Ref.*		0.308	*Ref.*		0.255	*Ref.*
less prestigious expectation	0.175	(0.067)**	0.483	0.128	(0.055)*	0.383	0.29
	More prestigious occupation						
	male			female			contrast of AME
	AME (se)		PM	AME (se)		PM	Chi²
Parent's expectation							
(ref.: congruent with aspiration)	*Ref.*		0.097	*Ref.*		0.207	*Ref.*
more prestigious expectation	0.074	(0.040)	0.171	0.150	(0.058)*	0.357	1.20

Source: Own estimations based on NEPS Network (2019). Notes: Significance levels: + p < .1 * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001; AME = average marginal effects; se = standard error; PM = predictive margins; for the complete table see Table A5 in the Supplementary File.

women (15 vs. 28 pp). Likewise, the probability of realization in the case of lower parental expectations decreases more for women than for men (19 vs. 14 pp). However, the differences in both cases are not statistically significant (chi² = 2.44 resp. chi² = 0. 19).

H3b postulated that women adapt their occupational choice to their parent's expectations more than men. The results for the outcome "less prestigious occupation" show that men are more likely than women to enter a less prestigious occupation than they aspired to if their parents shared their aspiration (31% vs. 26%). Contrary to H3b, this probability decreases more strongly for men than for women if their parents' expectations are lower than their own aspiration (18 vs. 13 pp). However, this difference is not statistically significant (chi² = 0.29). In contrast, the results for the outcome "more prestigious occupation" show that women are more likely than men to enter a more prestigious occupation than they aspired to if their parents share their aspiration (21% vs. 10%). In line with H3b, this probability increases more strongly for women than for men if their parent has a more prestigious expectation for them than they have (15 vs. 7 pp). However, this difference is also not statistically significant (chi² = 1.20).

H4 postulated that women are more disadvantaged than men when it comes to the probability of realizing their aspirations when there is a lack of parental expectations. The results for the outcome "aspiration realized" show a negative effect of a lack of expectations on the probability of realization for both genders. As expected, the effect is greater for women than for men (25 vs. 18 pp). The same pattern also emerges for the group of adolescents whose parents stated that their child should follow his or her own aspirations (21 vs. 14 pp). However, the gender differences are not significant (chi² = 0.80 resp. chi² = 0.85).

6. Limitations and Robustness Checks

6.1. Sample Selectivity

The analysis sample comprises only part of the original sample of NEPS (starting cohort 4), which can lead to selectivities that may also affect the present results. First, selectivities exist through the exclusion of adolescents whose parents did not participate in the survey, since the parents' occupational expectations are of central interest to this study. Table A6 in the Supplementary File shows that this led in particular to an increased exclusion of adolescents with a migration background. Thus, the results are only valid to a limited extent regarding this group.

Secondly, selectivities exist through the exclusion of adolescents for whom no compromise was observed as they did not enter VET. Selectivities in this regard are relevant for the present results in that the desire to enter VET or to successfully enter VET could also be related to divergent or lacking parental expectations. These might, on the one hand, lead to adolescents being less supported in their search for an apprenticeship and therefore having greater problems in successfully entering VET. However, the observation period of 6 years is relatively long and allows even later transitions into VET after possible intermediate phases of unsuccessful searches for apprenticeships, employment, or further schooling to be observed. On the other hand, compromises could be observed among adolescents continuing school instead of entering VET in order to obtain a university entrance qualification and enter university because of more prestigious parental expectations. Further analyses of the probability of not entering VET (see Table A7 in the Supplementary File) show that adolescents whose parents have higher expectations of them are less likely to enter VET, suggesting that the relationship between divergent parental expectations and compromise formation in occupational choice identified in the present analyses may be underestimated.

Furthermore, as in other longitudinal studies, there are additional selectivities due to panel attrition. For the NEPS starting cohort 4, Zinn et al. (2020) show that especially adolescents in lower secondary schools as well as adolescents with a low educational background or poor mathematic competencies tend to drop out of the panel. These characteristics were controlled for in the analyses of this study.

6.2. Operationalization of Divergent Parental Expectations and Compromise Formation

Further limitations of this study relate to the operationalization of compromise formation and divergent parental expectations. First, to measure divergent parental expectations, the adolescents' occupational aspirations were compared with the parents' occupational expectations. While individual occupational aspirations are clearly measured as realistic aspirations, this does not apply to parental expectations. In contrast to measuring adolescents' occupational aspirations under the condition that they consider everything they know right now, parents are asked much more generally what occupation they think their children should learn. This circumstance can lead to additional measurement-related discrepancies if it means that adolescents' occupational aspirations are measured more realistically than those of their parents. Looking at the distribution of divergent parental expectations, the results show that the majority of parents named an occupation that either exactly matched their child's occupational aspiration (41%) or was of similar (22%) or lower (16%) prestige. Thus, these results do not indicate that parents disproportionately name occupations of unrealistically high prestige.

Secondly, to simultaneously analyze how divergent parental expectations are related to adolescents' probability of realizing their aspirations or making different directions of compromise in prestige, both the divergent parental expectations and the compromise between

adolescent occupational aspiration and training occupation in prestige were operationalized categorically. The threshold for categorizing these differences was set at 10% (see Section 4). The Supplementary File contains additional analyses showing that alternative operationalizations with this threshold set at 5 or 15% do not lead to significant changes in the results (see Tables A8–A11). Furthermore, when measuring compromise formation and divergent parental expectations, the occupations were operationalized on the basis of the five-digit code of the KldB 2010. A less strict operationalization based on the occupational groups (three-digit code) does not lead to different results from the main model either (see Table A12 in the Supplementary File). However, using this operationalization, no gender differences are found in the relationship between deviating parental expectations and the realization probability of the occupational aspiration of the adolescents (see Table A13 in the Supplementary File).

7. Summary and Discussion

Many adolescents in Germany do not succeed in realizing their occupational aspirations when they enter VET. This circumstance reflects the fact that VET entry is particularly challenging for adolescents for many reasons, such as the school grades and other entry criteria imposed by the competitive structure of the German VET market, the supply structure of the local VET market, or unrealistic occupational aspirations on part of the adolescents themselves. Therefore, the cues and support parents provide to their children can be an important resource, but also be a pathway to status reproduction. The study, therefore, aimed to find out whether divergent parental expectations are also related to compromise formation and lead adolescents to enter different occupations than they had originally aspired to. Since it is unclear to what extent adolescents perceive parental influence on their occupational choices, this study used data from a longitudinal study that asked both adolescents and parents about aspirations or expectations for the adolescents.

The results show that divergent parental expectations play a crucial role in the process of compromise formation in the transition from school to VET. Trainees whose aspirations are not congruent with parental expectations are not only less likely to realize their aspirations, but also more likely to instead enter an occupation more in line with parental prestige expectations. Consistent with theoretical expectations, relatively higher parental expectations push adolescents towards more prestigious occupations, while relatively lower aspirations lead them towards less prestigious occupations than they originally aspired to. Also worth mentioning are the separate findings for those adolescents whose parents did not express occupational expectations for their child or indicated that their child should follow his or her own aspirations. These adolescents are less likely to realize their aspirations than those whose parental expectations matched their own in the survey. These findings are thus consistent with results of previous qualitative research indicating that adolescents are destabilized in their occupational choices when their parents are not involved. The data also show gender differences in the relationship between divergent parental expectations and compromise formation, although these are not statistically significant. Divergent parental expectations have a stronger negative effect on the probability of realizing aspirations for women than for men. Women are also more likely than men to adapt their occupational choice to the higher expectations of their parents by entering a more prestigious occupation than that originally aimed for. Thus, the findings of this study are also consistent with socialization theory considerations and previous research suggesting that women are more likely than men to incorporate their parents' opinions into their occupational choices, not only when forming occupational aspirations, but also in making compromises when entering VET.

In summary, the present study provides new insights into compromises in occupational choice and the role of divergent parental expectations. It was known from previous research literature that parental aspirations often predict the aspirations of their children. The present study shows that even when adolescents have developed divergent realistic occupational aspirations, they adjust their occupational choice to their parents' expectations, regardless of their school performance and aspiration level. Accordingly, compromises in occupational choices during the transition to VET are not simply a matter of adapting to external conditions in the VET market but also to parental expectations regarding occupational prestige. This study further shows, however, that adolescents are less likely to shift their occupational choices to exactly match those of their parents. Instead, the results indicate that adolescents slightly adapt their choices, moving closer to the parental expectations but not meeting them exactly.

The study suggests that it is important to involve parents in career counseling for adolescents to stabilize them in their occupational orientation and choices. From a theoretical perspective, it has been argued that adolescents should adjust their occupational choices to divergent parental expectations especially due to familial rejection of their occupational aspirations and lack of parental support. Whether it is actually these mechanisms that lead to the identified effects or whether the underlying mechanisms are more complex cannot be conclusively answered by this study. Further research is required, for example in the form of qualitative longitudinal surveys. Moreover, the results of this study do not allow the conclusion that divergent parental expectations are generally detrimental to adolescents, as the study does not examine the medium- and long-term consequences of the adjustments. Further research is needed to examine how divergent parental expectations

and adolescents' (non-)adjustment to these affect their further course of VET and employment, e.g., in terms of the probability of dropping out of VET, job satisfaction, and job change.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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Article

Scarring Dreams? Young People's Vocational Aspirations and Expectations During and After Unemployment

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Abstract
Young people's early-career unemployment experience has been found to have long-lasting effects, resulting in lower earnings even decades later. However, while this so-called "scarring effect" is well established, there is still little knowledge about the mechanisms through which it comes about. We take a closer look at the period that produces the wounds that later turn to scars. Drawing on a panel survey in which young adults in Austria were interviewed once at the beginning of an unemployment period and again one year later, we study how job aspirations and expectations changed during this period. We find that respondents on average lowered their aspirations and expectations over time, particularly those who experienced latent deprivation during unemployment. Furthermore, while the aspirations and expectations of those who were unemployed at the time of the second interview remained relatively unchanged, those who were employed lowered their expectations and to some extent also their aspirations. Our results suggest that research should pay more attention to the heterogenous effects of early-career unemployment: It produces scarred dreams for some while others manage to keep their aspirations and expectations alive.

Keywords
job aspirations; job expectations; latent deprivation; scarring effects; youth unemployment

Issue
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1. Introduction

Experiencing unemployment at an early stage may leave long-lasting scars on future careers, including wage losses and lower job quality years or even decades after the unemployment spell (e.g., Arulampalam, 2001; Dieckhoff, 2011). One potential explanation for this so-called "scarring effect" might be that due to the unemployment experience and difficulties in finding a new job, individuals lower their occupational aspirations and expectations and adjust their career goals, which in turn affects career achievements (Empson-Warner & Krahn, 1992; Schoon, 2001).

However, despite ample research on the development of job aspirations and expectations in adolescence, in particular during the transition period between education and employment, and their effects on career outcomes (Beal & Crockett, 2010; Schoon & Polek, 2011), little is known about the potential changes in job aspirations and expectations of young people who become unemployed (Shu & Marini, 2008).

To fill this research gap, we explore longitudinal data from a panel survey of young adults aged 18–28 in Vienna, Austria, who had recently registered as being unemployed in the public employment service (Mühlböck et al., 2018; Steiber et al., 2017). Specifically,

we analyze how job aspirations (in terms of the status of the desired job) and expectations regarding the probability of reaching these aspirations develop after young adults become unemployed. Hence, we compare information from the first wave of the panel study with data from the second wave, which was conducted one year later when our respondents were either still unemployed or had found a new job.

Studying this particular age group is of special importance because aspirations formed in early adulthood may remain comparably stable across the life course (Low et al., 2005). Hence, periods of unemployment in these formative years may shape career goals and expectations (Lent & Brown, 2013; Lent et al., 2022). As early-career unemployment spells have become more common in recent decades, studying the heterogenous consequences of youth unemployment becomes increasingly relevant (O'Reilly et al., 2015; Ralston et al., 2021). Manifest and latent deprivation during periods of unemployment (Jahoda, 1982) may force those who experience financial and mental hardship to lower their aspirations and accept any job that is available, thereby increasing existing inequalities. However, to date, heterogeneity within the experience of youth unemployment has received little attention. Therefore, this article focuses on the diverse trajectories of individuals experiencing unemployment at a young age focusing on the institutionally homogenous field of the Viennese labor market.

Austria has a strong vocational education system with early streaming of youth into different educational paths (stratified educational system). Its skills formation system has been described as "collective" (cf. Busemeyer & Trampusch, 2011), with the direct involvement of firms in initial vocational training and thus relatively smooth school-to-work transitions. Vienna, more than less urban areas of Austria, features a stark separation of pupils into low/vocational and high/academic educational tracks (Schneeweis & Zweimüller, 2014). This institutional setting should be conducive to the early formation of stable job aspirations and expectations (Basler & Kriesi, 2019).

Nevertheless, our analysis shows considerable and heterogeneous transformations in job aspirations and expectations following unemployment experiences. Young adults who experienced latent deprivation were especially likely to lower their job aspirations and expectations during the observation period. The aspirations and expectations of those who were still (or again) unemployed at the time of the second interview remained relatively stable, whereas those who were employed by the second interview had lowered their expectations, and those with long unemployment experience had also lowered their aspirations. We discuss whether this development reflects an adjustment to a more realistic assessment of career chances or whether the unemployment experience drives young people into jobs that neither match their original aspirations nor their qualifications.

The article proceeds as follows: First, we summarize previous theoretical and empirical accounts of the "scarring effects" of unemployment and the importance of aspirations and expectations for people's careers. We derive hypotheses about the potential effects of different experiences following job loss. Next, we describe the data and main variables, then provide the analysis. We conclude by summarizing our main results and discussing the potential consequences of lowered aspirations and expectations.

2. Vocational Aspirations and Expectations and Career Outcomes

Previous research has thoroughly documented the so-called "scarring effects" of unemployment. When encountered at an early stage in one's career, the experience of unemployment not only causes future unemployment (Arulampalam et al., 2000; Cockx & Picchio, 2011), but also substantial losses in future earnings (Gangl, 2006; Gregg & Tominey, 2005) and affects the job quality of future employment (Brand, 2006; Dieckhoff, 2011). However, while the effects of unemployment on later career prospects are well documented, less is known about the causal mechanisms behind these effects. One potential explanation is that human capital depreciation may occur during unemployment through the loss of firm-specific or general skills (Krahn & Chow, 2016). A loss in social capital due to a reduction in social contacts and networks may also account for the "scarring effect." Another explanation is based on signaling theory, stipulating that a prolonged unemployment spell in a CV signals low productivity to prospective employers (Shi et al., 2018). Furthermore, the psychological impacts of unemployment such as reduced self-efficacy and mental health (Paul & Moser, 2009; Simões et al., 2017) could translate into less effective job searching (Wanberg et al., 2005). Finally, social and financial pressures and the realization that high-quality jobs are difficult to obtain may lead individuals to lower their occupational aspirations and expectations and to accept jobs of lower intrinsic and extrinsic quality (Empson-Warner & Krahn, 1992).

Research on status attainment and intergenerational social mobility has highlighted the crucial role of occupational aspirations and expectations as key drivers of the career choice process, motivating educational decisions, vocational choice, and influencing career success (Mau & Bikos, 2000; Schoon & Parsons, 2002; Schoon & Polek, 2011; Sewell et al., 1969). According to the propositions of the social cognitive model of career self-management (Lent & Brown, 2013), actions to develop one's career are motivated by goals that are formed based on aspirations and outcome expectations. In line with the theoretical assumptions of the model, empirical research has found that occupational attainment is related to previous job aspirations and to the belief in one's ability to reach these aspirations (Armstrong & Crombie, 2000). For example, Schoon (2001) and Schoon and Polek (2011) have found that job aspirations and expectations expressed at age 16 are good predictors of occupations

held at age 33. Youth with higher career aspirations obtain jobs with higher prestige and wages in adulthood, even when factors such as educational attainment, cognitive ability, and other social psychological characteristics are controlled for. The strong empirical connection between adolescents' aspirations and expectations and their eventual attainments indicates that career goals and achievement expectations are indeed important social-psychological determinants of career outcomes (Ashby & Schoon, 2010).

However, the occupational aspirations of young people may be unrealistic (Baird et al., 2008). Considering the jobs available, not everyone will be able to work in his or her desired occupation. Hence, it is important to differentiate between occupational aspirations and achievement expectations. Beal and Crockett (2010) compare answers to the questions "what kind of work would you like to do?" (occupational aspirations) and "what work do you think you will probably do?" (occupational expectations). They find that for 79% of adolescents, aspirations and expectations fall into the same category in terms of occupational prestige scores. This finding could be interpreted as an indication that most young people hold realistic aspirations. A problem arises for those with unrealistic aspirations and expectations because clinging to dreams that do not materialize can lead to emotional distress (Carr, 1997; Wrosch et al., 2007). Career ambition is a double-edged sword: On the one hand, being ambitious and believing in one's own ability to achieve the desired job is an important precedent for success (Lent & Brown, 2013); on the other hand, overambition and distorted expectations may lead to prolonged periods of unsuccessful job search (Mueller et al., 2021).

3. Adaptability of Aspirations and Expectations Over Time

The formation of occupational aspirations has been theorized as a lifelong process starting in early childhood and continuing beyond school-leaving age. As adolescents become increasingly conscious of the social structure of opportunities and constraints during the transition from school to work, they dismiss (seemingly) unrealistic aspirations in favor of more accessible options (Gottfredson, 1981). With growing work experience, aspirations stabilize (Super, 1980). Hence, the variability of aspirations changes over the lifespan: They are comparably fluid during adolescence and early adulthood, and become more stable around the age of 25–30 (Low et al., 2005). Yet, aspirations and expectations are adaptive to changing environments (Savickas, 2005) and subject to learning effects based on experiences made throughout one's career (Lent & Brown, 2013).

Several researchers have studied changes in career goals during the school-to-work transition (Jacobs et al., 1991; M. K. Johnson, 2002; Rindfuss et al., 1999; Schels & Abraham, 2021; Shu & Marini, 2008). They show that occupational status aspirations tend to decline when young people enter the labor market, indicating an adaptation of initially ambitious plans to the opportunities available to the individual (Shu & Marini, 2008). Women, younger, and less educated individuals are found to be particularly susceptible to such downward adaptations (Low et al., 2005). Furthermore, the school context has been found to influence the development of vocational aspirations, especially in countries with a stratified educational system. Individuals adapt their goals to the respective social environment within their educational track (Wicht & Ludwig-Mayerhofer, 2014). A high level of educational stratification and low permeability between tracks should lead to stronger differences in vocational aspirations between tracks as well as early solidification of aspirations (Basler & Kriesi, 2019). We may thus observe differences in the timing of aspiration formation and adaptation processes between countries depending on their education and skill formation systems. Tomasik et al. (2009) argue that downgrading initially overambitious job aspirations leads to better career outcomes for young people than the reverse strategy of starting with too modest aspirations that may shorten the duration of job search. The latter strategy could lead job seekers to abandon better quality goals prematurely. In contrast, the strategy of downgrading will allow them to obtain a job with the highest level of social prestige attainable—at least as long as the pace of downgrading is sufficiently fast to avoid prolonged periods of job search (Tomasik et al., 2009).

Even more pronounced adaptive processes have been found with regard to expectations, arguably because expectations are more aligned with reality than aspirations and thus more directly affected by experience and feedback (Beal & Crockett, 2010). At the same time, outcome expectations affect aspirations. People value rewards they are likely to receive and place less importance on rewards to which access is unlikely. Hence, if they perceive the chances of obtaining their desired job to be low, they will consciously or unconsciously adjust their aspirations and set themselves goals with a higher perceived probability of achievement (M. K. Johnson & Elder, 2002).

In sum, the literature suggests that the opportunities and constraints experienced over the life course shape individuals' perceptions of the likelihood of attaining a goal, which in turn lead individuals to adapt their aspirations and expectations. Those experiencing more constraints than expected presumably lower their expectations and potentially also their aspirations. Those experiencing better opportunities and fewer constraints than expected will be less likely to downgrade and more likely to maintain or even upgrade their expectations and aspirations (Low et al., 2005).

4. Unemployment and Changes in Aspirations and Expectations

Labor market experiences made during early adulthood are likely to affect the formation of career aspirations and

expectations. These early experiences of constraints and opportunities, which occur during a period when young people's vocational aspirations are still in flux, provide important feedback about the chances of actually obtaining a job in the desired occupation. Hence, experiences of prolonged unsuccessful job search, especially when combined with the financial and mental hardships associated with unemployment (Jahoda, 1982), could be particularly influential.

In principle, theories and empirical findings regarding the development of aspirations and expectations over an individual's life-course, and in particular during the transition from school to work, should also apply to periods of unemployment and the experiences of (un)successful job search in the early career phase. Yet, this cannot be taken for granted, as most young unemployed have already gained work experience, which may increase the stability of their job aspirations and expectations. At the same time, potential negative experiences of job loss such as disappointment, frustration, and self-doubt accompanied by a loss of financial security may induce profound adjustments in career goals. Hence, this article focuses on the development of occupational aspirations and expectations during periods of unemployment.

To date, only a few researchers have studied the role of unemployment in shaping individuals' job aspirations and expectations, and they come to different conclusions. Based on interviews with young people on the Isle of Sheppey, Wallace (1987) finds that unemployment experience and being forced to accept low-status jobs leads to reduced occupational aspirations. Such a reduction is particularly strong when aspirations were unrealistically high at the outset. These results have been supported by a quantitative study conducted by Empson-Warner and Krahn (1992) that uses panel data on high school graduates in Edmonton, Canada. It shows that experiencing unemployment during the first year following graduation leads to reduced aspirations. Other studies have not found any significant effects of unemployment. According to Furlong (1987, p. 67), a sudden rise in unemployment rates in Leicester did not affect the aspirations of young people. Church and Ainley (1987, p. 90) also find no negative effect of unemployment on young adults' aspirations in London. Regarding achievement expectations, the previous literature has mostly studied the related concept of perceived employability, defined as the subjectively perceived ability to find a new job (if necessary), irrespective of the type of job. Here, most studies concluded that perceived employability is dampened by prolonged periods of unemployment (cf. Schmillen & Umkehrer, 2013). However, in a recent study based on US survey data, Mueller et al. (2021) could not detect such an effect of long-term unemployment.

In sum, the existing empirical literature has provided ambiguous results regarding changes in young adults' job aspiration and expectations after unemployment. We argue that diverging trajectories among those who become unemployed might explain this ambiguity. Following up on the key theoretical insight that young adults' likelihood of lowering job aspirations and expectations depends on the opportunities and constraints encountered during unemployment, we argue that it is insufficient to focus on differences between unemployed and employed individuals, as more specific differences in unemployment experiences may moderate changes in aspirations after or during unemployment. We, therefore, study the effects of unemployment duration, financial or latent deprivation during unemployment, and re-employment on changes in aspirations and expectations in the year after becoming unemployed.

Based on the social cognitive model of career self-management (Lent & Brown, 2013) and previous empirical findings by Empson-Warner and Krahn (1992), we expect that young adults adapt their aspirations and expectations following negative job search experiences. Consequently, we hypothesize that individuals who experience a longer period of unemployment will lower their aspirations and expectations more severely than those who remain unemployed for a shorter duration (H1). We further expect that financial deprivation during unemployment correlates with a downgrading of aspirations and expectations (H2), as the lack of economic resources increases the pressure to accept any job irrespective of whether it is in the desired occupation or not (Lent & Brown, 2013). Latent deprivation during unemployment may erode people's self-worth (Jahoda, 1982) and hence correlate with a lowering of aspirations and expectations (H3).

For those who find a job, two possible scenarios are conceivable: On the one hand, the positive experience of re-employment could induce new optimism (Lent & Brown, 2013). Following this line of argumentation, young adults who are in employment at the time of the second interview should experience an increase in aspirations and expectations in comparison to those who are still (or again) unemployed (H4a). On the other hand, similar to the effects encountered in school-to-work transitions when adolescents adjust their aspirations and expectations downwards to match labor market realities (Low et al., 2005), unemployment-to-work transitions may lead to a decline in aspirations and expectations (H4b). Furthermore, the potential negative effect of re-employment could be stronger after longer periods of unemployment, assuming that the jobs accepted after longer search periods are less likely to match aspirations and expectations (interaction hypothesis H5a). In line with Jahoda's (1982) study on long-term unemployment, negative effects due to financial and latent deprivation are expected to be more pronounced when individuals experience longer periods of unemployment (interaction hypotheses H5b and H5c).

5. Data and Methods

To test these hypotheses, we draw on data from a two-wave panel survey conducted in Vienna among

young unemployed adults aged 18–28 (Mühlböck et al., 2018). The first wave took place between May and September 2014 among young adults who had recently (maximum of four weeks before the interview) registered as unemployed. Respondents were recruited directly at public employment offices in Vienna, either immediately after registration or when they had their first counseling meeting. The survey was self-administered, with respondents filling out the questionnaires on laptops in the presence of interviewers. Respondents were contacted again to participate in the second wave of the survey one year later, which was again self-administered and computer-assisted. At that time, many respondents were still (or again) searching for a job (41.9%), whereas others were in education (30.6%) or had found new employment (27.5%). The first wave included 1,215 individuals, and 625 individuals participated in both waves in total. Despite the particularly difficult and mobile target group of young adults, the re-interview response rate of 51% is similar to the response rate of the IZA evaluation dataset, which was collected with a similar design but covers a bigger age range (16–54 years old) of newly unemployed individuals in Germany (Arni et al., 2014). To account for non-response and attrition, we computed weights based on information from register data on the general inflow into unemployment in the age group 18–28 in Vienna and the estimated probability of first-wave participants to participate in the second wave (Mühlböck et al., 2018). A descriptive table showing the distribution of age, gender, and educational level in the population of unemployed young adults in Vienna in the summer of 2014 and among the survey sample (weighted and unweighted) is provided in the Supplementary File (Table A1). Summary statistics of all variables used in this article and the exact question wordings can be found in Table A2.

We measured job aspirations in both waves (labeled throughout the article as t0 and t1) by asking participants to name their desired occupation. About 17.7% of the respondents indicated that they did not have a desired occupation at t0 and 19.9% of the respondents gave this answer at t1, which corresponds to previous studies reporting high proportions of respondents without a desired occupation (Staff et al., 2010; Yates et al., 2011). The responses of those who named a desired occupation were coded by three independent coders using the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO). They were then matched with the International Socio-Economic Index of Occupational Status (ISEI; see Ganzeboom et al., 1992; Ganzeboom & Treiman, 1996) to arrive at a continuous indicator for the socio-economic status of the desired occupation, with higher values denoting a higher status. The ISEI is based on both the required level of education for a specific occupation and the expected income in this occupation, and thus combines the two most important facets of socio-economic status. Because the ISEI is derived computationally using optimal scaling, it is seen as a more objective measure than for example prestige scores, which rely on subjective evaluations. The use of ISEI renders the study comparable with several other studies on job aspirations (Basler & Kriesi, 2019; Miyamoto & Wicht, 2020; Wicht & Ludwig-Mayerhofer, 2014). In our data, ISEI values of desired jobs range from 19 (e.g., roofers) to 88 (e.g., medical doctors), with a mean value of 49.6 at t0 (the beginning of the unemployment spell) and a mean value of 49.3 at t1 (one year later). Despite the fact that the mean values hardly differ, the Sankey diagram in Figure 1 reveals large within-individual changes during the observation period. More than half (51.8%) of the respondents who indicated a desired occupation changed it between t0 and t1, with half of them (25.4%) raising and half of them (25.4%) lowering their aspirations. The share of those with medium-level aspirations decreased when compared to the beginning of the unemployment spell and those with low levels of aspiration were more likely to stay in this category than those with medium and high levels of aspiration.

Expectations were measured by asking participants to rate the probability that they would ever be employed in their desired occupation on a scale from 0 (extremely unlikely) to 10 (extremely likely). We find that many respondents had high expectations, especially at t0 (mean: 7.5), which declined during the observation period (mean t1: 6.8). About 43.5% lowered their expectations; 29.5% held higher expectations at t1 than at t0; 27.0% did not change their expectations. As can be seen from the Sankey diagram in Figure 1, expectations were even more volatile than aspirations. At the same time, change in aspirations and change in expectations are inversely correlated ($r = -0.20$, $p < 0.001$), implying that a decline in aspirations correlates with an increase in expectations.

In the following section, we analyze the effects of longer periods of unemployment, financial and latent deprivation, as well as re-integration in the labor market on changes in aspirations and expectations. We distinguish between individuals who were continuously unemployed for less than 90 days and those who were continuously unemployed for 90 days or more during the observation period, a threshold value commonly used in Austrian active labor market policy to distinguish between those individuals who easily find re-employment and those who need assistance ("Hauptziel: Langzeitarbeitslose verhindern", 2014).

We measure financial deprivation by calculating an additive index of two items asking whether respondents had enough money for everything they needed and whether they had to forgo purchases due to a lack of financial resources during the period of unemployment. Latent deprivation is measured by answers to a question asking respondents whether they frequently felt depressed during unemployment using the same scale. "Status at t1" indicates whether someone was in employment, in education, or NEET (not in employment, education, or training) at t1. While we include those in education, we focus our main analyses on differences

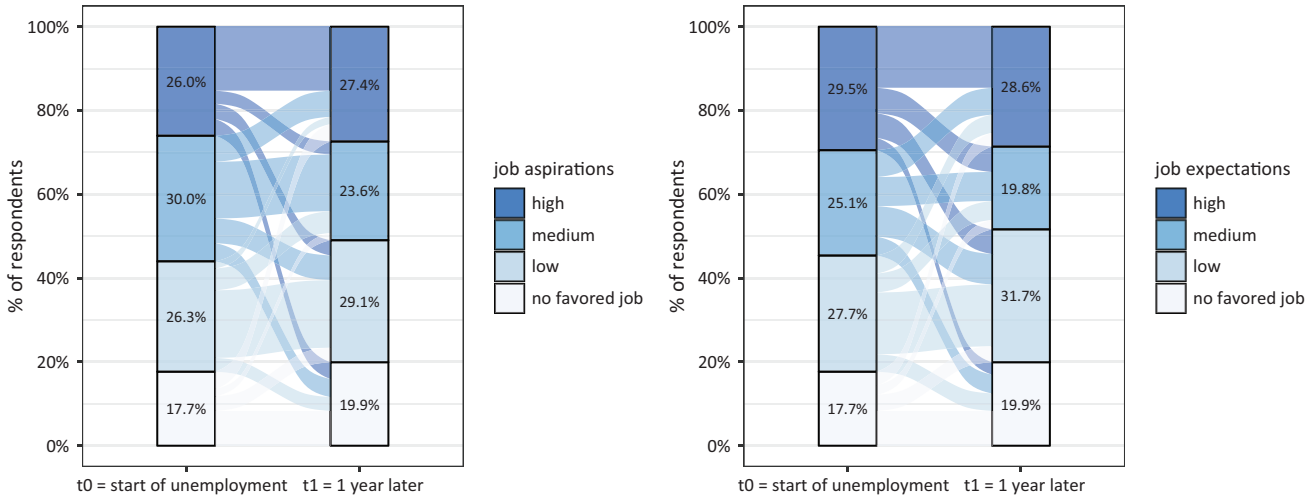

Figure 1. Changes in aspirations and expectations between t0 (beginning of unemployment spell) and t1 (one year later). Notes: N = 577 individuals; categories roughly correspond to tercile splits at t0; aspirations: low ≤39, medium >39 and ≤56, high >56; expectations: low ≤6, medium >6 and ≤9, high >9.

between those employed and unemployed (NEET), while the effect of education is discussed elsewhere (Mühlböck et al., 2020). There can be overlaps between being employed, in education, and NEET. To arrive at a clear distinction between outcome states, we coded the status "job" conservatively—when respondents were in vocational training or pursuing tertiary education in addition to having a job, they were coded as being in education, and when they earned less than EUR 406 per month (*Geringfügigkeitsgrenze*, i.e., marginal employment) in their job(s), they were coded as NEET. However, results are robust against different coding decisions, and analyses using three separate binary variables for job (0/1), education (0/1), and unemployed (0/1) yield similar results.

We test the hypotheses regarding the effects of unemployment duration, manifest and latent deprivation, and employment status at t1 using change score models (D. Johnson, 2005) to avoid confounding by time-invariant variables at the level of the individual (see Supplementary File, Tables A3 and A4, models 1–4). The regression models are depicted by the following equations:

$$\Delta\text{Aspiration}_{(t1-t0)} = \beta_0 + \beta_i X_i \quad (1)$$

$$\Delta\text{Expectation}_{(t1-t0)} = \beta_0 + \beta_i X_i + \gamma\Delta\text{Aspiration}_{(t1-t0)} \quad (2)$$

where $\Delta\text{Aspiration}_{(t1-t0)}$ and $\Delta\text{Expectation}_{(t1-t0)}$ denote the changes in aspirations and expectations between t0 and t1, the vector X_i represents our independent variables, and the vector β_i represents the respective regression coefficients. As changes in aspirations may lead to changes in expectations, we control for the former in regression models on the latter. To test the hypotheses that suggest heterogenous effects depending on the severity of the unemployment experience, we estimate models that include interactions between the variables in question (see Supplementary File, Tables A3 and A4, models 5–7) and provide marginal effects plots to interpret the results. An advantage of the change-score model is that homogeneous time invariant effects are automatically controlled for. As a robustness check, we estimate lagged dependent variable models (Supplementary File, Table A4) that account for age, gender, and level of education.

6. Results

Regarding young adults' job aspirations, we find a statistically significant negative effect of experiencing latent deprivation during unemployment ($\beta_{\text{Latent deprivation}} = -1.68$, t = −2.636, p = 0.009), but no statistically significant effect of financial deprivation ($\beta_{\text{Financial deprivation}} = -0.17$, t = −0.271, p = 0.787; see Table A1). The effect of employment status is found to be dependent on duration of the unemployment spell. Those who were employed at t1 and had experienced an unemployment spell of at least 90 days lowered their aspirations, while those re-employed after a shorter unemployment experience slightly raised their aspirations (Figure 2a). Among those individuals with NEET status at the time of the second interview, aspirations remained stable between t0 and t1. Figure 2c shows that the effect of latent deprivation during unemployment is also moderated by unemployment duration. Those experiencing longer unemployment periods reduced their aspirations more severely due to latent deprivation than those who were unemployed for less than 90 days. We find no evidence for an effect of financial deprivation on job aspirations irrespective of the duration of the unemployment spell (Figure 2e).

The results for job expectations are similar to those for aspirations. Controlling for changes in aspirations, we find that young adults who experienced latent

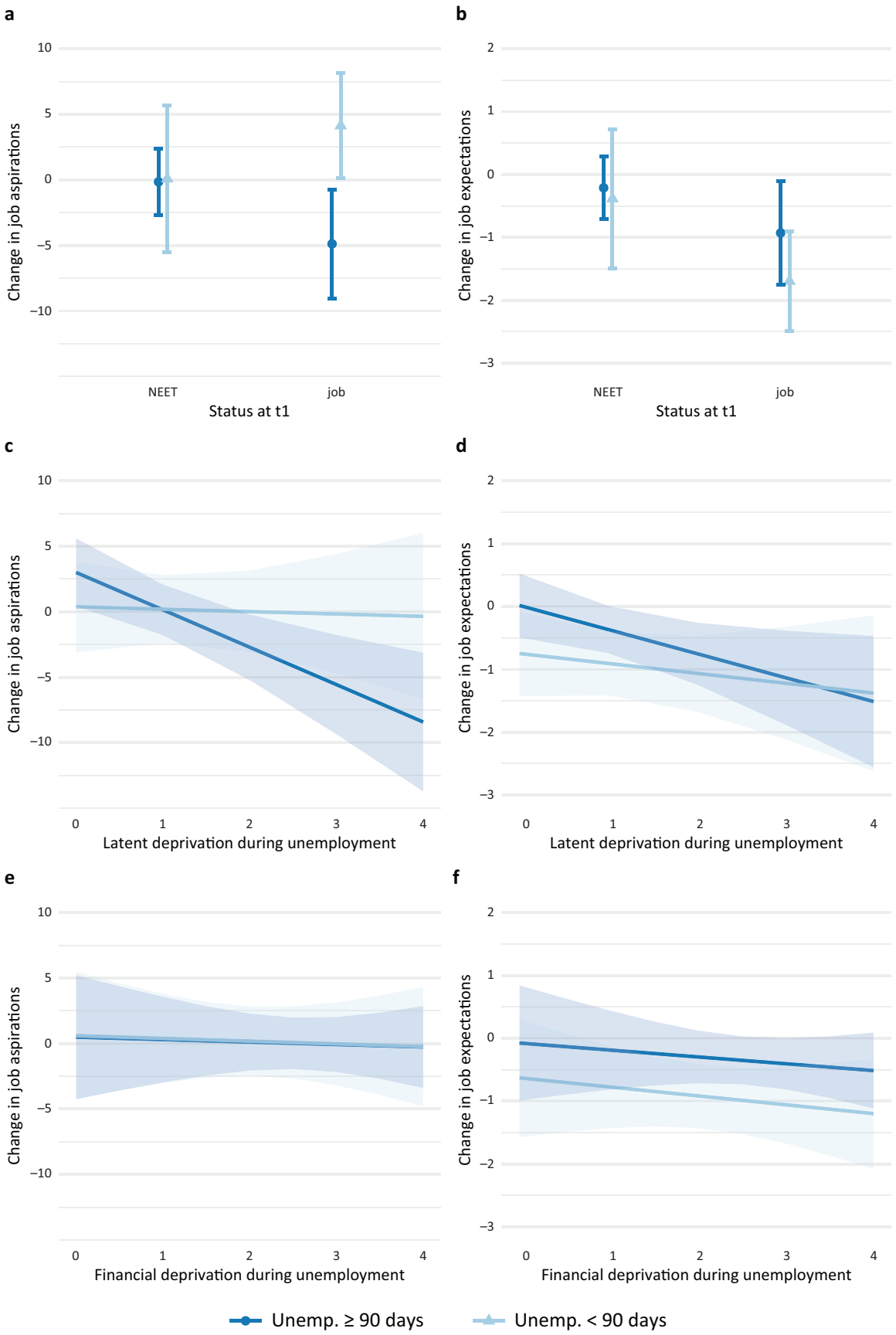

Figure 2. Marginal effects for change in aspirations (left) and expectations (right) between t0 (beginning of unemployment spell) and t1 (one year later). Notes: Figures 2a through 2c are based on models 5–7 in Table A3 in the Supplementary File; Figures 2d through 2f are based on models 5–7 in Table A4; 95%-confidence intervals are shown.

deprivation during unemployment lowered their expectations ($\beta_{\text{Latent deprivation}}$ = −0.28, t = −2.199, p = 0.028). We find no statistically significant effects for unemployment duration ($\beta_{\text{Unempl. ≥;90d}}$ = 0.52, t = 1.607, p = 0.109) or for financial deprivation ($\beta_{\text{Financial deprivation}}$ = −0.10, t = −0.795, p = 0.427). However, concerning employment status, we do find a statistically significant effect on expectations. Those who had a job at t1 had lowered their expectations more severely than those with NEET status (β_{job} = −1.09, t = −2.979, p = 0.003). In contrast to the results for job aspirations, we do not find any significant moderating effects of unemployment duration on either employment status, latent, or manifest deprivation (Figures 2b, 2d, 2f).

In summary, neither the first hypothesis regarding a general negative effect of longer unemployment duration nor the second hypothesis regarding a negative effect of financial deprivation during unemployment are supported by our analysis. However, we find strong support for the hypothesized effect of latent deprivation (H3): Those experiencing depression during unemployment downgraded not only their aspirations but also their expectations. Concerning re-employment, H4b stipulating a negative effect is supported, albeit only for expectations, while only those who experienced a long period of unemployment prior to taking up a job had lowered their aspirations (H5a). Finally, while we do not find support for a moderating effect of unemployment duration on the effect of financial deprivation (H5b), in line with H5c, those who experienced longer unemployment spells lowered their aspirations more severely when affected by latent deprivation than those with shorter unemployment spells.

So far, we have analyzed the changes between t0 and t1, as the development in this period is the focus of our study. However, these changes may depend not only on the experiences encountered during the observation period but also on the initial levels of aspirations and expectations at t0. Hence, to complement the change score analysis, we take a closer look at the initial values of aspirations and expectations (Table 1). For those respondents who found a job after experiencing a longer period of unemployment, initial aspirations were particularly high (mean t0: 54.2), while mean aspirations at t1 amounted to 50.8. In comparison, the mean level of aspiration among those who were employed after a short unemployment spell increased from 49.1 at t0 to 52.0 at t1. This could indicate that aspirations in this group had been unrealistically high at the beginning of the unemployment spell. Indeed, in this group, we also observe the largest difference between the original aspirations at t0 and the occupational status at t1. However, while the mean occupational status at t1 of the group with longer unemployment duration amounts to 46.7, the mean of the group with short unemployment duration is 44.5. This finding is in line with the argument that high initial aspirations may not only result in a longer job search duration, but also in jobs with a higher occupational status (Tomasik et al., 2009).

7. Discussion and Conclusion

We find that the aspirations and expectations of young adults are quite volatile in the year after becoming unemployed. This is in line with the social cognitive model of career self-management (Lent & Brown, 2013), which stipulates that individuals adapt their career goals and outcome expectations to their experiences, which may be quite intensive and incisive during this period. At the same time, experiences of unemployment differ considerably between individuals.

Our findings indicate that the duration of unemployment per se does not affect the job aspirations and expectations of young adults. However, it moderates the effects of latent deprivation and re-employment on job aspirations. Those whose unemployment spell lasted at least three months lowered their aspirations more severely the more they were affected by latent deprivation. Furthermore, while aspirations increased slightly among those who re-entered the labor market after less than three months, re-employment resulted in scarred dreams for those whose unemployment experience lasted longer, crystalizing into a sometimes severe decrease in job aspirations in terms of occupational

Table 1. Mean levels of aspirations and expectations at t0 (beginning of unemployment spell) and t1 (one year later).

	Mean				
	Aspiration t0	Aspiration t1	ISEI job at t1	Expectation t0	Expectation t1
Unempl. <90d	52.03	52.01		7.80	6.90
Unempl. ≥90d	48.16	47.68		7.18	6.62
Status t1: NEET	45.22	44.54		6.97	6.68
Status t1: job	51.61	51.40	45.65	7.25	5.86
UE <90d & NEET	47.09	47.15		7.44	7.18
UE ≥90d & NEET	44.74	43.86		6.85	6.55
UE <90d & job	49.07	51.96	44.50	7.58	5.76
UE ≥90d & job	54.15	50.84	46.71	6.91	5.96

Note: N = 388.

status. Regarding job expectations, measured as the perceived probability of being able to work in the desired occupation one day, we also find negative effects of latent deprivation and re-employment (irrespective of unemployment duration). Because the institutional setting in Austria promotes the early formation of stable job aspirations and expectations (Basler & Kriesi, 2019), the effects we find for our sample of young adults are likely to be even more pronounced in countries where workers' skills and occupational options are less predefined by their educational paths.

The fact that individuals who were employed at the time of the second interview displayed a decrease in aspirations and expectations warrants further discussion. As elaborated in the theory section, this negative effect of the unemployment-to-work transition was to be expected to some extent, since a similar decline in aspirations and expectations has been found in studies on school-to-work transitions. That aspirations did not decline for those with NEET status indicates that aspirations are indeed impaired by a combination of extended job search combined with experiences in the labor market.

A downwards adjustment of aspirations is not necessarily problematic. Young adults' aspirations may have been unrealistically high in the first place, hampering their re-employment chances. This is why assessments of the match between desired and achievable occupations are part of active labor market programs (Alexander, 2019; Walther, 2015). Indeed, based on a crude comparison of the actual level of education and the required level of education for the desired occupation, we find that 47.4% of the respondents did not possess the necessary qualifications generally needed for the ISCO1-level of their desired job. Moreover, as has been argued by Tomasik et al. (2009) and suggested by our analysis, starting with high aspirations and gradually lowering them when they cannot be fulfilled may lead to better career outcomes than the reverse strategy of starting with low aspirations and raising them later.

However, there are also important downsides to lowered aspirations. First, it is difficult to assess whether aspirations were indeed unrealistic. In the short term, they probably were too high as compared to the current level of education and the jobs available to the young adults. Yet, at the age of 18–28, further education can be acquired if necessary. Furthermore, in the long term, the lower aspirations of young adults may become a self-fulfilling prophecy if further education and career advancements are not pursued due to a lack of motivation. Second, our findings indicate that young adults may not only accept temporary setbacks but even abandon long-term aspirations due to pressures to accept any job just to get out of unemployment. Third, the finding that those with longer periods of unemployment lower their aspirations is telling of the deepening scars that unemployment inflicts on young people. In view of the importance of the profession and of employment for an individual's status in society, an occupation that does not conform to initial aspirations has lasting negative effects on mental and material wellbeing. Indeed, we find that those respondents whose jobs at the time of the second interview did not match their aspirations at the time of the first interview were more likely to feel overqualified, displayed lower levels of job and life satisfaction, and earned less in their jobs than their peers whose jobs matched or surpassed their initial aspirations (see Table A6 in the Supplementary File). Hence, experiences during unemployment and their effects on job aspirations and expectations warrant further exploration. Our study should thus contribute to a renewed interest in the causal mechanisms behind unemployment scars.

Future research should seek to overcome several limitations that we faced in this study: First, while the size of our sample is already large in comparison to previous studies of unemployed young people (Axelsson et al., 2007), larger sample sizes will be required to explore more complex relationships between different combinations of factors. Second, the analysis of two-period panel data suffers from important caveats. The change score models do not account for the fact that aspirations and expectations at t0 could affect our independent variables of interest, especially unemployment duration and job search success. While we also estimated lagged dependent variable models, which yield similar results, neither change score nor lagged dependent variable models are ideally suited to measure treatment effects due to potential endogeneity and omitted variables—biases that can neither be ruled out nor tested with the available data (Morgan & Winship, 2014). Future panel studies with observations for more than two periods could help to overcome this problem. Finally, the relationship between aspirations and expectations is highly complex. In this study, we analyzed them in parallel, apart from accounting for a potential effect of change in aspirations on change in expectations by including a respective control variable in our models. Yet, their complex relationship should be explored further, which, again, would require more than two survey waves.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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Article

Why Do High-Performing School Leavers Aspire to Occupations Atypical of Their Qualification?

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Abstract
In Germany, the dual system of vocational education and training is an attractive alternative to tertiary programmes for school leavers with a higher education entrance certificate (HEEC). Most adolescents with this qualification opt for training occupations where the majority of apprentices hold an HEEC (e.g., bank clerk). This decision seems sensible considering that such training occupations are difficult for people with lower school-leaving certificates to access and promise better career outcomes. Nevertheless, some adolescents with an HEEC enter occupations that are not typical of their school-leaving qualification. This article examines under which circumstances adolescents with an HEEC aspire to training occupations atypical of their level of education and thus accept lower career outcomes. Following the rational choice paradigm, we expect differences in perceived benefit and probability of success between school leavers with an HEEC opting for HEEC occupations as opposed to non-HEEC occupations. Using data from the 2018 DZHW Panel Study of German School Leavers With an HEEC, our logistic regression models show that the individuals' self-assessed strengths and their occupational goals explain why they aspire to training occupations atypical of their qualification. Contrary to our assumption, adolescents from academic families are not less likely to aspire to non-HEEC occupations.

Keywords
higher education entrance certificate; occupational aspiration; school leavers; segmentation; vocational education and training

Issue
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1. Introduction

Due to the tracked school system in Germany, adolescents' occupational choice is highly structured by their school-leaving certificates. Privileged are those who attain a higher education entrance certificate (HEEC) as they are eligible to enrol at universities, unlike school leavers with an intermediate or a lower school-leaving certificate. Nevertheless, some school leavers with an HEEC instead start an apprenticeship in the dual system of vocational education and training (VET) (15% as of 2018; see BIBB, 2021, p. 220). Previous research problematized this choice because dual VET is considered to offer poorer outcomes than university education (e.g., income) and because dual VET mostly attracts high-performing school leavers from non-academic families reproducing social inequality (e.g., Becker & Hecken, 2009; Müller & Pollak, 2008).

However, what has been overlooked so far when analysing the occupational choice of adolescents with

an HEEC is the occupational heterogeneity within dual VET (cf. Protsch & Solga, 2016), making it almost impossible to contrast dual VET and university education per se. For example, some dual VET occupations (e.g., insurance broker) lead to higher earnings than some university studies (e.g., liberal arts; Glocker & Storck, 2012). Most adolescents with an HEEC choose occupations within dual VET that are attractive alternatives to university education because they offer excellent prospects. These are mostly demanding occupations that in other countries are part of higher tertiary education (Protsch & Solga, 2016, p. 6). Such occupations are called HEEC occupations because most apprentices hold an HEEC. Nevertheless, there are also adolescents with an HEEC who start training in occupations that are not typical of their level of school-leaving qualification (BIBB, 2021, p. 120).

Thus, instead of merely asking why adolescents with an HEEC prefer dual VET to university education (e.g., Becker & Hecken, 2009; Schnitzler, 2019) the research question should be extended by asking why some aspire to non-HEEC occupations and thereby forgo the advantages of HEEC occupations. While an extensive body of empirical research on occupational choice considers the adolescents' school education (e.g., Basler & Kriesi, 2019; Malin & Jacob, 2019; Schels & Abraham, 2021), to our knowledge, no study has analysed the occupational aspirations of adolescents with an HEEC whilst taking the hierarchical occupational segmentation of dual VET into account. However, the number of adolescents with an HEEC in dual VET is increasing not only in general but also in non-HEEC occupations (BIBB, 2021, pp. 119–120).

The aim of our article is to investigate why high-performing school leavers would aspire to non-HEEC occupations within dual VET. Our research question refers to previous research that revealed the strong and stable vertical segmentation of dual VET occupations by apprentices' school education (Baethge, 2010; Hall, 2021; Protsch, 2014; Protsch & Solga, 2016; Uhly, 2010). The occupationally segmented VET system is linked to social inequality (Ebner et al., 2020; Protsch & Solga, 2016) because, in contrast to non-HEEC occupations, most HEEC occupations offer better work and learning conditions and more favourable employment and earnings prospects once training has been completed (Protsch, 2014; Protsch & Solga, 2016; Troltsch & Walden, 2012). Additionally, HEEC occupations appear more prestigious because the level of school education within a training occupation defines its social prestige (cf. Eberhard et al., 2009). Although HEEC occupations are open to all adolescents in principle, those with lower school-leaving qualifications have considerably less chance of gaining access to them since companies prefer to recruit adolescents with an HEEC (Protsch, 2014; Protsch & Solga, 2016). Our article contributes to the literature relating to adolescents' occupational aspirations and the segmentation of dual VET.

We use the rational choice paradigm as a conceptual framework to investigate the aspects in respect of which adolescents with an HEEC opting for non-HEEC occupations differ from those interested in HEEC occupations. To analyse the role of individual preferences and occupational goals we complement the sociological rational choice framework (e.g., Breen & Goldthorpe, 1997) with psychological expectancy-value theory (EVT; Eccles, 2011; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Our analyses are based on a representative national German survey of adolescents who will shortly leave school with an HEEC (the Panel Study of School Leavers With an HEEC 2018; see Woisch et al., 2019), which was conducted by the German Centre for Higher Education Research and Science Studies (DZHW).

2. The German Education System

The German general school system is characterised by early ability tracking. After primary school, students are sorted into different school tracks equipping them with different opportunities for subsequent fully qualifying programmes. Students leaving school after 12 or 13 years with an HEEC can either enrol at university or start training within the dual system of VET or in the school-based VET sector. Adolescents with an intermediate or a lower school-leaving certificate, who have attended school for nine or ten years, only have VET options. After general school, they still have the opportunity to attain an HEEC at partly qualifying vocational schools.

Dual VET is the largest fully qualifying sector in Germany. Training takes place both in a company and at a part-time vocational school. On average, training takes about three years and apprentices receive a training allowance. In principle, no school-leaving certificate is required to start an apprenticeship. Nevertheless, companies offering training are free to decide which applicants they take on, and they use adolescents' school-leaving certificates to assess their trainability. This results in better chances for applicants with higher school-leaving qualifications to obtain a training place (e.g., Holtmann et al., 2017; Protsch, 2014). There are more than 320 training occupations, and school-leaving certificates exert an influence both in terms of which of these occupations adolescents are able to access and in respect of the occupations to which they aspire (e.g., Hirschi & Vondracek, 2009; Schels & Abraham, 2021). Accordingly, there is a stable vertical occupational segmentation between high-performing and low-performing school leavers within dual VET (Protsch, 2014; Protsch & Solga, 2016). In the literature, various operationalisations of occupational segments by school education differentiate occupations typical of adolescents with an HEEC, which is rather small despite being the highest segment, from occupations typical of school leavers with the lowest certificate (lowest segment), while the other occupations are differentiated in different middle segments (Hall, 2021, p. 227).

Typical HEEC occupations are almost exclusively high-skilled service training professions (e.g., bank clerk, tax

clerk) or IT occupations. The middle segments, where apprentices with an intermediate school-leaving certificate are in the majority, comprise retail occupations, industry and commerce occupations (e.g., industrial mechanic, office manager). The lowest segment encompasses many craft trades and low-skilled hospitality occupations (e.g., hairdresser, bricklayer) (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2020; Protsch & Solga, 2016).

The school-based VET system offers different training occupations such as social and nursing professions and trains mostly women and people with an intermediate school-leaving certificate. Training positions are offered by schools and not by companies. This results in a different logic of access. For this reason, this article only considers adolescents who aim to pursue training in the dual VET system.

3. Theoretical Framework, Literature, and Hypotheses

We focus on differences in the realistic occupational aspirations (cf. Haller, 1968) of adolescents who will leave school with an HEEC. Following extended rational choice approaches, deciding for or against a non-HEEC occupation can be modelled as an individually rational weighing of occupational alternatives. During this process, adolescents evaluate the benefit, probability of success, and cost of the alternatives (Breen & Goldthorpe, 1997; Erikson & Jonsson, 1996; Esser, 1999). Correspondingly, and in reference to previous research on occupational and educational aspirations (e.g., Dräger & Wicht, 2021; Glauser & Becker, 2016), differences in subjectively perceived benefit and probability of success should explain why adolescents with an HEEC opt for non-HEEC occupations. We also draw upon EVT (Eccles, 2011; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002), addressing additionally individual differences in the evaluation of benefit and probability of success based on individual characteristics (e.g., goals) and contextual factors (e.g., parents).

We merely implicitly consider the cost aspect because the database does not contain any information on the anticipated costs of occupational choice within dual VET. However, we assume that adolescents with an HEEC who aspire to enter non-HEEC occupations will incur opportunity costs. Even though they have invested two or three additional years in their education, they forgo the benefits of HEEC occupations.

3.1. Parents and Social Origin

Rational choice approaches postulate that the occupational aspirations of adolescents vary with their social background. Calculations of cost, benefit and probability of success turn out differently depending on the social class of the parental home (Boudon, 1974). Additionally, young people are eager to at least attain the social class position of their parents. Accordingly, aspirations are aligned to the parents' social status (Breen & Goldthorpe, 1997). Deciding not to enter university thus constitutes downward mobility for adolescents from an academic family background (Breen & Goldthorpe, 1997). Due to their lower degree of social prestige, non-HEEC occupations are even less adequate in terms of social status (cf. Eberhard et al., 2009) implying an additional loss in social status. Therefore, we assume that adolescents whose parents have an academic background are less likely to aspire to non-HEEC occupations (H1).

EVT proposes that parental attitudes and expectations shape adolescents' occupational aspirations (Eccles, 2011). For Germany, research showed that adolescents anticipate whether their parents would approve of their occupational choice for dual VET occupations, and this affects their aspirations. The parental influence was strong even if adolescents' occupational interests, occupational knowledge and self-confidence were controlled for (Granato et al., 2016; Matthes, 2019). Furthermore, Mischler and Ulrich (2018) demonstrated for the craft trades (mostly non-HEEC occupations) that adolescents will be less likely to aspire to a non-HEEC occupation if their parents have high aspirations and wish their child to obtain an HEEC. We, therefore, assume that adolescents who perceive their parents' aspirations to be higher are less likely to aspire to non-HEEC occupations (H2).

3.2. Benefit

According to EVT, the attractiveness of an occupation is determined by the potential adolescents ascribe to an occupation for facilitating their goals and by the interest and enjoyment in performing the activities related to an occupation. The development of these aspects is influenced, amongst other things, by people's "ability self-concepts" (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Eccles and Wigfield (2002) explain that positive experiences when succeeding at tasks lead to a positive relationship of competence beliefs and interests in the respective field. Empirical research accordingly demonstrates the influences of ability self-concepts on interest development (Tracey, 2002). Further research underlines reciprocal influences between interests and (self-assessed) strengths (Denissen et al., 2007; Isaacs et al., 1997). In line with psychological theory on occupational choice which emphasises people's desire to achieve a fit between the characteristics and requirements of an occupational area and their interests as well as their strengths (Holland, 1997), self-assessed strengths have a strong predictive power within the context of occupational choice when used instead of interests (Isaacs et al., 1997; Prediger, 1987). In line with this reasoning, we view the opportunity to fit one's strengths to an occupational option as a component of this option's benefit. Although abilities are also relevant for the expected probability of success of an occupational option, we refer to the research outlined above and draw upon a self-assessment of various strengths in lieu of the respondents' interests, which are not contained in our database.

We assume that self-assessed strengths are accompanied by occupational aspirations in areas that match these strengths. Because non-HEEC occupations are more frequently industrial, technical or craft trade occupations (cf. Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2020) or involve manual tasks (Friedrich, 2021), we assume that adolescents who assess their own strengths in craft trades and technical areas as being higher are more likely to aspire to non-HEEC occupations (H3a). In contrast, HEEC occupations are associated with higher cognitive requirements (Meyer & Sacchi, 2020; Stalder, 2011). They include a greater number of, for example, qualified commercial occupations and media occupations (cf. Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2020). We, therefore, assume that adolescents are less likely to aspire to non-HEEC occupations if they assess their own strengths in the economic sciences and in foreign languages to be higher (H3b).

Adolescents also evaluate occupational alternatives in terms of how useful these are for the achievement of their personal goals (Eccles, 2011). Goals have been shown to predict, for example, interest in STEM occupations above and beyond STEM-related self-efficacy (Diekman et al., 2010). Diekman et al. (2010) distinguish goals that relate to power, status and income (agentic goals) from communal goals that are oriented not merely towards working with people but more specifically towards supporting others and serving humanity. HEEC occupations are well suited to the realisation of agentic goals because they lead to high returns (BIBB, 2019, pp. 301–307; Protsch, 2014). As agentic and communal goals form two distinct factors (Diekman et al., 2010) people with high communal goals might expect to encounter a job environment and colleagues not matching their own values when entering HEEC occupations. Bearing in mind that adolescents strive to match their values to the occupational environment when developing occupational aspirations (Holland, 1997) entering an occupation that predominantly attracts people with agentic goals might be unattractive for adolescents with communal goals, and this is why they opt for alternative occupations.

We, therefore, assume that adolescents with high agentic goals are less likely to aspire to non-HEEC occupations (H4a) and that adolescents with high communal goals are more likely to aspire to non-HEEC occupations (H4b).

3.3. Probability of Success

To assess the probability of success of occupational alternatives, adolescents consider both their chances of getting an apprenticeship and of meeting the occupational requirements during VET. School-leaving qualifications and school marks are key indicators for both aspects (Erikson & Jonsson, 1996; Esser, 1999; Hirschi, 2011; Kay et al., 2017, p. 2171). Research demonstrates that adolescents adjust their occupational aspirations following their school performance (e.g., Basler & Kriesi, 2019; Hirschi, 2010; Hirschi & Vondracek, 2009). For occupational aspirations within dual VET, longitudinal data shows that students downgrade their aspirations to less prestigious and thus more accessible training occupations if their school marks are poor, and opt for more prestigious occupations if their marks improve (Heckhausen & Tomasik, 2002; Tomasik et al., 2009). The influence of school marks is apparent even if the adolescents' social origin and actual abilities are controlled for (Wicht & Ludwig-Mayerhofer, 2014).

The occupational segmentation according to school-leaving qualifications suggests different cognitive requirement levels for different occupations, attributing higher requirement levels to HEEC occupations (Protsch, 2014; Stalder, 2011). Adolescents evaluate whether they will be able to meet these requirements in a specific occupation. If they do not believe that they are capable of performing the tasks, they turn to more achievable alternatives irrespective of their interest in the prior one (e.g., Eccles, 2011).

Access to dual VET is market-driven and competitive. Irrespective of school performance, social origin or other factors adolescents' chances of finding an apprenticeship are determined by the ratio between training places offered and the number of adolescents seeking training places (e.g., Beicht & Walden, 2016; Granato et al., 2015; Kleinert & Jacob, 2013). Research indicates that adolescents link the chances of realising their occupational aspirations to the regional opportunity structure and adjust their aspirations accordingly (e.g., Flohr et al., 2020; Glauser & Becker, 2016). For example, Hirschi (2010) and Hirschi and Vondracek (2009) showed that the more training places were offered in a region in a certain training occupation the more likely it was that students aspired to that occupation. Jaik and Wolter (2019) found that students are more likely to revise their initial occupational plan if occupations are characterised by a shortage in training places offered.

We, therefore, arrive at the following assumptions:

- Adolescents with poorer school marks are more likely to aspire to non-HEEC occupations (H5).
- The lower adolescents perceive their chances of successfully completing training, the more likely it will be that they will aspire to the less demanding non-HEEC occupations (H6).
- The likelihood that adolescents will aspire to non-HEEC occupations will be higher if they live in regions where the training market situation in HEEC occupations is tight (H7).

4. Data, Operationalisation, and Model Design

We use data from a survey conducted by the DZHW of adolescents aspiring to complete an HEEC in 2018, which we enriched with data on the training market. The survey took place six months prior to school leaving

via a randomly chosen disproportionate cluster sample. Participants comprised 38,228 students out of 78,633 contacted at 1,104 schools of various types throughout Germany (Woisch et al., 2019). The disproportionality of the sample was adjusted to the statistical population via a design weight with regard to the school type and federal state in which the HEEC will be acquired.

Because we focus on differences in occupational aspirations in the dual VET system, we exclude students who do not wish to enter dual VET, who have already completed VET or are currently doing so. Additionally, no analyses can be conducted for students from Berlin or Hessen since data privacy regulations in these federal states prohibit the collection of parental information. This reduces the sample to 3,955 cases.

Our dependent variable is based on the occupational aspirations of the respondents, which we classified as either non-HEEC occupations (=1) or HEEC occupations (=0). We used the vocational training statistics of the Federal Statistical Office provided by BIBB (cf. BIBB, 2021) to classify the respondents' aspirations. The vocational training statistics deliver yearly information on the apprentices' highest school-leaving qualification for every newly concluded training contract in each single occupation in the dual VET system in Germany. Within the vocational training statistics as of 31 December 2017, we define occupations in which apprentices with an HEEC account for 60% or less of newly concluded contracts as non-HEEC occupations and occupations with an HEEC proportion of more than 60% as HEEC occupations. This threshold refers back to earlier work (cf. Protsch & Solga, 2016) and is stricter than the approach adopted, for example, by Hall (2021), who used a 50% threshold. We then used this classification of training occupations (non-HEEC vs. HEEC) to classify the occupational aspirations of the sample as non-HEEC occupations or HEEC occupations. In our dataset, students' occupational aspirations are measured as occupational types (5-digit code according to the 2010 German Classification of Occupations). Thus, single occupations are summarised in occupational types. If 5-digit codes comprise more than one distinguishable single occupation, we calculate the average share of apprentices with an HEEC over the entire 5-digit category and classify this type into HEEC occupations and non-HEEC occupations accordingly. Forty-two persons named occupational types that could not be easily classified as either HEEC occupations or non-HEEC occupations. Thus, we excluded them from the analysis, reducing the sample to 3,913 cases.

In order to add information about the tightness of the training market faced by the adolescents, we used official data about training supply and demand for 2017 for HEEC occupations and non-HEEC occupations. Since the training market situation varies considerably by region, we used the students' school postcode to differentiate the market situation by training market regions according to the Federal Employment Agency. Depending on the adolescents' aspirations we calculated a regional company-based extended supply-demand ratio (SDR) according to BIBB (2021) for each respondent. Thus, the SDR displays the training market situation the adolescents were facing when aspiring to an HEEC occupation as opposed to a non-HEEC occupation in a certain region. Differences in SDR state how many fewer places were available to adolescents in the region for every 100 potential applicants in HEEC occupations as compared to non-HEEC occupations. Table 1 displays all independent variables.

HEEC occupations and non-HEEC occupations differ not only with regard to educational background but also in respect of gender distribution. While HEEC occupations more often have a balanced gender ratio, non-HEEC occupations are more segmented by gender (Hall, 2021). Research findings on gender differences in the evaluation of both benefit and probability of success and consequently in occupational aspirations (e.g., Beicht & Walden, 2015; Breen & Goldthorpe, 1997; Eccles, 2011) could be suggestive of diverging effects of the different influence factors on occupational aspirations and thus on our dependent variable. In order not to overlook any effects due to potential gender-related differences, we estimate separate models for girls and boys.

Since our sample comprises students from both general schools and vocational schools and given the fact that adolescents' former educational experiences, as well as their aspirations, vary according to the school type (cf. Wicht & Ludwig-Mayerhofer, 2014), we control for school type in all models. Additionally, we control for migration background because research indicates that the aspirations of young migrants differ from those of adolescents without a migration background (Beicht & Walden, 2019). Persons with missing values on the independent variables (n = 727) are excluded from the analyses. Thus, our analysis sample consists of 3,186 cases.

We estimate binary logistic regressions in order to examine influential factors of occupational aspirations. We add the predictors step by step and present average marginal effects (Mood, 2010). Average marginal effects show the change in the likelihood of aspiring to non-HEEC occupations if the predictor is increased by one unit. Because the data results from a clustered sample, we cluster standard errors at school level. The different federal states in which students attend school are controlled for in the models but not displayed in the tables.

5. Results

Fifty-five percent of the respondents aspire to non-HEEC occupations, girls (48%) less often than boys (64%). These adolescents aspire to 115 different occupational types. Some of these occupations are characterised by a low share of newly concluded training contracts with adolescents with an HEEC (e.g., dental assistant, industrial mechanic), while others have a relatively high share of apprentices with an HEEC (e.g., clerk in public administration, IT specialist in systems integration). Girls and

Table 1. Operationalisation of the independent variables.

Variable	Operationalisation
Social origin and parents	
Academic family background	1 = at least one parent has a tertiary degree 0 = neither parent has a tertiary degree
Parental expectation (as perceived by respondent)	1 = *very unimportant* to 5 = *very important*
Benefit	
Self-assessed strengths in — craft trades area — technical area — foreign languages area — economic sciences area	1 = *weak* to 5 = *strong*
Agentic goals — high income — good career opportunities	1 = *very unimportant* to 5 = *very important*, collated as a dichotomous variable due to low variance: *(very) important* (4/5 = 1) and *(very) unimportant* (1/3 = 0)
Communal goals — support others — act selflessly	
Probability of success	
Current average school mark	1.0 (*very good*) to 5.0 (*not sufficient*)
Self-assessed chance to successfully complete VET	1 = *very low* to 5 = *very high*
Training market situation	1 = training market situation was worse for HEEC occupations than for non-HEEC occupations (top quartile of the distribution) 0 = lower three quartiles of the distribution
Control variables	
Migration background	1 = adolescent holds foreign citizenship or she/he/at least one parent was born abroad 0 = no migration background
Type of school	1 = vocational school, 0 = general school

Note: For the question wording see Table A1 in the Supplementary File.

boys differ substantially in their aspirations. The most popular non-HEEC occupations for girls are office manager (19%) and clerk in public administration (13%), for boys IT specialist in systems integration (11%) (the only IT occupation classified as non-HEEC), mechatronics fitter (9%), and industrial mechanic (7%). For the respondents opting for HEEC occupations, the picture is less diverse. In total, the adolescents in this group aspire to 33 occupational HEEC types; 51% of girls and 64% of boys aspire to only two different occupations (industrial clerk, bank clerk). The distributions of the dependent and independent variables are displayed in Table A2 in the Supplementary File. Table 2 presents the results of the logistic regressions separately by gender.

First, we regress socio-demographic characteristics, school type and parental expectation on aspirations (M1 in Table 2). Contrary to H1, adolescents whose parents have academic qualifications are not less likely to aspire to non-HEEC occupations. The contrary is even true for girls. They are more likely to aspire to non-HEEC occupations if their parents hold a tertiary degree. However, the effect becomes smaller if the girls' self-assessed strengths are accounted for. Regarding H2, parental expectations only play a minor role for girls. As assumed, they are less interested in non-HEEC occupations if they expect their parents' aspirations to be higher. However, the effect disappears completely in the further model steps. The results could be an indication that parents want their children to attain an HEEC because they want all possibilities to be open to them after school. But once the child has attained an HEEC, they leave the occupational choice up to the child. And once the child has decided against university education, a high social origin no longer steers them towards prestigious occupations

Table 2. Determinants of aspiration for non-HEEC occupations.

	boys				girls			
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M1	M2	M3	M4
Migration background	−0.04	−0.04	−0.04	−0.04	0.09*	0.09*	0.09*	0.08*
	(0.16)	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.19)	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.17)	(0.17)
Vocational school	−0.03	0.03	0.04	0.04	0.03	0.07*	0.07*	0.07*
	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.16)	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.15)
Academic family background	0.02	−0.01	−0.02	−0.02	0.08*	0.06*	0.06+	0.06*
	(0.13)	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.13)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.15)
Parental expectation	−0.01	0.01	0.02	0.02	−0.03*	−0.01	−0.01	−0.01
	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Strengths								
Craft trades		0.09***	0.09***	0.09***		0.03+	0.02	0.02
		(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)		(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Technical		0.06***	0.06***	0.06***		0.04*	0.04**	0.04**
		(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.09)		(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Foreign languages		−0.01	−0.01	−0.01		−0.03**	−0.03**	−0.03**
		(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)		(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Economic sciences		−0.09***	−0.08***	−0.07***		−0.12***	−0.11***	−0.11***
		(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)		(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Goals								
High income			−0.07*	−0.07*			−0.07*	−0.07*
			(0.19)	(0.19)			(0.14)	(0.14)
Good career opportunities			−0.12**	−0.12**			−0.10*	−0.10*
			(0.23)	(0.23)			(0.18)	(0.18)
Support others			0.00	0.00			0.01	0.01
			(0.15)	(0.15)			(0.13)	(0.13)
Act selflessly			−0.02	−0.02			0.02	0.02
			(0.14)	(0.14)			(0.13)	(0.14)
Current average marks				0.03				0.05+
				(0.17)				(0.13)
Chance of VET success				0.01				−0.01
				(0.12)				(0.10)
Training market situation				−0.00				0.06+
				(0.22)				(0.16)
Pseudo-R^2	0.02	0.20	0.21	0.21	0.02	0.10	0.11	0.11
n	1,596				1,590			

Source: Own calculations based on the Panel Study of School Leavers With an HEEC 2018. Notes: *** < 0.1%, ** < 1%, * < 5%, + < 10%; weighted, clustered standard errors in brackets; controls for the different federal states were included in all models but are not reported here.

with high outcomes. Regarding the control variables, girls with a migration background and girls from vocational schools are more likely to aspire to non-HEEC occupations, whereas we find no effect for boys.

Step two (M2) shows that self-assessed strengths are of major importance in predicting occupational aspiration. In line with H3a, adolescents aspiring to non-HEEC occupations reported higher strength in technical areas and craft trades. However, for girls, the effect for the craft trades area disappears in later model steps. Furthermore, as expected, the higher adolescents assess their strength in the economic sciences, the less likely they are to aspire to non-HEEC occupations whereas, contrary to our assumption, self-assessed strength in foreign languages is negatively related to aspiring to non-HEEC occupations only for girls but not for boys (H3b). The gender

differences regarding the role of strength in the area of craft trades and foreign languages tie in with the idea that girls and boys differ in their preferences and thus in their aspirations (Eccles, 2011).

The results of the third step (M3) suggest that striving for high income and good career opportunities reduces the probability of aspiring to non-HEEC occupations, as expected (H4a). Compared to these agentic goals and contrary to our assumption, there seems to be no relationship between communal goals (supporting others and acting selflessly) and adolescents' aspirations (H4b).

Contradicting H5, poorer marks do not fundamentally increase the probability of adolescents aspiring to non-HEEC occupations (M4). However, we find some evidence for girls. They are more likely to aspire to non-HEEC occupations if their average marks are poorer. The results could be an indication for boys being generally more optimistic when interpreting their school marks than girls (Lörz et al., 2011). Contrary to H6, we find that adolescents' lower assessment of their ability to complete training successfully is not associated with a higher probability of aspiring to non-HEEC occupations. When interpreting the results, one should bear in mind that anticipated chances of success and occupational aspirations were measured at the same time. This might have resulted in a causality problem if respondents used their realistic aspiration as a reference point for evaluating their chance of success.

Furthermore, the results regarding the chances on the training market only speak mildly in favour of H7. Only girls are more likely to aspire to non-HEEC occupations when the training market conditions at the location of their school are worse for HEEC occupations than for non-HEEC occupations. Any interpretation of the results should accord due consideration to the fact that a more differentiated operationalisation of the training market situation considering the home address of the adolescents instead of the schools' location could have produced different results. However, further analyses reveal that the training market situation is significantly related to our dependent variable for both genders when the market situation is considered as the sole explanatory variable. Apparently, the full set of model variables already explains this relationship.

We conducted different robustness checks. We estimated a model without parental variables (academic family and migration background) in order to exclude any influence on our results by the federal states of Hessen and Berlin, for which parental information is not available. The results remain stable, regardless of whether these two federal states are included or not. If, as explained above, adolescents seek to match their strengths and interests to the training occupation they aspire to, this process requires a certain degree of awareness of one's interests (Hirschi, 2011). If high uncertainty regarding one's interests exists, other factors could be relevant to the decision. However, further analyses that account for the degree of uncertainty of interests largely support the presented results. Additionally, we re-estimated the different model specifications (m = 20) after imputing missing values using multiple imputation by chained equations. This did not result in any substantial changes compared to the procedure using listwise deletion. Analyses not displayed here are available on request from the authors.

6. Conclusion

The specific occupations in which young people undergo training define their training and employment conditions, with HEEC occupations on average offering the best prospects (Protsch & Solga, 2016). It thus seems paradoxical that adolescents with an HEEC should aspire to non-HEEC occupations, which yield lower returns, despite having better chances of accessing HEEC occupations than applicants with lower school-leaving qualifications. We sought to understand this choice by considering the rational choice paradigm and EVT and by analysing the data of the DZHW Panel Study of German School Leavers With an HEEC.

Our results indicate that non-HEEC occupations are the preferred route for high-performing school leavers who see their strength in technical areas and, in the case of boys, additionally in the craft trades. Thus, matching an occupation's characteristics with one's preferences is a main driver in occupational choice (cf. Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). This seems rational because choosing an occupation that does not meet one's interests and strengths leads to dropout intentions (Volodina et al., 2015). Such an interest-driven aspiration seems to put the costs of entering non-HEEC occupations into perspective. Our data suggest that adolescents are well aware of these costs. Bearing in mind that most non-HEEC occupations offer less than HEEC occupations (Protsch & Solga, 2016), adolescents are less likely to strive for non-HEEC occupations if receiving a high income and having good career opportunities are important goals to them.

In our sample, adolescents from academic families seem to place no emphasis on status maintenance (Breen & Goldthorpe, 1997). The reason could be that they have already experienced downward mobility because they decided against university education, and the avoidance of further downward mobility is no longer relevant. Alternatively, the results could question the role of status maintenance, thus indicating that the motive of finding pleasure in occupational tasks might diminish adolescents' fear of downward mobility. This might be particularly the case for adolescents from privileged families because they have the resources to focus on intrinsic values and can therefore neglect the outcome of their occupational choice (cf. Johnson & Mortimer, 2011). Additional research is required to enlarge our understanding of the relative importance of intrinsic values such as interest and the motive of status maintenance in occupational decision-making. In this vein, the role of gender should be taken into account

given the fact that our female respondents are more likely to strive for non-HEEC occupations if they come from academic families. In general, our results indicate that a closer look at gender-specific effects could be rewarding in terms of disentangling the complexity of occupational choice of high-performing school leavers opting for dual VET.

Furthermore, aspiring to a non-HEEC occupation does not necessarily reflect a compromise made by adolescents with an HEEC in the face of limited opportunities (tight training market, poor marks), particularly not for boys. However, one has to bear in mind that adolescents with an HEEC are privileged in terms of opportunities precisely because they hold an HEEC. For adolescents with lower school-leaving certificates, adjusting occupational aspirations to opportunities plays an important role because educational attainment structures adolescents' opportunities (e.g., Heckhausen & Tomasik, 2002; Hirschi & Vondracek, 2009). Consequently, a future object of investigation should be to discover if the interest of adolescents with an HEEC in non-HEEC occupations leads to a (further) displacement of adolescents with lower school-leaving qualifications in non-HEEC occupations (cf. Beicht & Walden, 2018; Troltsch & Walden, 2012). However, the choice of non-HEEC occupations by adolescents with an HEEC could also be beneficial since it could decrease occupational segmentation according to school-leaving qualifications. This may be associated with an assimilation of educational returns between various occupational segments. It would, for example, be conceivable that training conditions in the lower occupational segments improve because adolescents with an HEEC have higher expectations of their employers (Eberhard & Ulrich, 2017). Additionally, the social prestige of non-HEEC occupations could rise, reflecting an increase in the school qualifications of apprentices (Eberhard et al., 2009). On the whole, the situation for adolescents with school-leaving certificates other than an HEEC will, however, only improve if, at the same time, HEEC occupations become more accessible to them.

Notwithstanding, our data does not permit any statements concerning the adaptation of aspirations nor the realised occupational choice after leaving school. Since it is possible that adolescents will readjust their aspirations, further investigations focusing on the transition to training are of interest. Additionally, choosing a dual VET occupation is linked to the choice of employer. We think it is probable that adolescents with an HEEC opt for a non-HEEC occupation because they find a company particularly attractive (cf. Mohr & Weis, 2019), even though it only offers non-HEEC occupations. Unfortunately, our database does not include the significance of the company in the occupational choice. Therefore, this aspect has to be left for future research. In future studies, it would furthermore be important not to differentiate solely between HEEC occupations and non-HEEC occupations. The latter encompass highly different occupations, which were divided into further segments in other studies (e.g., Hall, 2021; Uhly, 2010). In our survey, the usual distinction between occupations typical of apprentices with an intermediate school-leaving certificate and occupations typical of those with a lower school-leaving degree was not possible since hardly anyone within our sample aspired to the latter. Instead, we find that many adolescents aspired to non-HEEC occupations with relatively high shares of apprentices with an HEEC. These occupations (e.g., technical drawer, clerk in public administration) still offer good prospects. Thus, it would be of major interest to explore which high-performing school leavers aspire to occupations of the lowest segment, because such aspirations come with much higher costs than aspiring to non-HEEC occupations of middle segments (cf. Protsch & Solga, 2016). Qualitative research is needed to enlarge our understanding of atypical choices in this regard.

Our study contributes to a better understanding of occupational choice of high-performing school leavers opting for dual VET. Through the analysis of aspirations atypical of the adolescents' school education, we addressed the heterogeneity within the dual VET system and encourage the view that dual VET should be seen as more than just one system below university education. Clearly, the findings demonstrate the importance adolescents attach to a fit of their strengths and interests to occupational areas. However, discovering this fit requires self-knowledge and knowledge about the world of work (Hirschi, 2011). Previous research shows that especially students preparing for an HEEC complain about insufficient vocational preparation at school (cf. Eberhard et al., 2018). A more pronounced counselling which also considers atypical occupations within dual VET could encourage atypical but interest-driven choices (cf. Mischler & Ulrich, 2018). Policy should promote interest-driven occupational choice even if this means that high-performing school leavers decide against university education and opt for non-HEEC occupations. In the end, a greater mix of adolescents with different school qualifications within occupations of dual VET could lead to a more equal society.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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Article

Are Adolescents in One-Parent Families a Previously Unnoticed Group in Inclusive Career Guidance?

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Abstract
In Germany, schools are largely responsible for adolescents' career development. Corresponding interventions in career guidance must take into account various endogenous and exogenous factors of individualized development to foster successful post-school transitions. Parents, in particular, are one of the most significant influencing factors when it comes to shaping after-school plans usually having a highly positive effect along with teacher support. Children in one-parent families constitute a group that has received little attention so far in the context of career guidance analysis. They are at a higher risk of social decline into precarious circumstances and of living in families with lower education levels as well as less parental care time. In addition, one-parent families more often report that they are unable to adequately support their children concerning career development, ultimately impacting the children's post-school transition. Based on the theoretical model of career competence, a sample from eight German schools (N = 1998) is used to investigate to what extent adolescents in one-parent families differ from their peers in other family compositions regarding both support and development of career competence. Each school's location and teacher support are included in the calculations. This study shows that adolescents in one-parent families display below-average levels concerning three of the analysed facets (occupational knowledge, exploration, and self-regulation).

Keywords
adolescents; career competence; career education; multiple linear regression; one-parent family; risk group

Issue
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1. Introduction

Educational careers are significantly influenced by socio-demographic and socio-economic factors (OECD, 2016). The disadvantages of students with a low socio-economic status, migration background, and/or under-educated parents are especially significant in Germany (Albert et al., 2019; Hadjar, 2011; Klieme et al., 2010). The effects of one's upbringing and origins can also be observed in adolescents' post-school transitions (Beicht & Walden, 2019), career decisions, and other determinants of their career development, like cultural background (Solga & Wagner, 2001) or gender (Driesel-Lange & Ohlemann, 2019). Independently from their background, all adolescents need to acquire career-related skills to successfully navigate and manage their careers (Driesel-Lange et al., 2020).

In Germany, schools and the *Arbeitsagentur* (federal employment agencies) are legally tasked with supporting adolescents in acquiring career-related skills as well as in their post-school transition (Deeken & Butz, 2010). Career education and learning is

therefore a central task of all German secondary schools (Kultusministerkonferenz [KMK], 2017). Although research has shown that students differ in their career development and, hence, in their needs for support (Ohlemann & Driesel-Lange, 2018), career guidance is rarely tailored to these individual needs.

With this in mind, this article takes a closer look at parental influence, as parents as a group vary just as much as adolescents. The authors seek to clarify how different family constellations affect the development of career competence and what conclusions might be drawn. In this context, it must be pointed out that children in one-parent families as a group have received little attention in career education and guidance research so far. They are at a higher risk of social decline into precarious circumstances and of living in families with lower education levels and less parental care time (Bartels & Stockhausen, 2017). In the next step, we study the effects of teacher support on students from different family compositions to derive relevant support mechanisms in schools.

2. German Educational System and Career Guidance

2.1. German Educational System

In Germany, schooling begins at the age of six (or just about). All children in Germany start with *Grundschule* (primary school) which usually lasts four years (grades one through four). Exceptions here are the federal states of Berlin and Brandenburg, where primary school usually lasts six years (until grade six). After *Grundschule*, secondary education begins. Basically, there are three types of schools—*Hauptschule*, *Realschule*, and *Gymnasium*—as well as schools that combine two or three types of schools under one roof. These are usually called *Gesamtschulen*. Depending on the type of school, either a vocational track or a higher education track is typically favoured: Very roughly speaking, the German *Hauptschule* goes up to grade nine or ten with a focus on a vocational track; the German *Realschule* goes up to grade ten with a focus on a vocational track; the *Gymnasium* goes up to grade 12 or 13 with a focus on a higher education track. The *Gesamtschule* is a comprehensive school form combining different tracks and may go up to grade 13. However, as an example, students who attend a *Gymnasium* and pursue a higher education track also have the opportunity to pursue a vocational track after the ninth or tenth grade. In principle, compulsory education begins at the start of *Grundschule*. From here on, all children are educated full-time until the end of the first phase of secondary school (nine years). After that, the obligation to attend school full-time ends, because there are opportunities for vocational training within the vocational track. Choosing this track means that young people spend part of their time at school and the rest of their time at work. Upon reaching the age of majority, all forms of compulsory schooling end (cf. Eurydice, 2021–2022). An illustration of the German education system can be found in Figure 1.

2.2. Career Guidance in Germany

In Germany, the preparation of the transition from school to work is linked to the goal of enabling all students to develop their careers in a self-determined

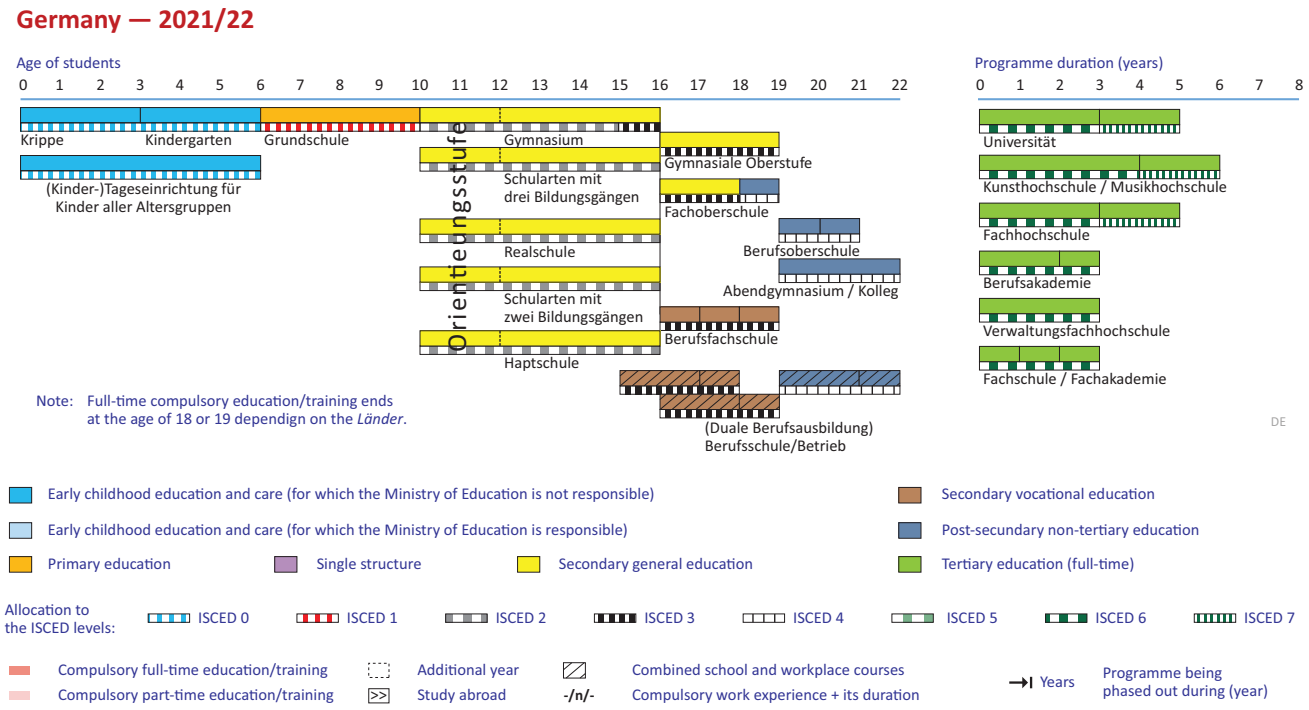

Figure 1. Structure of the national education system. Source: Eurydice (2021–2022).

manner and to shape them successfully in the long term. Career guidance can be seen as a highly relevant educational task, as it addresses the successful long-term participation of citizens in the labour force and society overall. As you can see above, in Germany the educational system offers many opportunities to decide on a career during but also after school. It is possible to decide at a very young age, after grade nine (in the age of 15), to do vocational training and to work at least part-time in a business. At the same time, it is possible to stay in school until the age of 19, for example, to start studying. In this case, entry into the workforce would be further delayed by the years of study. Nevertheless, adolescents need information and support during their school years in order to anticipate this process.

In this regard, both the schools themselves and the employment agencies have a special responsibility. According to the latest resolutions of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the States in the Federal Republic of Germany (KMK, 2017), all secondary schools are generally required to offer a program over a period of several years from grade seven onward, providing individual career guidance and support. During this process, adolescents are required to examine their aspirations and wishes as well as prospects and opportunities. Based on their interests, skills, and individual potential, students are challenged to shape their career choice process on their own and to make well-founded decisions that are not based on stereotypical attributions. They are supposed to receive advice and support on various steps along the way—with the help of extracurricular partners. Ultimately, the goal is to have adolescents compare their own professional interests and opportunities with the requirements and conditions of the world of work (KMK, 2017).

3. Theoretical Background

Developing relevant career competence (Driesel-Lange et al., 2020) and one's own occupational identity (Fend, 1991) as well as planning and fleshing out the transition to post-school educational options represent central tasks of career guidance for adolescents. Career decisions are influenced by a multitude of endogenous and exogenous factors, the career development process itself (cf. Ohlemann, 2021), and the acquisition of career-related competences and resources (Driesel-Lange et al., 2020; Hirschi et al., 2018).

3.1. Career Competence Development in Adolescence

Concerning lifelong career development (Savickas, 2012), adolescents must develop competences and resources enabling them to shape their own career in the long term. Definitions of career competences set out by both Defillippi and Arthur (1994) and Kuijpers and Scheerens (2006) place these skills in close relation to career development as an adult and overall career success. Building on these definitions and the concepts of career self-management (King, 2004), boundaryless careers (Arthur, 1994; Defillippi & Arthur, 1994), protean careers (Briscoe & Hall, 2006; Hall, 1996), and human capital (Fugate et al., 2004), models such as the career competences model of Akkermans et al. (2013) or the career resources model of Hirschi et al. (2018) specify these capabilities. There are also sociological theories that use for example external factors and effects of origin to explain career choice and the transition between school and the labour market. These include Bourdieu's (1982, 1987) theory and Roberts' (2009) opportunity structure theory. In simple terms, both theories assume that later career choices are strongly influenced by external factors (e.g., origin and parental home). The authors of this article also refer to external factors to find out how strong their influence is on the acquisition of career-related competences. However, the starting point here is the individual, in particular the individual acquisition of competences.

Most of the aforementioned models refer to adults who are already employed. However, adolescents can only draw on limited experiences during their first career choice and the related post-school transition. For adolescents, it is not the organization or the world of work, but rather the schools that constitute the referential context for their career development. To successfully manage this first career choice, they require other career competences, such as the development of a career self-concept or implementation strategies (Driesel-Lange et al., 2020; Savickas et al., 2018). At the same time, the implementation of career guidance varies so much depending on the school system (Schröder, 2020) that the school context is rarely considered in theoretical models. The career competence model by Driesel-Lange et al. (2020) constitutes an exception explicitly taking the school context as well as post-school transitional competences and developmental needs into account.

The model by Driesel-Lange et al. (2020) describes career-related development as an individual process during which adolescents acquire various competences within the dimensions of knowledge, motivation, and action. As can be seen from Figure 2, each dimension consists of four facets. The knowledge dimension includes self-knowledge, occupational knowledge (i.e., knowledge about the world of work and/or specific occupations), knowledge of prerequisites, and planning knowledge. The motivation dimension includes career concern, career control, career curiosity (i.e., willingness to remain open to new career opportunities and alternatives), and career confidence. The action dimension includes exploration, self-regulation, problem-solving, and stress management. In this context, exploration refers to the concrete action of finding information about one's own interests, job profiles, and educational paths. Self-regulation refers to the ability to manage career goals by consciously setting goals and monitoring and planning their implementation (Driesel-Lange et al., 2010).

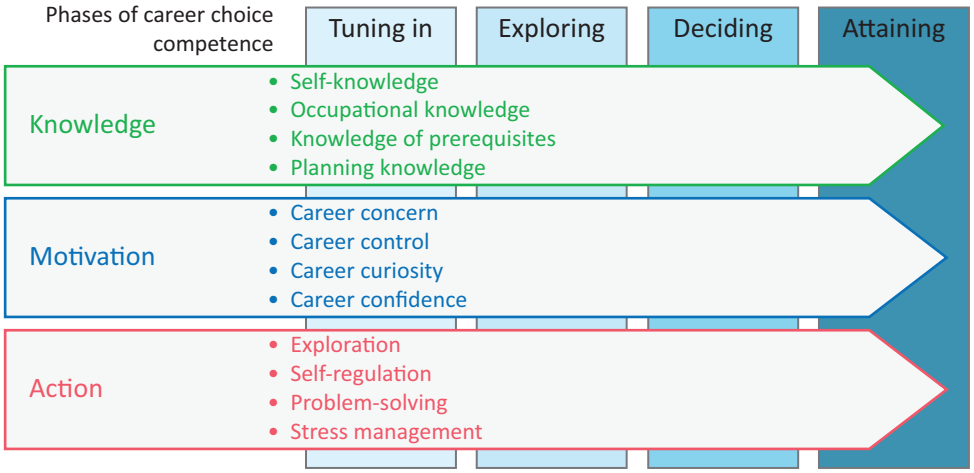

Figure 2. Career competence model. Source: Driesel-Lange et al. (2020).

In addition to these competences, the model outlines four phases describing different stages in which adolescents find themselves. These include tuning in, exploring, deciding, and attaining. In the first phase (tuning in), the focus lies on the preparedness to plan one's future. This phase is followed by various concrete experiences (exploring) in the world of work, such as an internship or a targeted search for information about a job. In the third phase (deciding), the adolescent makes a concrete decision about his or her post-school educational path. In the last phase (attaining), the students begin actively preparing the transition. Overall, this model combines both phase-typical aspects and competence-related implications. It has been contextually integrated into the school environment and operationalized for the needs of schools (Kaak et al., 2013). Further, the underlying assumption that there is little connection between an adolescent's individual development and their age/year of birth has been shown in different studies (Ohlemann, 2021). That is one argument why it is so important to look at the individual and then consider external factors. Our study builds on the career competence model by Driesel-Lange et al. (2020).

4. Current Research

4.1. Heterogeneity in the Career Development of Adolescents

Adolescents differ in their individual prerequisites, their social, financial, and educational resources, as well as their starting points and developmental progress. These differences give rise to a diverse range of needs in terms of support for the respective individual career choice process (Ohlemann, 2021).

Regarding the exogenous factor of cultural background, adolescents with migration backgrounds bear a higher risk of remaining without occupational qualification. Further, the importance of parental opinion regarding the individual career choice differs among students from different cultural backgrounds (Solga & Wagner, 2001). Regarding the endogenous factor of gender, studies have shown that girls in Germany start their career choice process earlier than boys do and explore their options more thoroughly. However, they also face higher insecurity regarding their career decisions (Driesel-Lange & Ohlemann, 2019). Driesel-Lange and Kracke (2017) observed different levels of career competence among students in grade nine. Moreover, Ohlemann and Driesel-Lange (2018) identified different groups with different competence levels or profiles. Ohlemann (2021) has argued that a path toward individualized career education can take place through internal differentiation. These heterogeneous factors enable us to identify individual groups and make specific needs visible.

4.2. Social support in Career Development

Parents represent another important factor in the life of every adolescent. They play an important role in their children's overall development as well as in their career choice process and their career success later in life.

Heckman and Mosso (2014) found that children's cognitive and social-emotional development are influenced by the time spent with their parents. In addition, the parent's income and educational background have a significant impact. Higher parental income and better-qualified parents are associated with better schooling (Heckman & Mosso, 2014), access to higher education (Kracke et al., 2018), and the children themselves having a higher income later in life (Bartels & Stockhausen, 2017; Jäntti & Jenkins, 2015). We see that many factors have an impact on a person's success over the course of their life. Further, a positive relation between adolescents' explorational behavior, their satisfaction with their transition to university, and perceived parental support can be observed (Dietrich et al., 2011). The higher the perceived support from parents and teachers, the more extensively students explore their career options, the higher their self-efficacy, and the more systematically they plan

their next career-related steps (Mayhack & Kracke, 2010). Dietrich and Kracke (2009) found a negative association between parents' interference and a lack of engagement, respectively, and adolescents' decision-making abilities.

In addition, we know that social status, demographic conditions, and the social environment shape and influence a person's actions. This can be seen, among other things, in Bourdieu's (1982, 1987) concept of habitus, which manifests itself in three types of capital: economic, social, and cultural. If a person does not have sufficient access to each type of capital potential disadvantages may arise. Of course, this also applies to adolescents and their development.

As mentioned above, parents and the overall family structure play a crucial role. We know that families exist in all colours and shapes, so it is important to look at different constellations and starting points. This should not be done by reproducing stereotypes, but by identifying potential needs more precisely. We also know that individualized and needs-based career education leads to better results in the transition from school to vocational training or higher education. Special attention should therefore be paid to one-parent families with a focus on analysing if children in these settings require specific types of support. In this context, schools could play an important, compensatory role.

We know that one-parent families represent a growing group in Germany (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2018). From 1996 to 2017, for example, the number of one-parent families with at least one underage child increased from 13.8% to 18.9%. It ought to be added that most single parents in Germany are mothers, single fathers as primary caregivers only make up a small portion (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2018). We also know that one-parent families in Germany demonstrate a higher risk of poverty and, as a consequence, are at a higher risk of becoming part of the societal precariat (Bahle et al., 2013; Bartels & Stockhausen, 2017; Statistisches Bundesamt, 2018). About 40% of children in one-parent families were considered as "living in poverty" in 2012. As a comparison, the overall poverty risk in Germany lies at approximately 14% (Bartels & Stockhausen, 2017). Bahle et al. (2013) showed that the risk of one-parent families drifting into a precarious situation can be observed across Europe. Parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds find it more difficult to support their children in their career choice process (Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach, 2014). Their children also more often choose to pursue vocational training rather than go to university (Kracke et al., 2018). In contrast, 71% of adolescents from higher social strata choose a university degree (Albert et al., 2019)—and during their transition to university, they benefit from their parents' respective knowledge and experience (Kracke et al., 2018).

In terms of their children's career choice processes, one-parent families rate their own ability to support their children as insufficient almost twice as often as parents do in general (Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach, 2014). This is partly due to the fact that single parents can spend less time with their children because of the multitude of tasks they must accomplish on their own (Bartels & Stockhausen, 2017). At the same time, children in one-parent families often feel less prepared regarding their career decisions compared to their peers living in other family constellations (Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach, 2014). This means we observe a perceived lack of support on both sides in one-parent families. Therefore, it is highly surprising that children in one-parent families have received little targeted attention in the context of career education so far.

4.3. The Crucial Role of Teacher Support

Several studies have shown that teacher support positively influences students' development with regard to different facets of career competence (Driesel-Lange et al., 2021). In addition to an increase in self-efficacy and planning, Schindler (2012) found a positive relation between higher perceived support from teachers and students' career-related feelings of security. Over time, the informational and emotional support provided by teachers has a particularly positive influence on the cognitive dimension of career competence (Driesel-Lange et al., 2018). The development of career competence is also influenced by social support adolescents receive from parents, peers, and teachers during their career choice process (Driesel-Lange et al., 2018). This also shows that in Germany school is a relevant starting point to counteract potential disadvantages students may face in terms of career development. Therefore, it is important to look at different target groups and identify their needs more precisely.

As can be seen from the theoretical implications and the current state of research, successful career guidance and education depends on many exogenous and endogenous factors. Moreover, career competences are crucial for successful school-to-school or school-to-work transitions, satisfaction later in life, etc. In Germany, it is a public political and strategic goal to support adolescents in their career development thus enabling them to make a proactive, informed, and independent career choice (KMK, 2017). The development of career-related competences is a crucial aspect of this process. In addition, we have seen that parents play an important supporting role (in the same way as teachers do). As has been pointed out, it is striking that families with only one main parent have received little attention so far. Placing special research focus on one-parent families promises to be particularly beneficial as (a) many single parents themselves state they are unable to support their children adequately in their career development and (b) children in these family constellations more frequently display feelings of insecurity with regard to their career decisions. In addition, it ought to be reiterated that these families are more likely to face financial difficulties with far-reaching consequences for children's career development.

5. Research Questions and Hypotheses

With this study, we aim to add to the existing knowledge on career development, in particular the development of career-related competences of adolescents in one-parent families in comparison to other family constellations. Our research question focuses on how students vary in their career competence development as well as their perceptions of parental and teacher support depending on the composition of their family.

Based on the findings discussed above, we have formulated the following hypotheses:

H1: Parental support is positively correlated with adolescents' developmental status of career competence.

H2: Adolescents in one-parent families receive less (perceived) parental support in everyday school life.

In Germany, career education mainly takes place in secondary schools. Hence, students are likely to perceive career-related activities and challenges as part of their school life. Therefore, if they are asked about parental support regarding school matters, it can be deduced that their answers include career-related matters as well:

H3: Living in one-parent households predicts a lower level of career competence among adolescents.

H4: Higher perceived teacher support predicts a higher level of career competence among adolescents.

6. Methodology

6.1. Participants

Adolescents (1098 female, 900 male) ranging from ages 12 to 22 (*M* = 16.4, *SD* = 1.65, grade eight to 13) who were enrolled in one of eight secondary schools (two *Hauptschulen*, three *Gesamtschulen*, and four *Gymnasien*) in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany, participated in the underlying survey: 49.9% exclusively spoke German at home and 50.1% spoke another language (in addition to German); 609 respondents (30.1%) were enrolled in a school in a neighborhood to be considered "privileged" or "well-to-do," while 1416 respondents (69.9%) were enrolled in a school in an "underprivileged" or "underserviced" neighbourhood. The status of a school is related to the socioeconomic status of the neighbourhood. "Underserviced" schools are in a neighbourhood with low socioeconomic status. The basis for the identification of the status "privileged" and "underprivileged" are data of the federal state North Rhine-Westphalia, which give the "social status" of the neighbourhood via social points (income rate of the neighbourhood, migration share, and employment rate; see Isaac, 2011). Further, 328 respondents (16.2%) lived in one-parent families, 1498 respondents (74%) lived with both parents, 130 respondents (6.4%) lived in blended families (i.e., one parent and their partner), and 70 respondents (3.5%) had other living arrangements. Please notice that, due to rounding, we reach 100.1% here. Due to the heterogeneity of reasons, the last group was excluded from this study.

6.2. Measures

Career competence was measured with 38 items (7-point Likert-scale) using items from the standardized diagnostic questionnaire of career competence (Kaak et al., 2013). This questionnaire is based on the theoretical model of career competence by Driesel-Lange et al. (2020). Table 1 provides an overview of the corresponding facets with their respective means, standard deviations, and Cronbach's alpha as well as an example item.

Four items of the TIMSS 2015 study (Wendt et al., 2017), were used to determine the interest of parents in their children's school life (e.g., "My parents ask me what I'm currently doing in school") and thus to identify potential *parental support*. Students reported on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*never*/*nearly never*) to 5 (*every day*/*nearly every day*). The internal consistency estimate (alpha) for the scores in this study was .79 (*n* = 1977, *M* = 3.56, *SD* = 1.19).

Students rated the support provided by teachers (7-point Likert scale) by answering a modified version of Schindler's (2012) scale by Driesel-Lange et al. (2018). For example, *teacher support* was operationalized by statements such as "In my class, we often talk about topics that affect our time after school" or "most of my teachers support me in finding my strength." The internal consistency estimate (alpha) was found to be .92 (*n* = 1998, *M* = 3.99, *SD* = 1.37).

6.3. Procedures

The tablet-based survey took place in January 2019 during regular class hours at the respective schools. Students' participation was voluntary and they received a small gift (e.g., candy, chocolate bars) at the end of the survey. We conducted our analyses in four steps. After examining the descriptive values, we proceeded using bivariate correlations between the career competence scales and parental support. Next, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) with the family constellation constituting the independent variable and parental support constituting the dependent variable was used to examine group differences via Hochberg's GT2 post-hoc tests (Field, 2018). After that, we applied a three-step hierarchical procedure to test our third and fourth hypotheses regarding the prediction of career competence. Following Field (2009, 2018), we conducted boot-strapped multiple linear regressions with the facets of career competence as dependent variables. Analyses were conducted using SPSS (version 25).

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, Cronbach's alpha of all scales.

Scale (N Items)	Example item	*M*	*SD*	*α*
Self-knowledge (3)	I can accurately assess my abilities.	5.24	1.19	.76
Occupational knowledge (3)	I know how vocational training programs or academic studies are organized.	4.09	1.53	.89
Knowledge of prerequisites (3)	I know exactly how to prepare for my future job.	4.53	1.63	.89
Planning knowledge (2)	For the time being, I have set clear goals in order to move closer to starting my career.	4.16	1.67	.80
Career concern (3)	It is important for me to clarify which professions I am suited for.	5.83	1.23	.88
Career control (3)	I am already thinking about what I want to be.	5.01	1.41	.88
Career curiosity (4)	I enjoy exploring new professions.	4.62	1.43	.68
Career confidence (4)	How much do you trust yourself to describe what your dream job should look like.	4.50	1.26	.83
Exploration (3)	How often have you purposefully asked several people in the last few months for information about occupations and training opportunities.	3.68	1.69	.88
Self-regulation (3)	If something that I wanted to do goes wrong, I want to find out the reasons.	4.70	1.40	.78
Problem-solving (3)	I trust myself to find a solution if I were to suddenly drop in my school performance.	5.22	1.28	.88
Stress management (3)	Thinking about my future profession is a burden for me.	4.50	1.46	.81
Teacher Support (10)	Most of my teachers support me in finding out what my strength is.	3.99	1.37	.92
Parental support (4)	My parents ask me what I'm currently doing in school.	3.57	1.19	.82

7. Results

7.1. Parental Support is Positively Correlated With Adolescents' Developmental Status of Career Competence

The bivariate *correlations* among parental support and teacher support as well as the twelve career competence facets are reported in Table 2. All facets of career competence are significantly associated with the two scales of support. Although these effects are comparatively small (Cohen, 1988), our first hypothesis about a positive correlation between parental support and adolescents' career competence is validated. A positive correlation can be observed between the described career competence facets and perceived support. Adolescents who feel

Table 2. Correlations of the career competence facets with parental and teacher support.

	Parental support	Teacher support
Self-knowledge	.128***	.096***
Occupational knowledge	.034*	.109***
Knowledge of prerequisites	.093***	.138***
Planning knowledge	.105***	.162***
Career concern	.114***	.103***
Career control	.170***	.205***
Career curiosity	.113***	.188***
Career confidence	.123***	.151***
Exploration	.080***	.143***
Self-regulation	.211***	.159***
Problem-solving	.125***	.149***
Stress management	.061***	.042***

Note: *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

supported by their parents or teachers also have higher scores in the career competence facets and vice versa.

7.2. Adolescents in One-Parent Families Receive Less (Perceived) Parental Support in Everyday School Life

The calculated ANOVA revealed a highly significant overall effect of the family composition on perceived parental support, F (2, 1903) = 8.88, p < .000, η^2 = .01, representing a small-sized effect (Cohen, 1988).

Post-hoc tests showed that there is a significant difference between perceived parental support in one-parent families (*M* = 3.34, *SD* = 1.23) and "traditional" two-parent families (*M* = 3.64, *SD* = 1.15) as well as between blended families (*M* = 3.36, *SD* = 1.25) and two-parent families. Students who live with both parents feel more supported than young people in blended families or one-parent families. Our hypothesis that adolescents from one-parent families (feel they) receive less parental support in everyday school life is confirmed.

7.3. Living in One-Parent Households Predicts a Lower Level of Some Career Competence Facets Among Adolescents

To test our third hypothesis, we performed a *hierarchical multiple linear regression* model for each of the twelve career competence facets. As our focus in this study lies on family composition, we will only report in detail on the results of the following facets: occupational knowledge, exploration, and self-regulation.

Family composition significantly predicted the mean level of these three facets and remained significant in the second step with the addition of the predictor of teacher support. The remaining nine facets are not reported, regardless of the significance of the last step in the regression.

As Table 3 shows, the total R-square for three facets is statistically highly significant and of a similar size between .05 and .08, representing a similarly good model fit for these career competence facets.

Adolescents from one-parent families have significantly lower levels of competence in each presented facet compared to their classmates living with both parents (see Table 3). This effect is the same for three facets (all standardized β: −.06). Further, there are differences between two-parent families and blended families on the shown facets, but only occupational knowledge has a significant effect (standardized β: −.05).

In terms of exploration, it is clear that the location of the school has an effect (standardized β: .06). Adolescents in an underprivileged location explore more. The third hypothesis is confirmed with regard to the facets of occupational knowledge, exploration, and self-regulation.

Table 3. Hierarchical multiple regression predicting facets of career competence from demographic factors, school location, family composition, and teacher support.

	Facets of career competence					
	Occupational knowledge		Exploration		Self-regulation	
Predictor	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β
Model 1	.01***		.01***		.02***	
Gender (0)		.01		.05*		.12***
Language (0)		.10***		−.06*		−.11***
School location (0)		−.03		.08**		−.01
Model 2	.02**		.02**		.03**	
Gender (0)		.01		.05*		.12***
Language (0)		.10***		−.06*		−.11***
School location (0)		−.02		.08**		−.01
One-parent family (0)		−.07**		−.06**		−.07**
Blended family (0)		−.05*		.04		−.03
Model 3	.05***		.06***		.08***	
Gender (0)		.01		.05*		.12***
Language (0)		.11***		−.06*		−.10***
School location (0)		−.04		.06*		−.03
One-parent family (0)		−.06*		−.06*		−.06**
Blended family (0)		−.06*		.04		−.03
Teacher support		.17***		.20***		.23***
Total R^2	.05***		.06***		.08***	
n	1907		1907		1907	

Notes: Reference category is "two-parent family"; gender: 0 = male, 1 = female; * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001; school location: 0 = privileged, 1 = underprivileged.

7.4. Higher Perceived Teacher Support Predicts a Higher Level of Career Competence Among Adolescents

The perceived teacher support predicts the state of development in the shown facets of career development. The stronger the perceived teacher support, the higher the level of competence.

These significant effects lay between .17 (occupational knowledge) and .23 (self-regulation) and are thus twice or three times higher than the effect of living in a one-parent family or a two-parent family. Our hypothesis that higher perceived teacher support predicts a higher level of career competence is confirmed.

7.5. Limitations

One limitation of our studies lies in the cross-sectional analysis from which no conclusions can be drawn regarding causality or development processes. For example, we can only find a positive correlation between perceived support and higher scores in career choice competence, but no direction of effect. A longitudinal analysis might also focus on how children of one-parent families develop in relation to their peers. The group of blended families would have to be defined more precisely to identify possible risks in this area as well. Only small effects could be identified, which can be regarded as a first indication for potential needs. Furthermore, no interactions between the other predictors and family compositions were considered, but the shown findings suggest that interactions might exist.

8. Conclusion

Preceding research showed the positive effect of parental and teacher support on adolescents' career development (Mayhack & Kracke, 2010; Schindler, 2012). We were able to confirm this result with our data. As Dietrich et al. (2011) state, parental support in the form of conversations about what has been experienced in the context of career guidance is important—particularly when it comes to managing the transition from school to vocational or academic life. It was also found that adolescents from one-parent families rated parental support as lower than adolescents living with two parents. These results confirmed the assumption that one-parent families support their children's professional development less (Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach, 2014).

As mentioned above, the development of career competences is a complex process that recurs to different dimensions and phases (Driesel-Lange et al., 2020). The model is focused on both the school situation in Germany and the individual adolescent and describes that a variety of competences have to be acquired. These twelve competences are assigned to three dimensions, namely knowledge, motivation, and action. These are needed at different stages to deal with the transition after school. The model describes four phases (tuning in, exploring, deciding, and attaining). The complexity of individual development is made clear by the fact that development cannot be thought of in a linear way (Ohlemann, 2021). This shows why it is so important to closely monitor how the acquisition of career competences develops and which factors could cause a lower acquisition of competences. It became apparent that adolescents from different family compositions only differed regarding their development in the following areas: occupational knowledge, exploration, and self-regulation. However, the results must be put into perspective with regard to the adolescents' level of career competence. It is important to mention that the adolescents did not differ concerning the other facets, like problem-solving, knowledge of prerequisites, or career confidence based on their family constellation. Here we also see that external factors do not fully explain how the acquisition of career competences proceeds. This is why it is so important to take a closer look at the individual, the different competences and external factors. Only then can further implications for the support of adolescents be made visible.

In the context of the state of research, exploration in particular stands out here. Kracke and Noack (2005) were able to show that adolescents develop positively in their exploration when both parents continuously encourage their children or provide their children with moderating support. The fact that children from one-parent families show a risk here can be used for further research. In this article, only one quantitative characteristic was collected. We know whether the adolescents in our sample grow up mainly with one or both parents. We know nothing about the quality of the relationship, the parenting style and expectations, or the educational level of the parents. We can only assume—and this is suggested by both Bartels and Stockhausen (2017) and the Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach (2014)—that the group of one-parent families is limited in terms of time and resources.

Nevertheless, based on these findings, further conclusions may be drawn. For one, adolescents from one-parent families face a specific need for support in the area of occupational knowledge, exploration, and self-regulation. At the same time, it can be seen as a relief that adolescents from one-parent families do not face a specific need for support on other facets of career competence, e.g., self-knowledge, career curiosity, or stress management. In order to target support, further studies would have to focus more closely on the parent-child relationship. This could then reveal very specific needs.

The shown effects of the one-parent family on the level of career competence are also relativized in comparison to the strong effects of teacher support. The positive effect of teacher support offers an opportunity to address or cushion the needs of this group through school-based career guidance. Therefore, it is important to raise teachers' awareness of their positive and significant influence.

We were able to confirm that adolescents from one-parent families are a risk group in career guidance that has received too little attention. In order to be able to classify these findings more broadly, however, a more thorough examination of this group is required. Until this takes place, we know that children in one-parent families need support early in their career development process. Further, schools as the key element of career guidance in Germany must be made aware of this risk in to provide appropriate support to these students. Among many things, this means a sufficient number of staff is needed for schools to provide the level and quality of support both policymakers and society expect from them. Furthermore, didactical consequences must be drawn to address special needs (e.g., peer learning, mentoring). This conclusion can contribute to more equal opportunities in the context of school-internal career guidance, ensured through the support of teachers.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

Ethnic Differences in Gender-Typical Occupational Orientations Among Adolescents in Germany

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Abstract
We illuminate the socio-cultural embeddedness of adolescents to explain gender-typical occupational orientations (GTOO) from an intersectional perspective. We investigate whether and why immigrant and native youths differ in their GTOO. These issues are of practical and political importance, as deviations from the norm of the autochthonous majority society can drive change in the gender segregation of the labor market on the one hand but can also lead to difficulties in accessing training and work on the other. We use cross-sectional data on ninth-graders from the German National Educational Panel Study, which allows us to analyze distinct dimensions of GTOO, i.e., expectations and aspirations. The results of stepwise multilevel models show that (a) differences in GTOO between immigrant and native youths apply to certain countries of origin—particularly females from Turkey, the country with the strongest contrast to the German context in terms of gender-related labor market characteristics, differ in their aspirations from native females—and (b) differences between immigrant and native German expectations shrink with immigrant generation and after controlling for aspirations. This indicates that assimilation processes involving socialization-related adaptation to the host society play a greater role than an increase in information about its labor market.

Keywords
career choice; country differences; gender; horizontal labor market segregation; immigrants; German National Educational Panel Study; occupational aspirations; occupational expectations

Issue
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1. Introduction

Like the labor markets of all Western countries, the German labor market is highly segregated by gender (Charles & Grusky, 2004). Horizontal segregation into typical “male” and typical “female” jobs gives rise to gender inequality, which usually goes hand in hand with vertical inequality, such as lower earnings in female-dominated occupations (e.g., Busch, 2013; Leuze & Strauß, 2016). Youths’ gender-typical occupational orientations (GTOO) play an important role in reproducing this labor market segregation and resulting social inequality (European Commission, 2009; Kleinert & Schels, 2020).

Previous research attempts to explain GTOO in terms of individual traits, self-concepts, or family influence (Eccles, 2011; Hardie, 2015; Polavieja & Platt, 2014). More recent studies, however, also focus on contextual influences on GTOO, such as peer or teacher influences in the school context (Hadjar & Aeschlimann, 2015; Legewie & DiPrete, 2014; Siembab & Wicht, 2020) or the influence of local labor markets (Flohr et al., 2020; Malin & Jacob, 2018).

Young immigrants are a highly interesting case for exploring GTOO from a contextual perspective. Their gender-specific socialization processes are embedded in the multiple contexts of their country of origin and their host society. As the gendered connotation of occupations is culture-specific (Hofstede, 2001), young immigrants' "frames of reference" (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997) about men's and women's careers may be shaped by different, and possibly even inconsistent, ideas about gender. This is important from a policy perspective because, on the one hand, multiculturalism and resulting differences in career choices can drive change in gender-segregated labor markets. On the other hand, if gender is an important hiring characteristic, atypical career choices can also lead to difficulties in accessing training and work. However, little is known about how gender and migration intersect in explaining occupational orientations (for exceptions regarding the US context see Baird, 2012; Hardie, 2015).

We aim to highlight the relevance of youths' sociocultural embeddedness in specific contexts when investigating the GTOO of immigrants compared to native youths in Germany. We address two central questions: (a) Do immigrants from certain countries of origin have different GTOO than native Germans? If so, (b) do these differences persist or diminish across immigrant generations due to acculturation? For this purpose, we use cross-sectional data on 10,264 ninth-graders from the German National Educational Panel Study (NEPS), which allows us to analyze theoretically distinct dimensions of GTOO. Moreover, the NEPS allows for nuanced analyses of differences between native Germans and immigrants by country of origin and immigrant generation (Olczyk et al., 2016).

2. Country Context

In Germany, around 20% of the total population had a migration background in 2010—this share had risen to roughly 25% by 2020. This includes all persons who were either not born with German citizenship themselves or who have at least one parent who was not born with German citizenship (German Federal Statistical Office, 2017, 2022). Until 2010, when the data on which our analyses are based were collected, migration in Germany was characterized by two main groups that differed in terms of integration and motivation.

One large group is the so-called guest workers, made up mainly of Turks who came to Germany with their families beginning in the 1960s, primarily to improve their economic situation. This is a negatively selected group in terms of this population's educational and economic resources and thus its integration into the German labor market, but a positively selected group in terms of its higher educational and occupational aspirations compared to native Germans (Salikutluk, 2016; Wicht, 2016). Another large group is the (late) repatriates. These are German minorities in the former Soviet Union (FSU) or Eastern Europe, especially Poland, who were able to resettle in Germany due to special regulations. Despite their comparatively high level of education, this group also must contend with problems in the education system and the labor market (Haberfeld et al., 2011; Kogan, 2011).

Since members of these ethnic groups immigrated to Germany at different times, it is important to consider their generational status, i.e., whether the respondents themselves were born abroad (first generation), their parents (second generation), or their grandparents (third generation; see Olczyk et al., 2016). FSU immigrants interviewed in the NEPS in 2010 are mostly first- or second-generation immigrants, while Turkish respondents belong mainly to the second generation, and Polish respondents to the third generation (for details on our operationalization of ethnic origin see Section 4.2). The NEPS data does not include information on migrants from recent refugee movements.

3. Theoretical Considerations

3.1. On the Concept of Occupational Orientation

Social psychology provides a multitude of concepts related to individual occupational orientation in general and GTOO in particular, including individual expectations and aspirations (Gottfredson, 2002; Sewell et al., 1969). Occupational expectations reflect anticipated career choices; they express an individual's beliefs about what they can reasonably expect to achieve considering their opportunity structure (resources and external circumstances). In contrast, aspirations are seen as giving expression to people's desires and wishes, which are detached from perceived opportunities proximal to career choice (Gottfredson, 2002; Rojewski, 2005). While related to different aspects of an individual's agency in career development, expectations and aspirations are closely linked to the individual's socially embedded learning experiences in childhood and adolescence (Lent et al., 1994; Sewell et al., 1969). In short, aspirations are assumed to arise from socialization processes; expectations additionally result from information about and perceptions of accessibility and structural barriers.

3.2. Theoretical Model of the Formation of GTOO Within Social Contexts

Gender—along with prestige—is considered a key driver of occupational orientation. Gottfredson's (2002) theory of circumscription, compromise, and self-creation states that the gender-typing of aspirations arises from socialization during the process of circumscription by way of internalizing the gender roles provided by the social contexts in which individuals find themselves. Exposure to the articulated and tacit expectations of significant others (see also Sewell et al., 1969, which focuses on status transmission processes) leads individuals to develop

gender-driven perceptions of themselves and the social world and, as a result, to narrow their range of desired occupations (i.e., occupational aspirations). In the process of compromise, which is more proximal to career choice, perceived opportunity structures come into the equation. From the already limited pool of aspired-to occupations, individuals exclude those they perceive to be difficult or impossible to achieve and adapt to goals they deem more achievable. That is, individuals gradually develop an idea of what to expect (i.e., occupational expectations; see Gottfredson, 2002).

3.3. Country-Specific Differences in GTOO

Societies differ significantly in their ideas about which occupations are considered more feminine or more masculine (Hofstede, 2001): In Russia, for example, most medical doctors are women, whereas in European countries this occupation is rather mixed (Ramakrishnan et al., 2014). Moreover, whether someone prefers a more gender-typical occupation or one that is more gender-atypical depends strongly on culture-specific socialization processes (Xie & Shauman, 1997). For the US context, studies find for example that African-Americans and Hispanics aspire to more gender-atypical occupations than do White youth (Baird, 2012; Hardie, 2015). Further evidence can be drawn from studies on gender-role attitudes among immigrants in Europe, according to which certain immigrants exhibit considerably different (mostly more traditional) value orientations compared to natives (Kretschmer, 2018; Röder & Mühlau, 2014).

The theory of segmented assimilation (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001) points to the role of contrasts between the socio-structural characteristics of the host society and specific countries of origin in understanding differences in immigrant acculturation processes. From this point of view, differences in GTOO between immigrant and native youth are not expected to be equal across immigrant groups but may depend on the specific contextual factors of the countries of origin (Heinz, 2009; Schoon & Lyons-Amos, 2016). Such discrepancies were found regarding educational orientations (McElvany et al., 2018; Salikutluk, 2016) and the socioeconomic status (SES) of occupations (Jonsson & Rudolphi, 2011; Wicht, 2016).

The main contextual factors are the sociostructural characteristics of the labor market in the countries of origin, including horizontal segregation and female labor force participation. Following Xie and Shauman (1997), adolescents' GTOO may reflect the actual distribution of men and women in the adult labor force through same-sex role models (Leuze & Helbig, 2015) relevant to aspirations or perceived structural barriers (Lent et al., 1994) relevant to expectations. Hence, we expect immigrants from countries with lower horizontal gender segregation than Germany to show less GTOO than native Germans. For countries with more horizontal gender segregation than Germany, the direction of the relationship is unclear because the occupations underlying gender segregation may differ.

We thus pose that the aspirations (H1a) and expectations (H1b) of immigrants from countries with lower horizontal gender segregation of the labor market (compared to Germany) are less gender-typical than those of native Germans.

Moreover, female labor force participation in the country of origin is assumed to be relevant for differences in GTOO between immigrant and native youth. In countries of origin with low female labor force participation, certain male-dominated occupations may typically be held by women in Germany. This is likely to be particularly relevant to the differences in GTOO between immigrant and native German boys. While boys from such countries of origin are likely to have more diverse same-sex role models and perceive fewer barriers based on gender, girls may lack same-sex role models in their country of origin.

We then pose that the expected differences in GTOO are more pronounced for boys from countries with lower female labor force participation (compared to Germany) than for girls (H1c).

Table 1 provides an overview of the country-specific sociostructural characteristics of Germany and the largest migrant groups there. Of the countries considered, Germany has the highest occupational gender segregation, as measured by the standardized dissimilarity index (39.9%), and a relatively balanced labor force participation of women (52.8%). In terms of these two measures, the strongest contrast is between Germany and Turkey. Therefore, we expect the largest difference in GTOO between boys from Turkey and native Germans and the smallest difference in GTOO between girls from Turkey and natives, as Turkish girls tend to lack same-sex role models in their country of origin. The characteristics of Poland and the FSU states are

Table 1. Gender-related labor market characteristics by country of origin.

		FSU			
	GER	KAZ	RUS	POL	TUR
Labor force participation rate of women [(a)]	52.8	65.4	55.9	48.3	27
Standardized Dissimilarity Index [(b)]	39.9	32.2	35.6	32.9	30.7

Notes: (a) data from 2010; (b) own calculations based on data from 2011, except Russia from 2016 (occupations classified according to ISCO-08 (for details see Busch, 2013, pp. 116–132). Source: International Labour Organization (2020a, 2020b).

more heterogeneous and partly comparable to those of Germany. However, the difference in the dissimilarity index between Germany and Kazakhstan is striking. Therefore, we expect larger differences in GTOO between immigrant youth from Kazakhstan and native German youth for both genders.

3.4. Decreasing Differences in GTOO With Immigrant Generation

As immigrants often stay in the host society for several generations, assimilation processes may emerge that entail diminishing cultural and social differences with the autochthonous majority society (Alba & Nee, 2003). Acculturation is a central component of assimilation: Immigrants adopt behaviors and cultural values of the host society over time and across immigrant generations (Gans, 2007), including GTOO. In this regard, Röder and Mühlau (2014) point to acculturation processes in gender role attitudes.

The role of acculturation in immigrant GTOO might be twofold: First, immigrants who initially lack information about the opportunity structures of the host country (paucity of information; see Kao & Tienda, 1998) may acquire or correct relevant knowledge over time. This might entail a compromise between their initial GTOO and the demands of the labor market, leading to an adjustment of expectations. Second, unlike first-generation immigrants, second- and third-generation immigrant youths may have internalized the social norms and values of the host society more strongly by being exposed to them over time. For them, the circumscription process of excluding unacceptable occupational alternatives might therefore be more influenced by the social structures of the host society, leading to shrinking differences between the gender-typical aspirations of immigrant and native youths.

Thus we pose that the differences in aspirations (H2a) and expectations (H2b) between immigrants and native Germans diminish across immigrant generations.

4. Data and Methods

4.1. Sample

We use representative data from the NEPS, which provides information on 22,467 German ninth-graders (Blossfeld & Roßbach, 2019; NEPS Network, 2019a, 2019b). We rely on two starting cohorts (SC) of the NEPS: SC3 "Paths Through Lower Secondary School" (N = 7,228) and SC4 "School and Vocational Training" (N = 15,239). Due to a different survey design and missing values in key independent variables, students who attended special-needs, elementary, or orientation stage schools were excluded.

The surveys were carried out in the classroom via paper and pencil interviews, starting in 2010. In our study, we primarily used data from the 5th wave of SC3 in 2014 and the second wave of SC4 in 2011, which we combined into one cross-sectional dataset. At this time, students were at the end of ninth grade, where some of them—especially those at lower secondary schools (*Hauptschule*)—were about to leave the general school system. In addition, we made use of data from prior waves to fill in missing information on relevant sociodemographics.

Complete information on all variables used in our analyses is available for 6,184 students. 7,525 students had missing values in at least one of the variables on occupational orientation (aspirations or expectations). Analyses of missing values show a systematic correlation with the school type students attends. Students at upper secondary schools (*Gymnasium*), whose transition to training often takes place after graduating in the 13th grade, three years later than students attending lower tracks, are less likely to provide information on their occupational orientation. We control for school type to avoid a systematic bias of the results due to that missing pattern. Other cases have missing values in control variables, especially the gender-typing of parental occupations.

We applied multiple imputations to deal with missing values in the control variables (Little & Rubin, 2002). Since under some circumstances imputed values of the dependent variable may add noise to the estimates of the analysis model (von Hippel, 2007), we excluded cases with missing information in those variables (N = 7,525). Also, we excluded students with missing information in our focal independent variables measuring immigrant generation and country of origin (N = 115). We used sequential imputation by chained equations to create 20 datasets. The imputation model encompasses all variables of our analyses models as well as auxiliary variables, including school type, gender, vocational interests, numeracy and literacy skills, and type of SC. The analysis sample comprises 4,868 male and 5,396 female students.

4.2. Measures

We use expectations and aspirations as measures of students' *occupational orientation*. Expectations were measured with the open-ended question: "Consider everything you know right now. What will probably be your occupation in the future?" (NEPS, 2013a, p. 129). Aspirations were measured with the open-ended question: "Imagine you had all opportunities to become what you want. What would be your ideal occupation?" (NEPS, 2013a, p. 128). The occupations mentioned by students are coded by NEPS according to the five-digit classification of occupations (KldB 2010, see German Federal Employment Agency, 2015), which allows us to merge occupation-related characteristics. We use the proportion of people in the occupation of the same sex as the respondent, as determined in the 2011 census, to map the gender-typing of occupational expectations

and aspirations (German Federal Statistical Office, 2014). Values range from .000 to .996.

We use immigrants' generation status and country of origin as measures of *ethnic origin*. The variables are based on information about students' country of birth, that of their parents, and that of their grandparents (for details see Olczyk et al., 2016). If respondents, their parents, and grandparents were born in Germany, they were classified as natives. We distinguished between immigrants from Turkey, the FSU, and Poland. Another group is made up of immigrants from other countries, which had to be pooled due to insufficient case numbers. As for immigrants' generation status, respondents who were born abroad belong to the first immigrant generation. Those born in Germany with at least one parent born abroad belong to the second generation. If respondents and their parents were born in Germany and at least one grandparent was born abroad, respondents are considered third-generation immigrants. Due to an insufficient number of observations, we were not able to consider a combination of the country of origin and immigrant generation in a single variable.

We use the grade point average in math and German to measure *academic achievement*. The information is based on student responses to questions concerning their last mid-year report card. Values range from 1 (*best grade*) to 6 (*worst grade*).

The variable *school type* is based on information about the sampling procedure that explicitly accounted for stratification by school type. In Germany, *Gymnasium* is the highest school type, offering the opportunity to obtain a university entrance certificate. Among the school types below *Gymnasium*, many *Länder* distinguish between *Hauptschule* (lowest level) and *Realschule* (intermediate level), whereas other *Länder* combine these two types (schools with several courses of education). Finally, some *Länder* offer comprehensive schools, where the qualification students can obtain depends on how well they do during their course of education.

To depict the *sociocultural familial background* of the respondents, we use three variables: The first one is the number of books available in the household as a measure of cultural capital (Sieben & Lechner, 2019). This variable is based on student assessments supported in the questionnaire by a visual illustration (NEPS, 2013a, pp. 64–65, 2013b, p. 29). The scale ranges from 1 (*none* or *only very few books*) to 6 (*enough to fill shelf units*). The second variable is parental SES as measured by the highest ISEI (Ganzeboom et al., 1992) of parental occupations. Values range here from 11.56 to 88.96. The third variable is the gender-typing of maternal and paternal occupations. This variable is measured by the same-sex share of persons in the respective parent's occupation, as determined in the 2011 census. Values range from .002 to .997.

Finally, we use a binary indicator to distinguish the SC3 *subsample* from that of SC4. This information is available in the survey design of the NEPS.

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics for all variables used in our analyses as well as information on the survey instruments, scales, and coding.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics (non-imputed values).

	Males			Females		
	x̄/%	SD	N	x̄/%	SD	N
Gender-typical expectations	.71	.26	5,476	.65	.24	5,983
Gender-typical aspirations	.73	.23	5,476	.58	.24	5,983
Migration background (ref. natives)	.67	.47	3,654	.63	.48	3,772
1st generation	.05	.23	301	.05	.22	303
2nd generation	.18	.38	972	.21	.40	1,225
3rd generation	.10	.30	549	.11	.32	683
Country of origin (ref. Germans)	.67	.47	3,653	.63	.48	3,771
POL	.05	.22	275	.05	.23	321
FSU	.05	.22	266	.05	.23	320
TUR	.05	.22	277	.06	.23	348
Other	.18	.39	1,005	.20	.40	1,223
Grades (math & German)	2.91	.74	5,180	2.83	.77	5,744
School type (ref. *Gymnasium*)	.32	.47	1,773	.38	.49	2,292
Comprehensive school	.10	.30	536	.10	.30	596
Realschule (secondary school)	.25	.43	1,379	.23	.42	1,349
School with several courses of education	.09	.28	479	.09	.29	553
Hauptschule (lower secondary school)	.24	.43	1,309	.20	.40	1,193
No. of books in household	3.77	1.52	5,176	3.91	1.47	5,690
Highest parental ISEI	52.59	20.29	4,210	52.15	20.34	4,701
Mother's occupation (female share)	.71	.23	3,728	.72	.23	4,200
Father's occupation (male share)	.75	.24	3,604	.75	.24	3,938
SC3 (ref. SC4)	.28	.45	5,476	.28	.45	5,983

4.3. Analytic Strategy

We ran gender-separated models based on both the country of origin and immigrant generation to examine the presumed differences in GTOO between immigrant and native youths. We follow a stepwise approach and present models for occupational expectations and aspirations as well as models for expectations while controlling for aspirations. This enables us to distinguish information-driven from socialization-driven differences in GTOO between immigrant and native youths.

To account for the clustering of students within schools, we used linear random intercept models (Rabe-Hesketh & Skrondal, 2012). In all models, we included school type, grades in math and German, cultural capital, highest parental SES, and gender-typing of maternal and paternal occupation as covariates to rule out the possibility that GTOO differences between immigrant and native students are partly due to differences in these variables.

5. Results

5.1. Descriptive Results

We start with a descriptive look at the differences in GTOO between native and immigrant youth. Table 3 shows, by gender and migration, the means and standard deviations of gender-typical expectations and aspirations, the top three occupations named as expectations and aspirations (top 3 occupations), and the share of students covering the most popular ten occupations as a measure of the concentration of expected and aspired occupations (% top 10).

Without controlling for other characteristics, the mean differences in GTOO between native Germans and immigrants from certain countries of origin are small for both genders, varying by two percentage points. Among boys, however, there are substantial differences between native Germans and immigrant generations. There is also a stronger concentration of occupations among Turkish students than among native Germans for both genders.

A look at the top three occupations reveals interesting findings. For example, many Turkish and FSU males and first-generation male immigrants expect to become bankers, which is a mixed occupation in Germany, given the 30–70 classification of the gender segregation of occupations (e.g., Polavieja & Platt, 2014), but that tends to have a higher share of women (62%), according to the 2011 census (German Federal Statistical Office, 2014). Among the top three expected occupations of first-generation male immigrants are also female-dominated retail sales occupations (72% women). For females from Turkey, medical doctor, a very balanced occupation (51% women), is one of the top three expected occupations. Females from Turkey and the FSU also aspire to become lawyers, which is a mixed occupation but tends to be male-dominated (34% women).

5.2. Multivariate Results

In our multivariate analyses, we first consider differences in GTOO by country of origin. Figure 1 shows the results for both male and female students (see Table A1 in the Supplementary File for the full regression results).

For males, the expectations and aspirations of students from the FSU and Turkey are statistically significantly less gender-typical than those of native Germans; for students originating from Poland, the difference was less significant, though here too aspirations were less gender-typical compared to those of natives. The differences in expectations between immigrants and native Germans diminish substantially after controlling for aspirations and remain only to a small extent for students from Turkey, indicating that differences in the gender-typing of the ethnic groups can be attributed to differences in aspirations.

Concerning females, our results only suggest differences in the GTOO between students from Turkey and native Germans, with more pronounced associations in the expectations compared to aspirations. Differences in expectations become statistically insignificant after controlling for aspirations. Females from Turkey aspire to occupations with a 7-percentage point lower share of women and thus tend to aspire to less gender-typical occupations. However, considering the estimated intercept of .54, they still on average aspire to mixed occupations.

We found the most pronounced differences in point estimates between students from Germany and Turkey, the country with the lowest gender segregation as measured by the dissimilarity index (H1a and H1b). After introducing gender-typical aspirations into the models explaining expectations, our results suggest that differences in expectations are due to differences in aspirations (H1a), i.e., they are driven by country-specific differences in socialization rather than differences in labor market information (H1b). Considering the overlapping confidence intervals for the groups of origin, differences between immigrant groups are not statistically significant. Our results also indicate differences in the associations examined between the female and male samples, as we found no differences between FSU and native German females, unlike for the male sample. However, contrary to our hypotheses (H1c), the differences in GTOO between Turkish and German students are quite similar for males and females.

Next, we look at differences in GTOO between native German and immigrant youths of different immigrant generations. Figure 2 shows the results for both male and female students (see Table A2 in the Supplementary File for the full regression results).

Again, our results indicate substantial differences in the associations between GTOO and immigrant generation by gender. While immigrants in the male sample show less gender-typical aspirations and expectations across all immigrant generations than do native Germans,

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of GTOO by ethnic origin and gender (non-imputed values).

	Males			Females		
	x̄	SD	% Top 10	x̄	SD	% Top 10
Expectations						
Natives	.72	.26	30%	.64	.24	38%
Top 3 occupations	automotive technician (5%), police officer (4%), mechatronics engineer (3%)			childcare worker (8%), teacher (6%), office clerk and secretary (4%)		
Poland	.71	.27	31%	.66	.23	42%
Top 3 occupations	woodworker, furniture-maker (4%), automotive technician (4%), mechanical engineer (3%)			childcare worker (9%), teacher (6%), retail salesperson (5%)		
Former Soviet Union	.71	.26	35%	.67	.22	45%
Top 3 occupations	automotive technician (5%), banker (5%), mechanical engineer (4%)			office clerk and secretary (6%), teacher (6%), banker (6%)		
Turkey	.70	.28	50%	.67	.24	55%
Top 3 occupations	automotive technician (9%), banker (8%), police officer (8%)			retail salesperson (8%), medical doctor (8%), childcare worker (6%)		
1st generation immigrants	.66	.28	38%	.68	.23	43%
Top 3 occupations	banker (6%), retail salesperson (5%), automotive technician (5%)			banker (6%), office clerk and secretary (6%), nursing (6%)		
2nd generation immigrants	.69	.27	33%	.66	.23	46%
Top 3 occupations	automotive technician (5%), banker (5%), police officer (4%)			retail salesperson (7%), childcare worker (7%), teacher (5%)		
3rd generation immigrants	.69	.26	28%	.65	.23	41%
Top 3 occupations	automotive technician (5%), teacher (4%), police officer (4%)			childcare worker (8%), teacher (8%), office clerk and secretary (5%)		
Aspirations						
Natives	.74	.23	35%	.58	.24	35%
Top 3 occupations	athlete (8%), pilot (5%), managing director (4%)			medical doctor (6%), childcare worker (6%), teacher (4%)		
Poland	.72	.22	34%	.58	.23	34%
Top 3 occupations	athlete (7%), architect (4%), pilot (4%)			medical doctor (5%), childcare worker (5%), clinical psychologist (4%)		
Former Soviet Union	.72	.22	35%	.58	.23	40%
Top 3 occupations	athlete (7%), lawyer (5%), pilot (4%)			medical doctor (7%), lawyer (5%), banker (5%)		
Turkey	.73	.22	60%	.57	.23	50%
Top 3 occupations	athlete (12%), pilot (11%), police officer (9%)			medical doctor (13%), lawyer (6%), teacher (5%)		
1st generation immigrants	.69	.24	44%	.59	.23	40%
Top 3 occupations	athlete (10%), pilot (5%), actor (5%)			medical doctor (8%), banker (5%), lawyer (5%)		
2nd generation immigrants	.72	.22	42%	.56	.24	39%
Top 3 occupations	athlete (10%), pilot (7%), managing director (4%)			medical doctor (8%), lawyer (5%), childcare worker (5%)		
3rd generation immigrants	.70	.23	35%	.58	.24	34%
Top 3 occupations	athlete (8%), pilot (5%), medical doctor (4%)			childcare worker (5%), medical doctor (4%), clinical psychologist (4%)		

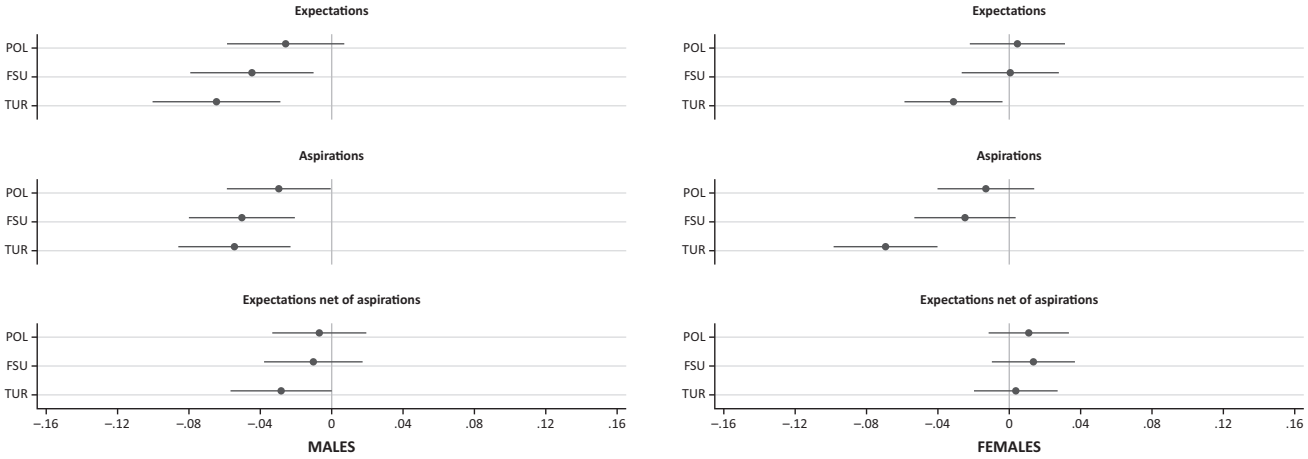

Figure 1. Differences in GTOO by country of origin (ref. Germans) for the male and female samples. Notes: Linear random intercept models; 95% confidence interval; N(males) = 4,868; N(females) = 5,396; N(schools-males) = 608; N(schools-females) = 610. Higher values of GTOO refer to a higher same-sex share in respective occupations. Controls: school type, grades in math and German, cultural capital, highest parental SES, gender-typing of parental' occupations. Intercepts (males): expectations .63, aspirations .73, and expectations net of aspirations .13; intercepts (females): expectations .57, aspirations .54, and expectations net of aspirations .28.

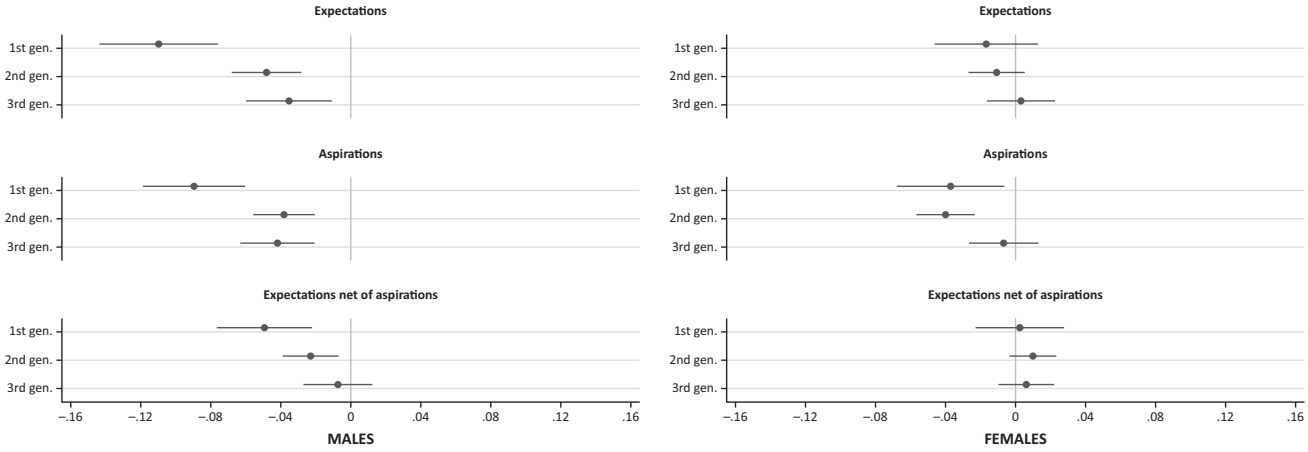

Figure 2. Differences in GTOO by immigrant generation (ref. Germans) for the male and female samples. Notes: Intercepts (males): expectations .63, aspirations .73, and expectations net of aspirations .13; intercepts (females): expectations .56, aspirations .54, and expectations net of aspirations .28. Other notes from Figure 1 also apply here.

only immigrants of the first two generations in the female sample show less gender-typical aspirations than native Germans. Also, the less gender-typical aspirations are more pronounced for males than for females. For males, first-generation immigrants on average aspire to occupations with a 9-percentage point lower share of men and expect to obtain occupations with an 11-percentage point lower share of men than do native Germans. Given the intercepts of .63 (expectations) and .73 (aspirations), first-generation immigrant males still aspire to and expect occupations that are classified as mixed.

Concerning our hypotheses 2a and 2b, our results for males indicate shrinking differences in aspirations and expectations between immigrants and natives across immigrant generations. For women, the models do not suggest a statistically significant decline in differences between immigrant generations. By introducing gender-typical aspirations to the models explaining expectations, we aimed to shed light on why differences in GTOO between natives and immigrants decrease with the immigrant generation: They may decrease due to socialization processes (decreasing aspirations) and/or due to information gains concerning the structural properties of the host society's labor market (decreasing expectations when aspirations are controlled). In line with H2b, after controlling for aspirations in the model predicting expectations, our results still show differences in expectations between immigrants and native Germans for males. However, compared to the model explaining expectations without considering aspirations, the

estimates decrease by about half and become statistically insignificant for third-generation immigrants compared to natives, supporting H2a.

6. Discussion

6.1. Summary

We illuminated the role of the intersection between gender and migration in explaining the occupational orientations of youths. Using data on ninth-graders from the NEPS, we investigated differences between gender-typical occupational aspirations and expectations of immigrant and German youths. First, we found origin-specific differences in GTOO: A descriptive look at the most frequent occupational aspirations and expectations shows that, compared to native Germans, immigrant youths more often mention occupations that can be considered mixed or less gender-typical in the German context. Moreover, our multivariate models reveal that especially immigrant boys expect and aspire to occupations with a lower same-sex share than German boys; differences between girls were not statistically significant. Our results support previous research that has found origin-specific differences regarding both GTOO (Baird, 2012; Hardie, 2015) and the social status of aspired occupations (e.g., Wicht, 2016). In line with segmented assimilation theory (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001), the differences in GTOO between immigrant and native youth apply only to certain origin groups: Turkish males and females as well as males from the FSU. Most notably, only females from Turkey, the country with the most pronounced contrast to the German context, differ in their GTOO from native females (the differences in GTOO between groups of origin in the male sample are not statistically significant). This could be due to a lack of same-sex role models (Xie & Shauman, 1997), causing females to tend to be oriented towards native German males.

Second, the differences between the GTOO of immigrant and native youth are subject to processes of acculturation, as the differences between immigrant and native expectations shrink with immigrant generation and substantially alter after controlling for aspirations. This speaks for socialization processes in the host society, i.e., the internalization of the social structures of the host society, rather than for an increase in information about the host society's labor market with immigrant generation. These results also support previous studies finding declining differences in gender ideology between immigrants and natives across immigrant generations (e.g., Röder & Mühlau, 2014). Our findings suggesting assimilation processes are also consistent with studies showing that there is a disproportionate percentage of foreign as compared to German apprentices in highly gender-segregated occupations such as hairdresser, medical assistant, retailer, and car mechanic (Siegert, 2009). This could be due to assimilation processes driven by the labor or training market.

6.2. Limitations

Some methodological limitations of our study need to be considered. First, due to an insufficient number of cases, we were unable to analyze the relationship between GTOO and the joint importance of country of origin and immigrant generation. Second, due to limited data, we use country of origin as a container for various structural differences and could not directly examine the relationship between country-specific structural properties and GTOO. Third, we do not consider cultural differences across countries of origin, such as norms and values regarding gender-typical career choices, as no such data are available. Finally, as the data used are cross-sectional, our results can only be interpreted correlatively and not causally.

7. Conclusion

Our results support the assumption that the gender-typing of occupations is culturally determined (Hofstede, 2001). Thus, the GTOO of immigrant youths are influenced by multiple cultural contexts: They come with a "frame of reference" shaped by their country of origin or that of their families, which they later adapt by internalizing the social structures and value orientations of the host society.

This acculturation process can have different implications for immigrants and their integration into the training market. On the one hand, by adapting to the GTOO of autochthones, immigrants may better meet the demands of the labor market and potentially increase their chances of a smooth transition into the training market. On the other hand, their adaptation may involve compromises associated with adverse consequences, such as lower well-being (Hardie, 2014) or dropping out of training (Beckmann et al., 2021). Future research is needed to investigate the consequences of acculturation processes in immigrant GTOO for both the well-being of immigrants as well as their labor market integration.

Moreover, another outstanding research question is the extent to which origin-specific differences in GTOO are related to other dimensions of occupational orientations, such as social status. For example, immigrants often have higher educational orientations (e.g., Salikutluk, 2016) and aspire to higher status occupations (Wicht, 2016) that are considered less gender-segregated (Busch, 2013; Siembab & Wicht, 2020). A task for future research would therefore be to examine whether this tendency toward more gender-atypical occupations is attributable to the level of SES of immigrants' occupational orientations.

From a macro perspective, gender-atypical career plans may have the long-term potential to reduce persistent gender segregation and gender inequalities in the labor market that result from occupational choices. With this in mind, it might be useful to take measures that encourage young immigrants to maintain their

gender-atypical career plans rather than "accepting" possible compromises. However, this also requires a training and labor market that is amenable to gender-atypical career choices.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Supplementary material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited). The syntax for replicating the analyses reported here can be found at https://doi.org/10.7802/2392.

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Article

Educational Transitions in War and Refugee Contexts: Youth Biographies in Afghanistan and Austria

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Abstract
This article addresses educational transitions under conditions of multiple insecurities. By analyzing empirical data of two research projects with youths in Afghanistan and refugee students in Austria, we show how young people make sense of the social and educational inequalities they encounter on their educational pathways within different national, socio-political, and institutional contexts. We present in-depth analyses of two cases to elaborate how young people in different parts of the world conceive of their futures when basic security needs are not met, and how they make sense of the social and educational inequalities they face during their transition processes. After living through repeatedly fractured perspectives, young people have to make sense of their biographical experiences and continuously (re)design their plans while facing uncertain futures. In the Afghan Youth Project, we reconstructed a collective—and morally charged—biographical orientation of future plans. This orientation can also be understood as a critical response to persistent fragility and inequality and suggests an imagined generational hold and sense of belonging. In the Austrian project Translating Wor(l)ds, we reconstructed continuing experiences of educational exclusion, marginalization, and devaluation in different migration societies throughout refugee routes. Educational transitions, which can be challenging for all young people, take on special relevance under these conditions. Combining biographical and socio-psychological research perspectives allows us to reconstruct educational processes as cumulative, non-linear processes and to reveal the ambiguities, contradictions, and ruptures woven into them, as well as the subjects' constructions of sense and agency.

Keywords
Afghanistan; Austria; biographies; educational transitions; ethnography; insecurity; participatory research; refugee students; vulnerable youth

Issue
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1. Introduction

As a decisive period in young people's lives, school-to-work transitions have received increasing scholarly attention both in the Global South and North in past decades (Bradley & Nguyen, 2004; Shehu & Nilsson, 2014; Unt et al., 2021). Among the main social inequalities described for transitions in the Global South are the lack of paid jobs, the concentration of skilled jobs in urban areas, ethnic and gender discrimination (Nilsson, 2019), as well as differences in private or public school attendance (Calvès et al., 2013). Educational processes in fragile states, such as Afghanistan, are steeped in general insecurity, violent attacks on schools, corruption, and weak governance, thereby including educational institutions in the surrounding political conflict (Pherali & Sahar, 2018). This makes educational pathways, and thus also transition processes, especially challenging for

girls in particular (Arooje & Burridge, 2020). However, educational systems in the Global North, where political and social circumstances are far more stable and secure, such as in Austria, are shaped by exclusion processes as well, albeit in a more subtle way (Husny & Fasching, 2022; Jørgensen et al., 2021). This particularly applies to young refugees who are often confronted with uncertain residence status, discriminatory perceptions, and a lack of viable labor market perspectives (Bešić et al., 2020; Eggenhofer-Rehart et al., 2018). Therefore, in contrast to approaches that focus on "job-skill mismatches" (Bandara, 2019) and thus suggest a deficit-oriented individualistic perspective on the transition into the workforce, critical social science perspectives pay attention to political, societal, institutional, and structural levels, which (re)produce inequality (e.g., Dahmen, 2021; Waechter et al., 2009). Such perspectives are directed at various dimensions of inequality (e.g., gender, race, language, age, religion), which—alone and in their intersections—can lead to exclusions, especially in the face of transition.

While the sociopolitical frameworks and institutional structures that shape educational trajectories have been extensively researched, little is known about the experiences of youths themselves. Our article addresses this gap and explores young people's experiences with and views on educational and school-to-work transitions under conditions of insecurity. The research findings presented in this article emerge from a shared reflection based on two independent studies—one undertaken with youth in Afghanistan (Langer et al., 2019, 2021) and the second conducted in Austria with refugee students from Afghanistan and Syria (Alpagu et al., 2019a, 2019b; Dausien et al., 2020). While both projects had a wider focus on youth and education, in this article we concentrate on experienced and anticipated transition processes.

In the following sections, we elaborate on the theoretical and methodological framework, outline each project in its context, and analyze selected empirical data from both projects. A comparative discussion leads to the concluding section.

2. Theoretical and Methodological Considerations

We draw on a coalescence of biographical research (West et al., 2009) and critical social psychology (Keupp, 2016) for the analyses presented in this article. Both share the assumption that biographies do not have an ontological status but must be seen as social constructions (Fischer & Kohli, 1987) that allow us to analyze how political, social, and institutional processes are experienced by individuals, thereby focusing on the interconnection of social structures and the respective individual engagement with them (Kühn, 2014). Educational experiences are thus interpreted in their relation to the respective institutional and sociopolitical frameworks. Biographical theories are particularly well suited to reconstruct educational trajectories as cumulative and non-linear processes (Dausien et al., 2016) that are shaped by ambiguities, contradictions, and ruptures, especially in transnational and migratory contexts (Siouti, 2017). Critical social psychology contributes a perspective to this regarding individuals' struggles with these ambiguities, contradictions, and ruptures (Keupp, 2016), and thereby highlights the significance of educational experiences for individual and group-related identity constructions, senses of coherence, and social belonging (Bainbridge, 2018; Wexler et al., 2005). Both unite again in the understanding of "biographization" as individual narrative processing and meaningful linking of events and experiences, as well as their implications for the construction of sense and agency. Agency, being a key concept in both approaches, is conceptualized here following Emirbayer and Mische (1998, p. 963):

> [As a] temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its "iterational" or habitual aspect) but also oriented toward the future (as a "projective" capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a "practical-evaluative" capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment).

Methodologically, the outlined theoretical framework allows us to understand the process of creation, reproduction, and transformation of educational transitions as decisive social phenomena, as well as the courses of action and the meanings actors assigned to their experiences at different times in their lives (Rosenthal, 2004). Since biographies consist of stratifications of experiences organized in sequential order, the narratives have to be examined in light of important transitions or turning points in one's life course, such as migration or traumatic events, educational transitions, or shifts in important relationships (Schütze, 1983). Narratives, however, are never developed free of context and thereby call for the integration of a positioning analysis as to how the characters are relationally positioned within reported events, how narrators position themselves towards an audience, for instance towards an interviewer, and how narrators position themselves vis-à-vis dominant social and political discourses into our methodological approach (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008).

For our analysis, we chose Afghanistan and Austria as contrasting, yet corresponding contexts. As a country where people have been facing manifold challenges due to decades-long and ongoing violent conflicts and wars involving devastating consequences for the social fabric, fragile political institutions, and a lack of social trust, sharp social (and not least gender) inequalities where educational and labor-market opportunities are severely limited, Afghanistan, on the one hand, is predestined for a study on educational transitions under conditions of multiple insecurities. While people in Austria,

on the other hand, have lived in peace since the end of World War II and can draw on a wide range of educational resources, the country also has one of the most restrictive asylum laws in Europe and various educational measures have been criticized as disadvantageous for refugee students. The insecurities we reconstruct regarding this case can contribute to a more nuanced picture of educational transitions in migration societies that are often accompanied by an uncertain residence status, socioeconomic marginalization, experiences of stigma, and structural (and sometimes even very concrete xenophobic) violence. In view of recent dynamics of forced migration to Europe, both contexts are nevertheless linked as young refugees from war-torn countries like Afghanistan and Syria represent important—and highly stigmatized—groups coming to Austria to seek protection and develop new prospects for the future. The Afghan "case" may provide insights into the difficult educational experiences that fuel these dynamics, while the Austrian one may help understand how young refugees cope with their educational expectations and adjust them to unfamiliar (and sometimes inhospitable) institutional environments.

3. The Research Projects

The two recently completed research projects we refer to in this article explore education-related experiences of youth in the context of sociopolitical insecurities. While the projects significantly differ in respect to their geopolitical context, they both rely on interpretative approaches to capture the complex subjective struggles with the manifold challenges of educational transitions.

3.1. The Afghan Youth Project

Building on a 2015 preliminary investigation, we designed a qualitative study, which aimed at understanding how young people deal with multiple insecurities while navigating their everyday lives and developing visions, plans, and skills for their future. Data collection took place in 2016 and 2017 in the northern provinces of Balkh and Kunduz. We decided on these two provinces based on their relative differences in terms of the prevalence of violence, socio-spatial structure (especially the distribution in urban and rural areas), and demographic composition, which, as contrasting cases, promised to deliver insightful results.

The multi-method design included semi-structured interviews, projective essays, and drawings related to the subjects' biographies. We interviewed 52 children and adolescents between the ages of 11 and 21 (28 individual interviews, six group interviews, two focus-group discussions). Sampling took place in a contrastive manner to depict the diverse environments that, regarding education, ranged from young women who had never received any formal education to young boys carrying out demanding physical work since childhood (e.g., as construction workers, wheelbarrow drivers), to youths who had already begun studying at university. The interviews were conducted by local peer researchers in Dari or Pashtu, who in most cases separated participants by gender. Some interviews were conducted by the German team members, either in English or with interpreters. In addition to the interviews, we asked the participants to make drawings before starting and between two thematic parts of the interview ("draw and tell" technique) as ice breakers in order to ease communication, serve as guidelines for subsequent questions, and, from a trauma-theory perspective, retrace experiences that could not be expressed verbally. We also collected 171 projective essays in the Balkh province by asking children and youths to write about their life expectations within the next 10 years (Gillespie & Allport, 1955; Langer et al., 2021). Drawings were included at the end of the writing process ("write and draw" technique). Data collection took place at different education-related facilities (public and private schools, orphanages), with the consent of the regional Ministry of Education. The participants were between the ages of 10 and 23. Considering where the data was collected, it may not come as a surprise that the stories and drawings have a particular emphasis on the (anticipated) transitional phase after school.

To identify key themes, their connections, and respective patterns on the material's manifest level, we carried out (MAXQDA-supported) thematic analyses of the interviews and essays (Braun & Clarke, 2006) based on their English translations; a similar thematic coding was applied to the drawings. Key themes that emerged from the analyses and which are relevant for the present article include, e.g., "serving Afghanistan" and "education is key." To gain a deeper understanding of latent meanings inscribed in the material, we also interpreted selected interviews scenically in regular interpretation group sessions (Bereswill et al., 2010), from which we formed empirically condensed research vignettes of the cases (Langer, 2016); a free association technique used by in-depth interpretation groups was applied to the drawings only cautiously, however, to avoid over-interpretation, and was always linked to the complementary interpretation of the essays and interviews. Interim results were discussed with the local peer researchers during each subsequent visit for a transcultural communicative validation of our interpretations.

3.2. The Austrian Project Translating Wor(l)ds

The second project was conducted in Austria from 2017 to 2019. The ethnographic project aimed to explore the biographical experiences and competencies of refugee students, following their arrival in Austria and during the adjustment period in their new social and educational context (Dausien et al., 2020). We collaborated with a so-called "transition class"—more concretely with 16 students (four female, 12 male, aged 14 to 18 years) who were born in Syria or Afghanistan and had followed

different migration paths. The students came from different linguistic, cultural, and religious environments as well as from different social classes and family constellations. They brought with them different, individual life experiences and life plans as well. Throughout the project, which we designed with two school teachers, we viewed school as a space of belonging and education—one that can open up or close off possibilities of articulation. Students were addressed as competent subjects with multiple experiences translating between different languages and social worlds, which they explored together with researchers. The school was not always conducive to working with biographical methods because of its rigid framework; on the other hand, the school setting opened up opportunities for us to meet with students on a regular basis. During twelve workshops over one school year, we worked with various methods and media that were intended to enable, but not enforce, autobiographical narratives. We used approaches from adult education and pedagogical biography work (Behrens-Cobet, 1999) and adapted them to work with youths. At the beginning of the school year, we worked mainly with written texts because the students felt more confident writing than speaking in front of the group. At a later point, we worked with different kinds of moderated storytelling sessions, in which the students had the opportunity to tell stories about a specific topic in a small circle. Since the need to tell a consistent and "true" life story is inextricably linked to interviews in the context of asylum procedures and involves the risk of retraumatization (Thielen, 2009), we did not conduct biographical narrative interviews during the project. Instead, we worked with different formats of "small stories" (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008) that revolved around arriving in Austria, educational experiences, and future plans. In addition, we listened for spontaneous narratives beyond methodological guidance and gave them space. Only towards the end of the project, when we had established a mutual basis of trust, did we ask some students for a biographical interview.

4. Struggling With School-To-Work Transition: Selected Case Studies From the Projects

Interpretive research has a particularly insightful strength of presenting its findings by means of in-depth interpretations of single cases (Abkhezr et al., 2018; Diefenbach, 2009; Lewis, 2011). We will therefore elaborate on the cases of Gul's and Sami's stories as selections from our two projects. Although the cases are not representative of the experiences of "the youth" we worked with, they paradigmatically demonstrate the complex reasoning surrounding education in the face of multiple insecurities, which is omnipresent in our empirical material.

4.1. Gul Afshan's Story (Afghan Youth Project)

At the time of the interview, in the summer of 2016, Gul Afshan was 19 years old. She lived in a household of nine with her parents, two sisters, and five brothers in a remote rural area in the Balkh province. In addition to the family's precarious financial situation with only one brother being able to provide a bit of food for the family, she stressed the fragile safety conditions in her district, especially for women:

> Not…only during [the] night but also during [the] day, [it] is not secure, our residence is quite far from the city…and it is an insecure area…[and] there are noticeboards on the road saying: The place for women is either [the] home or [the] grave.

When asked to tell something about herself, Gul seemed to hesitate:

> What could I say about my personal living….I mean, how could I tell, tell about [the] education that I did not have, only to some extent reading in literacy courses….By reading Qur'an I have learnt something and I am hopeful for the day when security prevail[s] and life gets better so then, like others, I am able to study and help people.

She obviously struggles with a lack of formal education and only had marginal access in religious contexts. As a precondition for learning, however, she calls upon peace. In addition, an aspect of solidarity emerges: When she is finally educated, Gul aims to help others.

Our peer researcher Naseera interviewed Gul at a Red Crescent hospital where she volunteered. The interview's location is significant considering that the school-to-work transition in Afghanistan is essentially gendered, even before the Taliban took over power again in summer 2021. Gul was urged to quit secondary school by her father a few months before the interview was conducted:

> When I was taken out from lessons, it was due to the fact that people would gossip about me, that the daughter of so and so studies, and this is very much painful and disturbs me a lot because a girl is also a living being and has the right to education; but our people may be backward in thinking because they think that girls should not [leave their] homes….That day when my father told [me] that, afterwards, you will not go out to learn because people talk to me about you, that day it is still a sour memory for me.

By inextricably linking her argument that a girl is "also a living being" to the right to education, she interprets education as a human right. The gendered dimension of educational transitions also becomes evident in the next section when Gul reports meetings she organized with other girls from the neighborhood to practice reading. After the neighborhood found out, their meetings were forbidden. One of her friends would not comply and was beaten by her father and forbidden to read. Gul describes this as a "type of heartbreaking-violence."

Gul links violence to the prohibition of going to school. She attributes the lack of respect for women in the public sphere to a general mindset in her community and criticizes men for not yet understanding that women are just as much a part of the nation. Through reference to Allah, Gul stresses that women are valuable on an existential level. She sees her volunteer work in public health awareness outreach as a key resource for self-education. It enables contact with other people outside the family, helps her feel meaningful in and for the community, and provides her a source of self-worth and self-efficacy. Education is central to Gul's narrative because it is a means of entering a society of people who treat her as an equal. She sees it as the pre-condition of being able to contribute something meaningful to society, through serving her community and nation as a valuable, honorable person. Gul has tried to access this world and fulfill this task in different ways, both through formal education and through her work for the Red Crescent as an attempt at informal education. Subsequently, Gul says that the priority of every Afghan is gaining security, which is linked to an in-school education. Many men are against the idea of women going to school, and even more to work, but Gul says that these men have a low level of education. Therefore, she sees nothing left but to pray to Allah that, at some point, the country's education level will be high enough that people will think openly (tolerantly) and that the distinction between genders in access to education and work will disappear. Gul says she has "a hope from Allah that a day comes that no one is left illiterate in our country because when everyone is literate then their thoughts are open."

This movement of thought is promising, but while education is a hopeful prerequisite for liberal and human attitudes, it in no way guarantees them—and recent developments have shown how fragile alleged educational achievements are. Gul sees the lack of opportunities for higher education as one main reason for young people to flee Afghanistan:

> But InshAllah one day they might think about that, [that] without their own country no other country can become their country, and so they will return and we will build our country and would have a stable living.

Here, strong ambivalences rooted in Gul's reality become clear. She invokes a possible future based on wishes and hopes—a future, however, that cannot be hers. And although leaving the country to access higher education in Europe might be an option, returning to Afghanistan educated and well-trained is only a temporary solution for its development.

The striking element in her account is the solidarity she hopes her generation will show for Afghanistan, which is rooted in collective, shared experiences of suffering. Towards the end of the interview, she elaborates on her dream to become a poet and give voice to people's pain, especially women's, and to inspire people:

> By Allah, probably one day I become something. When you ask anyone what [they] want to be, [they] say: I want to be a doctor, an engineer, and so on, but I want to become a poet, despite [how] much time is passed, in fact I am not hopeless. I want from Allah to become a poet so as to write down and express the pain of people and especially of women and by reciting them so the people are inspired and consider valuing each other.

Does she believe her dream will come true?

> Yeah, it is hard, if there was not any difficulty then I would have reached a position, but every person should have a kind of planning towards the[ir] wishes and I [will] try my level best though I am not literate, starting from the family.

4.2. Sami al-Masri's Story (Austrian Project Translating Wor(l)ds)

In this part, we will analyze excerpts from a biographical interview with Sami al-Masri. The interview was conducted after the school year during which we had succeeded in establishing a basis of trust with him. Sami was born in Syria in 2001. In 2014, he fled to Turkey together with his father, where they lived for one year before coming to Austria in 2015. There, Sami first enrolled in a "transition class" at a middle school and then in the transition class at a vocational school, which collaborated with us on the project. He is one of three students in the transition class to pass the entrance exam for the regular school. Sami started his biographical narration as follows:

> I was born in Syria in 2001 I lived in Syria until [I was] 20, so end of 2013, ah only since 2014 I had to leave Syria. I fled to Turkey; there I lived one year then I had to leave Turkey again. Then I came to Austria…at the end of 2015, I stayed in a refugee home for four or five months, then I had to leave the home.

At the beginning of Sami's story, no other characters appear. Although he had fled together with his father, this excerpt gives the impression of a "lone fighter." This could be related to the fact that Sami, like many of his peers, took on numerous administrative tasks for his family, more concretely caring for his seriously ill father, which must have made him feel alone with and which competed with his school duties. After starting his narration, Sami refers to the short duration of schooling in Syria and the insecurity caused by the war there. He characterizes himself as an excellent student back then and highlights his participation in a national mathematics competition. A break occurred in his education when he stopped attending school due to the deteriorating security situation. In Turkey, he could not attend school for financial reasons, because he had to work.

After arriving in Austria, the transition to his first school was challenging:

> At first, I was very happy to go back to school. Yes, but then it wasn't fun either, because…the teachers at that time just let us into the class, they give us games….So I didn't learn that much either…have no teaching material and so [on]. We just did Math, English, German. Yes. In Math we did things that you do in first elementary school, German kindergarten.

Sami criticizes that school was designed like occupational therapy. His description of subjects, content, and methods shows that he felt infantilized and not taken seriously in his educational aspirations. He continued with his transition in the next school year to a class that included "only refugees" and they had no contact with German-speaking students, making it difficult to learn German. He continues:

> Then I knew that I [had] to learn alone if I want[ed] to learn German. And then…I learned at home, yes. I was able to get information quickly. I…also made contact with people who speak good German. Then I finished the fourth grade….We didn't do fourth class material but a mixture of the second class, third class, and nothing at all of the fourth class actually. Only second and third grade.

Sami again constructs himself as a "lone fighter" who learned on his own because of the lack of school support. In addition to the educational segregation that prevents linguistic and social inclusion for refugee students, this passage reveals that Sami perceived the academic level of the "refugee class" to be below the norm. This holds true also for his next transition into the vocational school as well:

> We didn't do anything there either….I mean only I improved my German a little bit, but in other subjects [I didn't]. So I just wanted to go the year so that I can take the exam and go to first grade….I think there were about twenty of us in the class, three of them passed the exam.

The phenomenon of underachievement runs like a thread through Sami's educational history in Austria. He attended the last grade of school with the pragmatic goal of passing the exam for the regular school (*Regelschule*), but the fact that only three out of twenty students passed the exam points to severe institutional failures. Sami positions himself as the only one who was admitted to the next school level. While telling about a theater group which he had joined at school, Sami talks about his dream job as an actor and says:

> I have a friend who comes from Afghanistan….He is a very good actor. I think he's been here for four years. And he was not allowed to stay here….I thought it was such a pity that someone like him has to go and those who are bad can stay. Yes. And I thought that I should write….I mean [about] how the refugees feel, [about] the pressure they have in their home country and when they come here, [about] the pressure they have because they can't speak German at the beginning. And they come to a different society and a different culture, they have to learn everything and it can also be that, in the end, when they do everything they are simply sent back to the home country, to the risk.

Here, Sami leaves the personal level and tells the story of a friend who was deported. This format, which he uses also in other parts of the interview, allows him to distance himself from his own situation and to criticize structural problems of the Austrian migration regime from a "distanced" and less vulnerable position. The account refers to his awareness that learning does not necessarily lead to success, but can also prove "useless" after deportation. When asked about his wishes and imaginations for his future, Sami says:

> When I was little, younger, I have always planned so ten years, fifteen, twenty years ahead. Like, I'll do this and that when I'm eighteen, twenty go to university, do this and that. Now in my current situation [clears throat] I cannot plan a month ahead. Because I don't know what's going to happen tomorrow. Maybe today I am here, tomorrow not here. It's not sure either.

Sami constructs the "narrated Self" as a forward-planning child who used to have a clear educational perspective for the future. Although this account can be read as a narrative intensification in contrast to his current situation, it reveals that the uncertainty related to "tomorrow" makes planning completely impossible. However, directly after this passage, he tells us that he would like to be a "lifelong learner." Besides this reference, his account reveals that learning is linked to the idea of a moratorium, which makes it possible to deal with the uncertainty of the future.

Sami's story shows that discontinuity in educational transitions does not only hinder the learning process but has also a more fundamental impact on young people's biographical perspectives and on their confidence in the ability to actively design and shape their own future. Like most of his classmates, Sami had to develop his aspirations under extremely precarious conditions both in his home country, during the routes forced upon refugees, often over years, and within the legal and institutional insecurities of the migration society. The fact that Sami and other students nevertheless develop plans and wishes can be read as a "survival strategy" (Dausien et al., 2020). In addition, the interview shows that Sami does not view the institutional obstacles that complicate

his transitions from the viewpoint of a victim, but from a strong, reflective, and analytical perspective.

5. Comprehensive Discussion

While there have been cases of successful school-to-work transition in the Afghan Youth Project, we purposefully selected Gul's story as an insightful example, in which one can see the intersection of socioeconomic precariousness, living in a marginalized rural and highly insecure area, and (currently accelerating) gender discrimination results in a failed transition with an ongoing struggle for social agency. Her empirically rich story paradigmatically exposes the paramount importance of education for biographical transition processes and the structural barriers young people face in Afghanistan. Sami's story was chosen because he is one of only a few students in the class who have managed to stay in the Austrian educational system and thread their way into the "institutionalized life course" (Kohli, 2007). Therefore, his story makes it possible both to reconstruct hurdles in educational transitions and to unfold a biographical sense construction to make this path his own story. What can we learn from these two stories that are so different, yet in some ways remarkably similar in the sense that both are young people navigating constantly changing conditions and multiple insecurities in the educational pathways they imagined for themselves?

In many ways, the narrative logic Gul unfolds in her story is representative of the younger generation in Afghanistan, at least until the summer of 2021. A collective narrative runs through all the data we collected, telling a story of a mission to serve Afghanistan and its people by being an honorable person and by reaching societally valuable and productive occupations. Education is key in every respect: Only well-educated people can meaningfully contribute to society. "I want to reach a position in the next ten years that I could serve my country that has suffered a lot from fights," writes Anees (17 years old) in his essay; and Mawluda (17 years old): "I want to serve for my painful country after graduation." The transition process from school to the workforce is significantly over-determined. More than images of individual free decisions, the plans outlined for the future are strongly rooted in a collective mission and are legitimized by the youth's contributions to the future of the nation. Seeing oneself as part of a generational mission for unity and peace serves different functions: Psychologically, self-esteem and agency are strengthened when one adopts a powerful social identity; sociologically, the collective narrative of being "future-makers" contains implicitly sharp criticism of the older generation that can hardly be addressed openly; politically, however, it reflects an ambivalent effect of Western nation-building efforts through education (Ahmad, 2021).

That girls and women can use this narrative to position themselves as significant actors in social discourse, thereby raising a claim to be heard is an exciting provocation. It is a highly fragile logic, however, when the school-to-work transition fails (due to a broken education system and a weak labor market) and young people find themselves not only socioeconomically marginalized but deprived of the mission of serving the country as well. In this regard, we should recognize Gul's innovative struggle to cope with her situation and try new paths to still feel like a worthy part of the collective endeavor: volunteer work and an idealistic message, but still holding on to solidarity and hope.

We think of the younger generation in terms of an entrapment (Eggerman & Panter-Brick, 2010; Langer et al., 2021): Youths seem(ed) to be caught between normatively grounded notions of hope on the one hand and far-reaching everyday experiences of suffering on the other. This tension frames an anticipated transition not only to work but also into adulthood and permanently (re-)produces and undermines their sense of social agency that includes the promise of being part of a collective mission to lead Afghanistan into a bright future. But what if the idea does not hold anymore? While Gul's story seems to suggest that the failure to transition from graduation to societally useful professions can be dealt with creatively, one controversial solution discussed in the interviews and essays is migration to India, Turkey, or Europe to receive a good education, which is only legitimate if someone aims to return to Afghanistan for important jobs and to serve the country. Migration seems to be a highly ambivalent way out, as Sami's story tells. His could also be the story of many male youths in the Afghan Project and resonates well with first tentative observations from an ongoing follow-up project with young Afghan refugees in Germany.

Sami's story is representative of young refugee students coming to Austria in the sense that they encounter several obstacles and insecurities related to school enrollment, and that segregation into "refugee classes" complicates both social and linguistic integration, leading to "excluding inclusion" (Alpagu et al., 2019b) and a special risk of exclusion regarding later transitions. For refugee students, participation in the education system structurally means "precarious" (Mecheril, 2003), and thus temporal, belonging. In addition, Sami's story, like those of other students in our projects, shows that transitions are not just results of "decisions" based on rational choices (e.g., Dausien, 2014). Instead, they are ongoing and multi-layered confrontations with and examinations of spaces of possibility, which also appear at the level of interaction in the interviews. While this is certainly true for all young people, there are some distinctive features that concern refugees: First, structural barriers in the educational institutions of migration societies hamper transitions. Second, even if transitions are formally enabled, educational processes and social inclusion are hindered through segregation (Alpagu et al., 2019b). Third, transitions concern legal questions, e.g., related to asylum. The stories and texts written and told by Sami and his classmates show that the transition to

the Austrian education system and its possibilities is a disadvantaging and partly inscrutable experience. In addition, the texts are critical of student segregation, which makes both social participation and planning further educational and professional perspectives more difficult.

However, Sami's narrative is also a story of success: He survived life-threatening circumstances during his school years in Syria and had to interrupt his institutional education for economic reasons in Turkey. In addition, Sami shows that despite several economic, legal, health-related, familial, and educational insecurities during his escape route, and after he arrives in Austria, he has "made it." His self-construction as a "lone fighter" is not only one of powerlessness: On the one hand, it enables him to present himself as an educationally successful and independent youth. On the other hand, it makes it possible to point out the gaps and shortcomings of the Austrian education system whose rules he has understood and whose weak points he scandalizes. The fact that Sami is one of only three young people in the entire class who succeeded in finding a way into regular school after the "refugee class" is certainly related to his family background and associated privileges. A comparison with other stories of refugee students could show in more detail how connectivity and social resonance can be established in a new national, institutional, and educational context and which role social-cultural background structures can play for processes of biographization.

The cases we selected for this article refer to different sociopolitical and institutional frameworks of multiple overlapping insecurities; however, the experiences we reconstructed seem to be quite similar. They both reveal an ongoing battle with societal and institutional barriers, a permanent struggle with educational setbacks, a feeling of being deprived of anticipated pathways to higher education and professional work, and innovative attempts to develop new opportunities into the open future. The concept of school education provides a promise of hope for transitioning into a world of (unknown) stability and reliability within a (too familiar) world of instability and betrayal. While in Afghanistan (and Syria and beyond) this transition is linked to collectively shared endeavors that provide social containments in cases of failure, in the diaspora, the sense of being part of a collective mission (that might psychologically serve as a coping mechanism for overcoming experiences of marginalization) seems to dissolve. One loses the ability to stabilize an identity and is only left with the "lone fighter" position.

6. Conclusion

In this article, we focused on educational transitions under conditions of multiple insecurities. By analyzing the empirical data of two research projects in Afghanistan and Austria we have shown how young people make sense of the social and educational inequalities they encounter on their educational pathways within different national, socio-political, and institutional contexts. While youths in Afghanistan are mainly affected by the uncertainties linked to a (post)war state, its fragile institutions, and its lack of reliable future perspectives, refugee students in Austria have to deal with other uncertainties, e.g., regarding both their asylum status and educational pathways linked to a future in Europe and insecurities linked to a racialized labor and housing market there.

Our analysis has shown that transition processes in the context of uncertainty are linked to specific frameworks on national, societal, and institutional levels. After living through repeatedly fractured perspectives, young people must make sense of their biographical experiences and continuously (re)design their plans while facing uncertain futures. In the Afghan Youth Project, we reconstructed a collective—and morally charged—biographical orientation of future plans. This orientation can also be understood as a critical response to persistent fragility and inequality and suggests an imagined generational hold and sense of belonging. In the Austrian project Translating Wor(l)ds, we reconstructed continuing experiences of educational exclusion, marginalization, and devaluation in different migration societies throughout refugee routes. For refugee students, transition is a permanent incomplete state. In addition, being torn out of familiar environments and routines and confronted by a generational reversal of familial tasks can precipitate processes of disillusionment and self-constructions of being a "lone fighter." Educational transitions, which can be challenging for all young people, take on special relevance under these conditions. Personal histories are constructed in an unspecific reference to time in which past, present, and future are closely intertwined. Research has revealed that biographical agency emerges when past experiences can be meaningfully linked with an anticipated future. Under conditions of insecurity, this connection is often interrupted: When the past appears "cut off" or "lost" and the present is extremely uncertain, designing the future becomes severely difficult (Dausien et al., 2020). However, as overwhelming as the experiences of uncertainty undoubtedly have been for our research partners, it is remarkable how unrelenting their belief in the power of education was.

Qualitative research provides an insightful framework for analyzing the sociopolitical and institutional conditions that frame school-to-work transitions from the perspective of young people and for understanding their challenging educational struggles. Our article, therefore, is aimed at contributing to the growing body of qualitative research on social inequalities in educational contexts (Caraballo & Lyiscott, 2020; Legewie, 2021). The interpretative approach outlined here is accompanied by certain implications, of which we highlight two: First, while biographical case studies allowed for a detailed, contextualized reconstruction of complicated educational paths, systematically integrating these findings into the wider empirical material of the projects could reveal more general patterns of educational

struggles and barriers in school-to-work transitions. Second, while we focused on the importance of anticipating the school-to-work transition for guiding our process, it would be compelling to follow our research partners into their future work environments to understand how their acquired senses of agency might equip them for responding to the institutional barriers to come.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

Educational Success Despite School? From Cultural Hegemony to a Post-Inclusive School

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Abstract
This article explores how a differential thinking has arisen between "us" (locals, natives) and "them" (migrants) in German-speaking areas, how in this context a canned *Rezeptwissen* (recipe knowledge) has established itself and how there has been a normalisation of cultural hegemony in the context of education. This binary thinking has also taken hold stepwise within the concepts of school development and educational programmes. It has contributed significantly to the construction of an educational normality that has retained its efficacy up to the present. Along with the structural barriers of the educational system, the well-rehearsed and traditional conceptions of normality serve to restrict and limit the educational prospects and future perspectives of youth who are deemed to stem from a migration background. These prospects and perspectives for the future have a negative impact on their educational goals and professional-vocational orientations. Our research also shows that ever more youths and young adults are confronting and grappling with this ethnic-nationally oriented understanding of education and seeking to find other pathways and detours to move on ahead and develop appropriate conceptions of education and vocational orientations for themselves. The article explores the need for a "post-inclusive" school and "post-inclusive" understanding of education, which overcome the well-rehearsed and historically shaped conceptions of normality in the context of education, opening up new options for action and experience for the young people involved.

Keywords
cultural hegemony; education; post-inclusive school; post-migration; young people

Issue
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1. Introduction

The point of departure for this article is that the educational opportunities, possibilities of subjectification, and individual positionings of a person are marked and shaped by social structures and are dependent on facilitating and limiting conditions. It is common knowledge that the social resources at an individual's disposal are not equally distributed. A major role in this is whether persons are perceived as "natives," "migrants," or "refugees." A further aspect of this contextual coil is that as a result of powerful distinctions—"us" (local natives) and "them" (migrants)—a social normality has become established whose efficacy remains with us today. Educational institutions, and especially schools, which this article focuses on, are a striking example of how this binary manner of thinking functions and how in this way a school-based educational normality has crystallised. In that normality, certain children and youths appear almost routinely as a "deviation" from that notion of what is normal.

The way schools function as some kind of "sorting machines" has recently been the focus of greater international discussion (Domina et al., 2017; Emmerich &

Hormel, 2021; Horvath, 2018; Raudenbush & Eschmann, 2015). In this article, we seek to expand on these ideas and investigate school in the German-speaking areas, with a focus on Austria, with respect to two variables: cultural hegemony and "migration background." In doing so, we endeavour to build on research that was already able to substantiate a systematic and institutional discrimination of children and youths who are deemed to have a so-called "migration background" (Auernheimer, 2003; Diefenbach, 2007; Diehl et al., 2016; Fereidooni, 2009; Gomolla & Radtke, 2002). We will concentrate in the course of this article on how the "sorting machine" in the German-speaking area was able to produce an exclusive and exclusionary school-based normality and what role cultural hegemony plays in that construction. We ask what influence this educational reality exerts on the educational and professional opportunities of children and youths from migrant families, and how these youths deal with the negative ascriptions and mechanisms of exclusion. We also explore how they position themselves in this confrontation and what actions of resistance become visible in that context.

To render this thinking based on a categorising binary of "us" and the "other" visible, and to undermine and counter it, Edward Said proposed a "contrapuntal reading" that is meaningful for the present analysis (Said, 1994, p. 66), a kind of reading against the grain, a new perspective from the vantage of other worlds of experience. For our present focus here, that means seeking to see the social/societal relations of dominance and their associated conceptions of normality from the perspective of the experiences of youth. Experiences of migration and the lived realities of young people appear not as some sort of special topic but rather the point of fruitful departure for further reflection. To render these experiences visible, interviews with post-migrant youths were conducted in the framework of a research project at Innsbruck University and analysed for this article.

The analytical lens centres here on the living conditions of the young against the backdrop of social/societal power relations; the strategies they develop under restrictive social conditions are also explored. They are viewed not as "victims" of social relations but rather as experts on their life practices, persons who grapple with the living conditions they have found themselves in, positioning themselves within that confrontation.

The present article, borrowing from Mitterer (2011), seeks to engage in a "non-dualistic" reading—one that reflects on the two interconnected phenomena, namely the restrictive social conditions under which the youths exist and the perspectives on the future that they develop under these hemmed in, constraining possibilities. Reflecting on the two perspectives together facilitates clarifying the nexus between the limited options for action in heteronomous structures and also helps to render visible the potentialities present among adolescents and young adults (see also Flecker & Zartler, 2020, p. 14; Lutz, 2008).

In the following section, we seek to shed light on the framework of a theoretical approach to the social context of the school system in Austria and describe the construction of an educational normality that systematically disadvantages the children and youth of the post-migrant generation. Following that, we endeavour, based on biographical narratives, to render visible the impacts and ways of dealing with this cultural hegemony in the school system. In closing, the present article attempts to develop alternative perspectives that fracture and crack open the historical continuity and surmount the established categorical classifications.

Our thesis is that school becomes a site of cultural hegemony, a "classifier" or "sorting machine" that organises and reproduces societal power relations and mechanisms of exclusion. Alongside the structural hurdles of the school system, this school-based conception of normality functions to limit the educational opportunities of the young people who are ascribed a so-called "migrant background." It has a negative impact on their educational goals and vocational-professional orientations and blocks their "pathways into the future" (Flecker et al., 2020). The article argues the need for a post-inclusive school and post-inclusive understanding of education which surmounts the well-rehearsed interpretations and historically shaped conceptions of normality in the context of education, opening up new spaces for action and experience for adolescents and young adults.

2. Between Cultural Hegemony and Self-Empowerment in the Educational Context

We can speak about a systematic inequality within the educational system in German-speaking areas which leads to a structural discriminatory process of placing children and youth stemming from migrant families at a disadvantage (as an example, see Gomolla & Radtke, 2002). The reluctance to understand such a society officially as a migrant society has led, in these countries, to a situation where phenomena of migration have, over a long period, not been viewed as a central pan-societal concern. Corresponding proper measures, legal, political, or educational, failed to be taken. As mentioned above, the official school development did not react and respond appropriately to this. At best, migration movements were viewed as something exceptional, as a "problem case." Within the education system, different hypotheses circulated regarding cultural differences. Permanent distinctions were established between pupils from a migrant background and local native pupils by making use of "ethnicising" and "culturalising" interpretations (see, critically, Bukow & Llaryora, 1998). This thinking about difference and otherness was also reflected stepwise in the conceptions of school development and educational programmes; it contributed significantly to the construction of an educational normality at school which today still retains its efficacy and salience. Ethnically-based sorting and

classification go hand in hand with more-or-less subtle devaluing ascriptions, forming "categorical exclusivities" (Neckel & Sutterlüty, 2008, p. 20).

Against this backdrop, we understand schools as a mode of "sorting machines" (Domina et al., 2017). Thurston Domina, Andrew Penner, and Emily Penner described, in a nutshell, how the school functions in this respect when they write:

> We argue that educational institutions construct and reinforce highly salient social categories and sort individuals into these categories. These educational categories structure the competition for positions in stratified societies and, in the process, influence which individuals attain which social locations. In doing so, schools, and the categories they help construct, shape the inequality structure of the societies in which they operate. (Domina et al., 2017, p. 312)

In this article, we seek to deal primarily with the imagined category of difference "migration background," which as a specific differentiating mode of knowledge has become part of normality at school in the post-migrant society in German-speaking areas. In this context, we speak of *Rezeptwissen* (recipe knowledge). This is an institutional or societal form of knowledge that is a result of conventional migration and integration research and their ethnicising logic, a "body of knowledge" that is no longer reflected upon and serves as a guidepost for orientation in almost all areas of society.

Thinking in terms of difference as a premise of knowledge production or reproduction leads, whether so desired or not, to the ethnicising and culturalising of social relations and their bringing into line with pedagogical theory. That has certain consequences for the societal and school-based perception of pupils from a migrant background, impacting their educational careers and educational attainment. The descendants of migrants—the "post-migrant generation" (Yıldız, 2010) appear to have inherited the foreigner status of their parents and/or grandparents. They continue to be viewed and treated as permanent guests, according to the motto: "Once a migrant, always a migrant." In this context, Castel (2009, p. 84) correctly notes the "generation-transcending transmission of a habitus of deficit." The cultural hegemony constructed and imparted via these discourses stamps and shapes not just school development and the sphere of education, but society as a whole.

According to Antonio Gramsci, cultural hegemony means the "supremacy of a social group" (Gramsci, 1978, p. 2011). Cultural hegemony in the post-migrant generation then encompasses the production, reproduction, and maintenance of a society imagined to be homogeneous in national, ethnic, religious, linguistic, and racialist terms. None of these categories is unambiguous and every society and biography is marked by multiplicity in this respect. However, hegemonial discourses specifically assert unambiguousness, certainties that they must repeatedly normalise discursively. They are grounded on the "form of power of categorisation" (Foucault, 2007, p. 86).

Initially important to point out is that the Austrian school system stems from an era in which the dominant orientation was to a class society shaped by the nation-state and its elite. That system still adheres to the model of methodological nationalism and ethnocentrism and believes it can hardly cast aside its structurally conservative and closed cohesive attitude and move on to establishing new concepts of education beyond the national orientation infusing the school system (see Engelbrecht, 1988). It is equally important to know that there is a so-called "differentiated school system" in Austria. This means that after a common four years of elementary school, children must change to either so-called *Gymnasien* or *Neue Mittelschulen* (formerly *Hauptschulen*), depending on report card grades. Thus, children's educational paths are already separated at the age of 10. The differentiated school system is criticised because it is a major factor in the reproduction of educational and social inequality (Bruneforth et al., 2012; Lassnig, 2015).

In this unequal school system, migration is not understood as a form of the otherwise much-lauded mobility—and thus as an occasion and challenge for reorientation—but rather is perceived almost exclusively as a pedagogical or school problem. It is not fortuitous that pedagogy for foreigners back then was conceived as a compensatory mode of education, aiming to assist pupils in their necessary "integration" into school and society (see, critically, Mecheril, 2018). Under this premise, right from the start, also in the thinking of educational scholars, they were imputed to have a false socialisation: Their factual familial and the required school-based socialisation were automatically viewed as being incompatible. Later on, however, intercultural (see Auernheimer, 2012) and more open trans-cultural concepts (see Datta, 2010) were developed that opened up new perspectives. Yet up to the present, what unites them is a focus on cultural difference. Although deficit-oriented approaches have been criticised for years because of their aspect of "special education" and cultural-ethnic exaggeration (Mecheril, 2018; Yıldız & Khan-Svik, 2011), they have persisted and have remained long entrenched as part of established normality.

Such a compensatory notion proceeds from a premise of damaged or incomplete processes of socialisation and the deficiencies springing from this alleged defect, which are supposed to be compensated for and/or reduced through targeted measures (see Bernstein, 1972). Migration-linked developments and special opportunities qua affordances offered by individual and social multilingualism and trans-border worlds of education for the design of education locally on the spot rarely emerge from the perspective of a methodological nationalism (Hinrichsen & Terstegen, 2021).

To date, there has been no success in achieving a sustainable improvement in the traditionally multi-sectional and selective school system, let alone creating a "post-inclusive school" (as a school for one and all). There is at present no school form in which proper attention is actually paid to the individual, social, cultural, and religious diversity of the student body (see in particular Gomolla, 2005; Riegel, 2009).

It is all too well-known that children from migrant families, in contrast with the local indigenous native comparison group, are clearly overrepresented in marginalised forms of schooling. They far more frequently attend lower secondary (non-college-prep) Hauptschulen and special schools (ÖIF, 2018; Weiss, 2007, p. 33). On the other hand, they are underrepresented in higher-level, more elite types of schools. In this connection, one can rapidly speak of institutional discrimination and the stratification and creation of an "underclass" in the educational system (Gomolla & Radtke, 2002; May, 2021; Radtke, 2004; Yıldız, 2011). The result of such stratification is that lower secondary Hauptschulen and special schools become a kind of "heterotopia" in Foucault's (1986) sense, morphing into marginalised, territorially stigmatised residual spaces, which, from an "hegemonial" vantage, are devalued and accorded a supposedly deviant normality.

The title of Susanne Wiesinger's 2018 highly controversial book, much discussed in recent years in Austria, *Kulturkampf im Klassenzimmer: Wie der Islam die Schulen verändert* (*Culture War in the Classroom: How Islam is Changing the Schools*) clearly expresses this hegemonial, racist attitude. The entire book is based on generalisations and ascriptions; it serves to reproduce the existing racist interpretations and the well-rehearsed and familiar concepts of normality. Wiesinger was not only able to publish her racist outbursts and initiate a public debate about them but in 2019 she was also appointed ombudswoman for values issues and cultural conflicts at the Ministry of Education.

Faults and distortions in the educational system are frequently "explained" and accounted for by pointing to cultural or ethnic differences. According to the long-standing well-known binary cultural model, the modern Austrian education system is the contrary antipode to the tradition-bound and backward migrant children. One can note here just how much ethnically coded knowledge is treated and passed down, taken for granted, within the context of education. We can observe how predetermined images and interpretations flow into the definition of situations, and how they are transposed into habits and elements deemed self-evident that are no longer subject to critical reflection. In this way, the ethnic *Rezeptwissen* (recipe knowledge) becomes, in the context of school, part and parcel of the social stock of common knowledge (Gomolla, 2006, 2021; Radtke, 2004). This unfolds a de-individualising effect where people are no longer seen as individuals but as part of a homogeneous set, as typical representatives of "foreign cultures," "cultural circles," or "nations." Thus, they also become the subject of school and educational programmes (see Radtke, 2011).

The results of a textbook analysis in Germany reveal how this works in school lessons: "Migrants appear mostly as victims of social conditions and rarely as active agents….Often an irreconcilable juxtaposition of 'foreigners' and 'Germans' can be found" (Grabbert, 2010, p. 16). Hintermann (2010) comes to similar findings in her textbook analysis in Austria. Migration is often presented in a truncated and one-sided way from a deficit perspective, while phenomena such as social inequality, discrimination and racism are hardly addressed. The study published by the Federal Government Commissioner for Migration, Refugees and Integration in Germany (2015) also provides several examples showing that the multi-layered heterogeneity of the student body either does not appear at all in the textbooks or only under ethnic prefixes.

It is not without reason that international comparative studies have repeatedly pointed out the lack of equal opportunities in the Austrian or German education system. Multi-dimensionality and strict selection ensure the exclusion of part of the student body from qualified educational careers. In the long run, the school system will not be able to fulfil the social mandate of education for all as long as it remains bound to specific expectations of normality: The ideal student is native, socialised in a single language, and comes from a middle-class family that provides the appropriate educated bourgeois habitus—which of course includes foreign languages, but only the right ones. Any other multilingualism or double first language is perceived as disturbing. In this respect, the school system remains structurally conservative, middle-class oriented, and monolingual (see Schneider et al., 2015). Overall, migrant students from the representative regime (Jacques Rancière) of the school appear "distant from culture" or "distant from education.''

2.1. Resistance Strategies and Practices of Self-Empowerment

As will be shown later with biographical examples, the young people in question confront structural discrimination and stigmatisation, position themselves, and develop resistant strategies and self-empowering attitudes to shape their educational careers through detours. In this context, Seukwa (2007) speaks of the "habitus of survival art." At this point, one can speak of a tension between de-subjectification and re-subjectification. On the one hand, the representative regime of the school has a de-subjectifying effect on the migrant students. From this perspective, they are not perceived as young people with different biographical experiences; instead, they are reduced to cultural and ethnic characteristics and viewed as representatives of a collective. Thus, individuals become foreign or Turkish

students. On the other hand, the confrontation with these hegemonic attributions and discriminations creates new forms of subjectification. Rancière (2018, p. 48) calls this process "de-identification": "Every subjectification is a de-identification. Tearing loose from a natural place, the opening of a subject space."

Rancière describes such counter-hegemonic practices as strictly political action. As Mark Terkessidis has pointed out, all people who are affected by discrimination and exclusion, and thus in a marginalised position, are permanently confronted with processes of de-subjectification and re-subjectification (Terkessidis, 2004, p. 201). These forms of subjectification appear as a way of confronting discriminatory and racist structures. If we want to understand this mechanism, it seems useful to think of the two processes (desubjectification regimes and repositioning) together and argue from there. As the empirical biographical case studies show, migrant students and their parents as supporting instances are in a state of ongoing contestation. In the process, they create new subject spaces for themselves and develop resistant attitudes and self-empowerment strategies. It would be important to take these forms of subjectification, articulations, and self-empowerment practices as an approach to rethinking school and social normality.

2.2. Different Perspectives

The findings of the comparative TIES study in which prestigious research centres in eight European countries participated show that there are indeed alternatives to the Austrian and German educational normality. Some 10,000 young adults between the ages of 18 and 35 in 15 European cities were surveyed regarding their professional situation and educational attainment (Schneider et al., 2015). The results of the study substantiate that in dealing with migration in different social spheres, countries like Sweden and France have been far more successful than, for example, Germany or Austria. In Stockholm, six times more children from Turkish migrant family backgrounds attend college-prep high schools than in Berlin or Vienna and, at least potentially, they have the chance to finish a university course of study and to become active in professions grounded on academic study and a college degree (Schneider et al., 2015, p. 27). In France, the nationwide comprehensive, cost-free system of child care leads to a situation where, for two-year-olds, linguistic deficits can be compensated for before kindergarten and school. In Sweden, cost-free child care and completion of assigned homework tasks at school decouple educational achievement from the educational attainment level of the parents. In addition, in Sweden and France, the transition to secondary school only occurs at the age of 15. These structural conditions serve to ensure that in these two countries, the educational situation of the post-migrant generation from Turkish migrant families is far better in terms of a European comparison (Schneider et al., 2015, p. 27).

The analyses also indicate that every school system has its own snares and pitfalls. It is mainly the general features of the educational system that determine the ratios of success and failure. In most educational systems, there are also "stepping stones" that nonetheless make it possible to achieve educational success via detours and special pathways. In marked contrast with Germany and Austria, the school system in the Netherlands, in particular, provides opportunities that are also utilised by children and adolescents whose parents do not have the corresponding level of educational attainment.

The following biographical experiences from of our empirical study of young persons of the post-migrant generation can serve to make visible the effects of power exerted by cultural hegemony within the school system in Austria. Drawing on their concrete experiences, we should derive a new post-inclusive understanding of the school.

3. Empirical Study: Biographical Experiences of the Post-Migrant Generation

The biographical interviews that we have evaluated for this article provide evidence, on the one hand, of how school structures and experiences of discrimination against young people, especially at school, limit their educational opportunities and (can) block future career prospects and, on the other hand, of how the young people concerned deal with such experiences, position themselves and find their own paths and detours to achieve their educational and career goals.

The interviews were preceded by a public call for participants. The social background of the test persons is thus random—the interviewees positioned themselves principally as persons with a family or personal migrant biography in Turkey and one person with links to Bosnia. We took these specific experiences as a point of departure and contextualised them theoretically and empirically for this study. A total of 12 semi-narrative interviews were conducted with students from migrant families. To guarantee a level of openness, the conversations were conducted semi-narratively; they began with an introductory question and the participants had the opportunity to develop a free narrative during which—and depending on the situation—targeted supplementary questions were also asked. The interviews were tape-recorded and then transcribed. The interviews used in this article were conducted in the context of a research workshop ("Educational Success Despite School?") in the winter semester of 2020–2021 and analysed exemplarily for the present research question. The research project centres on the following question: How—despite structural hurdles and negative ascriptions and attributions in the context of education—did the interviewees nonetheless manage to mature and move on to become university students? In the interviews, we were especially interested in what experiences these young adults had had in the scope of their school career, how they dealt with this,

and what pathways/detours become visible in this process. The interviews were evaluated and analysed based on the approach of "grounded theory" as developed by Glaser and Strauss (1998) and the concept of the "understanding interview" of Kaufmann (1999).

We have selected eight interviews for this study which illuminate most clearly the specific experiences of the post-migrant generation in the context of the school. The following glances into the case reconstructions of this study do not allow for generalising conclusions regarding the social position of the youth of the post-migrant generation in the school more generally. However, the experiences point to certain patterns of the effects of power, which we interpret as the expression of the normalisation of cultural hegemony in the context of education. At the same time, they open a window onto the subjective forms of dealing with these structural conditions, which we interpret as a contrapuntal and in part counter-hegemonial perspective of the school. The interviews selected illustrate most clearly and impressively the problem statement of our study.

4. Educational Success on One's Own Account? Structural Discrimination and Acts of Conviviality

The interim results of our study show that the educational and professional preparatory careers of adolescents and young adults are initially dependent on numerous factors that become significant in the educational and professional careers of the student. These include structural conditions of the institution, encounters with members of the teaching staff who act to exclude or support students, the familial background, experience, and efforts to grapple with discrimination and racist exclusion, the economic and social situation, the familial fabric, and the migration history of the parents or grandparents (see also Zartler et al., 2020).

We analyse this circumstance within the tension between experiences of racial discrimination and conviviality (see also Ohnmacht & Yıldız, 2021). The brief insights into the biographies of the young people interviewed show a simultaneity of discriminatory and convivial experiences, both of which must be considered. The concept of conviviality goes back to Ivan Illich and Serge Latouche and arose in the context of debates on the critique of growth and the economy. The new ethic of conviviality emphasises the centrality of gift, trust, and radical equality among people (Illich, 2014). Paul Gilroy has taken the concept of conviviality and opened it up to critical migration and racism studies. According to Gilroy, contrary to racist and fatalistic voices that conjure up a collapse of cities like London due to migration and diversity—which in the German-speaking world is often constructed with the terms "parallel society" and "criminal migrant milieu"—a "convivial culture" (Gilroy, 2004) has developed.

The following examples shed light on the role school experiences can play in shaping the educational career and professional path of young people, how they deal with that, and how they position themselves. We will present the results of our study on three levels, illustrating at the same time the young people, their environment, and their experiences. These three levels are (a) structural conditions, (b) the impact of the teaching staff, and (c) the relevance of the familial background concerning migration histories.

4.1. Structural Conditions

The educational history of Azra, a female student we interviewed, is exemplary of the structural disadvantage of the post-migrant generation. She migrated at the age of two with her parents from Istanbul to Austria. In elementary school, she was advised to transfer to a special school due to "deficits in the sphere of language." Looking back on her own itinerary up the cline of advancement, this now educationally successful 25-year-old student speaks about the path she has taken in education. She thinks that it was only by dint of accidental support that she managed to transfer "out" of the special school to a lower secondary *Hauptschule*. Azra is today certain that her being stigmatised as a "special school pupil" served to slow down and lengthen her educational pathway. She says: "They all said that I don't need special assistance any longer. But OK, then just go and apply to a *Hauptschule* with a certificate in hand from a special school. You're simply labelled then as a 'problem child.'" Lower secondary *Hauptschulen* or special schools become spaces here for deviation from the local normality, i.e., they become marginalised, territorially stigmatised residual spaces that from a hegemonial vantage are devalued and accorded a different, inferior quality.

The fact that experiences at school for many children from migrant families are especially explosive in terms of their biography is well illustrated by the biography of a young woman who finished her university studies this year. Elvisa was born in Innsbruck and at the time of the interview was 25 years old. Her parents had emigrated from Bosnia to Tyrol in Austria before she was born. Her dad stems from a working-class family and is employed as a construction worker. She says the feeling of social exclusion and stigmatisation was something she perceived and suffered through especially in the *Hauptschule* (lower secondary education). Elvisa notes that she did not receive any recommendation to transfer to a secondary school offering further education, even though her grades were good. As Elvisa put it:

> I recall that the teacher speaking with my mom back then said that I should consider doing an apprenticeship, and so maybe not continue on to the *Gymnasium* for a diploma. But rather that I should go to a school where, after finishing, I could go out and immediately land some job. Yes, after that conversation she'd had, my mom actually had always said right

> out that I should attend a high school for continuing education—of course only if that's what I wanted. Probably she'd already noticed right away that the teacher had maybe only talked about an apprenticeship because we're "foreigners."

Due to the constant backing and support she received from her mom, also in difficult times and under trying conditions, Elvisa felt strengthened in her desire to pursue her own educational aims and interests. Consequently, after graduating from the *Hauptschule*, she decided to attend a higher-level vocational/professional secondary school in Innsbruck and then go on to university studies. Her experience at school can be viewed as exemplary for children from migrant families and the challenges they face. These problems are structural. They have become "institutionalised inequalities" (Berger & Kahlert, 2013), as seen in Azra's segregated educational path. Elisa's example shows that the sorting machine school often automatically excludes children who are ascribed a "migration background" as part of institutional practices when it comes to the transition from elementary school to a *Gymnasium*—regardless of grades, as Elvisa's case demonstrates. Within these uneven structural conditions, teachers have a great deal of influence.

4.2. The Impact of the Teaching Staff: Racial Discrimination and Conviviality

Ayla's experiences are illustrative of the reality that in the context of school, pupils are repeatedly confronted with negative images and ascriptions against which they (must) position themselves. Ayla was born and raised in Austria and is at present a university student. She talks about the clichés regarding her origin that she was repeatedly confronted and had to grapple with. Her dad stems from Turkey and her mom is from Austria. She notes that people in everyday life often have to proceed from a notion that all female Turks wear a headscarf or have to pray five times a day, and she criticises the fact that origin is often confused with religion. She talks about the barriers she was permanently confronted with at school. When she wanted to register as a pupil at the *Gymnasium*, both her class teacher and school principal at elementary school were against that. She commented that her teacher had once said to her in front of the whole class: "Ayla, in the *Gymnasium* you can't always ask so many questions afterwards, and you have to understand everything there much faster." Ayla explains the difficult communication she experienced with the school principal and her class teacher by referring to the fact that, since she was eight years old, she had worn a headscarf, even though her parents had advised her not to because they knew about the associated difficulties with that at school.

Seyla speaks about similar experiences; her grandparents came from Ankara as guest workers to Austria. She was born in a small town, grew up and attended school there, and has been living in a bigger city for three years. She says that back then, her elementary school teacher tried everything to prevent her from attending the college-prep *Gymnasium* high school. For that reason, her parents had to struggle with the school and with her teacher there. Finally, she managed to take and pass her high school graduation exam (*Matura*) and went on to study at university.

The narratives of Sükrü and Senem show that positive experiences with the teaching staff can have a motivating effect on the school career and achievement of adolescents. The interviewee Sükrü describes his time at school as initially difficult because, in the beginning, he didn't have sufficient knowledge of the language: "In my case, it was actually pretty difficult, like, well because I didn't know German very well, and in kindergarten and pre-school I had some difficulties." At the beginning of his schooling, he had negative experiences with his elementary school teacher. His first two years at elementary school were marked by lack of support. He recalls that the teaching staff even prevented him from going on to the lower secondary *Hauptschule*: "Well, I can still remember that my old elementary school teacher once told me that I wouldn't even be able to make it at the *Hauptschule*." This negative prognosis could well have shaped his further educational career in a very negative way. But after changing teachers in third grade at elementary school, he received sufficient support, and his negative image of the teaching personnel also changed. He perceives this shift as a stroke of "good luck" and comments: "She was very nice and even helped me when I didn't understand something."

Senem also talks about similar positive experiences with the teaching staff that were very meaningful for her in vocational school, and mentions that a female teacher in vocational school had supported her in every respect: "Yes, right, the class, the teachers, they were really terrific. Like, yeah, the teachers were there for us and always helped us, no matter what it was, also when we had personal problems. They even helped to improve your grades.''

4.3. Familial Background, Migration Histories, and the Continuity of Discrimination

Structural discrimination at school and dependence on benevolent teachers must be considered against the background of the social position of young people of the post-migrant generation inside the school system. Although many of them are already living in Austria in the third generation, they are still considered to not belong within the "methodological nationalism" (Gombos, 2013) of the school system.

Ercan, whose grandparents emigrated from the coast of the Black Sea in Turkey to Austria in the 1970s, and who has been studying at university for two years, does not understand why third-generation individuals here

still have to cope with experiences of exclusion at school and find that their social belonging is questioned as something somehow "foreign." In his eyes, the school he attended lacked the motivation to shape and design their educational trajectory and career path: "My grandparents come from Turkey. My parents, my siblings, and I grew up in Austria. We belong to this country just like all the others."

Mehmet, who was born and raised in Austria, has been living and studying for three years in a bigger city. Talking about his time at school, he recalls when after returning from summer vacation he told his teacher how beautiful their vacation trip had been with his parents in Turkey. The teacher replied: "So why didn't you stay there? You don't have to be here." Experiences of that kind permeate his biography.

Our research has also shown that family is an important resource for overcoming institutional hurdles and for the possibility of individual success. Azra told us that her older sister—who had managed to get into *Gymnasium*—played an important role in her educational career. She had always accompanied Azra to school in case of school disputes and problems and also helped her with her homework. In her biographical narration, she compared herself to the students marked as "local" and said that she had to do much more than them to get ahead.

According to Ayla's narrative, her mother and her cousin were very important for her educational success. Her cousin studied while she was in *Gymnasium* and regularly helped her with homework. "Without him, I probably wouldn't have made it this far," Ayla says.

These brief revealing glimpses into the biographical case constructions of our study are meant to show that the pupils of the post-migrant generation interviewed had to contend and grapple with discriminatory structural disadvantages in their schools, which must be interpreted as a manifest expression of cultural hegemony within the school system in German-speaking areas. We have also seen that some of the young persons, contrary to the resistance they faced—in a sense despite their school—have achieved educational success. That achievement of success is then heavily dependent on their individual resources, networks, and the individual support they received from teachers, as the biographical examples illustrate.

5. Conclusions: From Methodological Nationalism to a Post-Inclusive School

As was pointed out above, in comparison with other European countries such as Sweden, France, and the Netherlands, the social diversity and the multi-layered life realities of pupils from the migrant families in the educational context of Austria and Germany largely remain invisible or, if seen at all, their plans and designs for a future life are viewed from the hegemonial perspective as disintegrative or deficient (Schneider et al., 2015). A balanced and vital correspondence between educational normality at school is lacking on one hand and the super-diverse everyday realities of children and adolescents on the other. This attitude of ignorance, which can be observed both in school conceptions and educational programmes, has a negative impact on the educational goals and pathways of children and adolescents from migrant families and limits their possibilities at school and in professional life.

That is why there is an urgent need to radically open up schools to the outside, to restructure and re-conceive educational processes in schooling, rethinking school-based educational reality and, from that vantage, develop up-to-date "post-inclusive" concepts. In the world of global networking, in which hybrid and trans-cultural situations become the normality, schools also require new orientations, a new self-understanding, and up-to-date principles. In the face of global processes of transformation and the diversification of life realities of children and adolescents, schools have to reinvent themselves and be equipped with new forms of knowledge. We require facilities that are aware of the need for diversity and utilise appropriate educational concepts beyond national interpretations, which take the children and adolescents seriously and open up new horizons of experience and action to them. Post-inclusive schools and a post-inclusive understanding of education see multiplicity, ambiguity, multiple orientations, and super-diverse design for living as the point of departure. They posit that as an occasion for discovery and a vision of what learning can be.

A post-inclusive school is not grounded on historically traditional interpretations and "relations of normality." Rather it proceeds from the children and adolescents who are concretely there. It takes their everyday realities and living situations as the point of departure. The Freie Schule Honigfabrik in the Hamburg district of Wilhelmsburg described by Joachim Schroeder in his study (Schroeder, 2002) is one example of an alternative that radically questions the selective and segregating educational processes of the mainstream regular school, envisioning and implementing instead a different educational normality. The on-the-ground life realities of the adolescents in their neighbourhood are taken seriously and become the point of concrete departure for developing appropriate concepts of education here and now. The alternative school is oriented in its self-understanding to the relations in lifeworlds on its doorstep, the local and specific cultural, linguistic, and economic conditions, and not vice versa. Of crucial and central concern, as Schroeder (2002, p. 220) reminds us, is "to seriously link up with and relate to the social experiences of the adolescents, and to afford them opportunities and options to learn to recognise and practise social responsibility in all learning activities in school and beyond." This means that a school conscious of diversity and convivial multiplicity has to seek to correspond to and be in tune with the local life relations and realities, the on-the-ground social, cultural, linguistic, and economic prevailing conditions, and

not vice versa—a school that renders possible for adolescents new spaces of experience and thought, and perspectives for the future.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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Article

The Role of Autonomy in the Transition to the World of Work

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Abstract
The article is based on a qualitative study covering 32 youths from the age of 18 to 25 who did not manage a stable transition from school to the German labor market. All of them, albeit to different degrees and for different reasons, are running the risk of long-term exclusion from the sphere of work and vocational training measures as well as public support structures. Based on multiple narrative interviews with the young persons participating in the study, qualitative case reconstructions were conducted concerning their social background, socialization, and how their biographies developed. This contribution specifically sheds light on the relevance of the genesis of autonomy for the individual transition into the world of work and further education. The findings are presented as risk factors hampering the genesis of autonomy in the process of socialization, namely, (a) dysfunctional parent–child relationship and (b) persistence of traditionalism. The findings point not only to the high relevance of autonomy for managing a stable transition but also imply that there are further factors leading to more disconnectedness in addition to a broad range of factors known from the existing literature. From our perspective, longer processes of socialization, i.e., subject formation processes, significantly contribute to a more nuanced understanding of this phenomenon.

Keywords
autonomy; German education system; German labor market; school-to-work transition; socialization; vocational training; youths

Issue
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1. Introduction

This article focuses on youths whose transition from school to work failed and for whom institutional support services provided by the German welfare and education system as well as employment services have remained ineffective. Our empirical basis is the qualitative longitudinal study *Disconnected Youth: Processes of Disconnecting in School-to-Work Transition* (Fuchs et al., 2018).

The study was, among other things, motivated by a remarkable disparity in the German vocational training market, which increased during the years prior to the Covid-19 pandemic: On the one hand, the number of unfilled apprenticeships in 2019 reached an all-time high in Germany (80,000, according to the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training [BIBB], 2021, pp. 15–17). On the other hand, at the same time, there were more than 73,000 young people still looking for an apprenticeship. Of course, not all youths who do not find a training place are “disconnected youths.” In principle, a mere oversupply of apprenticeships does not necessarily mean that all applicants will be supplied. Two major reasons are (a) regional imbalances in the vocational training market and (b) varying demand for different occupations (BIBB, 2021, pp. 23–24). Some of the youths who fail to start an apprenticeship find other options—such as picking up low-skilled work or taking

up studies—but some of them are at least temporarily not in employment, education, or training, a status also referred to as NEET. However, among this group, there is also a significant share who have dropped out of all institutional contexts, such as school or vocational training or other support structures (Caroleo et al., 2020). According to initial estimates, a group of about 21,000 youths in Germany is severely cut off from all institutional support (Mögling et al., 2015, p. 45). These young people can also be considered "disconnected youths." Our findings on processes of disconnecting complement the previous findings for Germany and aim to identify causes for particularly severe cases of disconnectedness using a qualitative approach applying sequential analysis and case reconstructions. Focusing on the reconstruction of individual processes of socialization, we find two main factors driving processes of disconnecting: (a) dysfunctional parent–child relationship and (b) persistence of traditionalism. Both of these considerably hamper the development of habitual autonomy, which in turn affects the ability to cope with the vocational education system and the working world.

Following this introduction, this article first presents the theoretical framework containing both a review of relevant literature on disconnected youth as well as the theoretical core of our article, namely the concepts of "habitus" and "life practice," and the relevance of "autonomy in the world of work." Details on the empirical basis of this article and the applied methodology of qualitative analysis are the subject of Section 3. Section 4 presents the main empirical findings of two factors driving processes of disconnection. Section 5 contains our conclusions.

2. Theoretical Framework

One of the most prominent approaches in research on youth unemployment is the NEET concept. Empirical research based on the NEET concept can be traced back to the Social Exclusion Unit in the UK in 1999 (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999), which first introduced this concept. Since then, researchers have picked up on this idea and investigated potential factors contributing to the status of becoming NEET (Furlong, 2006; Yates & Payne, 2006). Interestingly, the terms "NEET" and "disconnected youth" are often used synonymously (Kevelson et al., 2020), thus blurring the distinction between a potentially temporary status of unemployment and a more wide-ranging process of disconnecting. The NEET definition has, in addition, been repeatedly criticized for being conceptually vague since it covers a variety of groups—ranging from young people with multiple disadvantages to those with good educational attainment failing to find a stable job (Cavalca, 2016; Scarpetta et al., 2010) or even not being interested in a stable transition.

There is a particularly rich literature based on quantitative studies identifying factors driving the NEET status at different levels. On a structural level, characteristics of the labor market and the welfare state, the vocational and employment system, and economic factors like the national GDP growth and the size of a youth cohort potentially impact the transition of youths into employment and training (Flisi et al., 2015). But family background plays a significant role as well, including factors such as parental educational attainment, parental unemployment, parents' income (Carcillo et al., 2015), or being a child of divorced parents (Eurofound, 2012). On an individual level, factors such as being disabled or of poor health as well as special educational needs are often found to increase the risk of becoming NEET. The same is true of ethnic minority groups or persons with immigrant backgrounds (Ross & Svajlenka, 2016) and care leavers (Akister et al., 2010). Finally, educational attainments and experiences of young people often prove to be relevant risk factors. Examples are lower education (Duckworth & Schoon, 2012), lower self-efficacy, and becoming a parent at an early age, especially among women (Millett & Kevelson, 2018).

Most of the existing research is based on a very broad understanding of failing transitions, thus covering a variety of constellations and motives among youths who fall under the category of NEET. In contrast to this, we explicitly focus on young persons who did not manage the transition from school to the world of work and received basic income support for long-term unemployed instead of starting vocational training. Furthermore, institutional support in these cases has so far proven ineffective. Although we acknowledge that typical risk factors identified in the above-cited literature also play a role in these cases, we are also convinced that an in-depth look from a biographical perspective with a focus on the process of socialization and subject formation can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of this sub-group of youths most-at-risk of becoming severely disconnected.

Our assumption is that especially more severe disconnectedness essentially stems from a discrepancy between the habitual autonomy and the autonomy requirements of a modern work and education society. In other words: Disconnectedness can arise if the degree of habitually formed autonomy falls short of societal expectations as well as the need for individual autonomy required to cope with the various tasks of the educational and occupational system. This is not meant to imply that disconnected youths are themselves to blame for their situation or their lack of autonomy. Autonomy is part of the individual habitus and arises from a complex socialization process. As we can see from the above-cited literature, the social and economic situation and milieu of their families of origin, educational practices of the parents, the support structure of the welfare state, the educational system, and the question of equal opportunity play considerable roles as well.

In modern societies, autonomy is increasingly becoming the norm in the working world. A good example is the free choice of occupation: Sons no longer automatically and unquestioningly follow their fathers' occupations, as in earlier times, with no other career options

being available. Daughters, too, do not simply become housewives after marriage, just because their mothers did. Today, they have to make a well-founded decision and they need a substantiated reason (Oevermann, 2009, p. 40). The free choice of occupation puts the responsibility on individuals to choose how to secure their livelihoods. This is why the principle of equal opportunity is so important in modern societies. Free choice of occupation and the accompanying personal responsibility can only be legitimized if, in principle, all occupations are open to all aspirants. Free choice of occupation is related to a free labor market: The introduction of free enterprise and a competitive market in Western Europe in the 19th century meant that production processes or services were no longer regulated, as traditional crafts or trades continued to be for a long time (Fischer et al., 1980; Kindleberger, 1974; Knowles, 1932/2006). At the same time, equal opportunity is not completely realized, as we can see from findings on ongoing structural discrimination in the access to apprenticeships and work (Keita & Valette, 2020).

A similar increased demand for autonomy can be observed in the tertiarization of the economy, i.e., the relative increase in service occupations. Even supposedly simple service occupations today require employees to make independent decisions. This increases both the overall opportunities for autonomy and the need for autonomy. Vocational training also nowadays requires more technical, analytical, and social skills, as well as learning and problem-solving skills (Funcke et al., 2010, pp. 22–23).

Organizational hierarchies are also flattening (Acemoglu et al., 2007; Rajan & Wulf, 2006). Even lower-level jobs today involve more personal responsibility and menial work requires more autonomy (Berger & Offe, 1984). This flattening of hierarchies is made possible by technological progress, which automates largely standardized work processes through digitalization and automation (Gerten et al., 2019). As a consequence, working individuals are required to act more autonomously. They must also act more flexibly at lower hierarchy levels and make more independent decisions than in the past, as there are more uncertainties to manage and tasks are becoming more complex (Wischmann & Hartmann, 2018, p. 26). Another theoretical premise of our article is that the institutions of the vocational education system and labor market in modern societies offer less recourse to traditions and routines. Therefore, individuals must shape and decide areas of their lives independently (Beck, 1992). Individual autonomy is central to coping with this creative pressure, which means both a gain in freedom but also an enormous burden (Giddens, 1991).

2.1. Habitus and Life Practice

Our perspective on the phenomenon of disconnected youth is, on the one hand, based on the concept of habitus by Bourdieu (1984) and, on the other, on the concept of *Lebenspraxis* (here translated as "life practice") by Oevermann (2004, 2009). From Bourdieu's concept of habitus, we adopted the premise that patterns of perception, thought, and action are formed and consolidated as individuals engage with society. An individual neither reacts completely pre-determined nor completely free to a given situation but faces a range of choices in all life situations. Based on Oevermann's model of life practice, we assume that individuals always have more choices available to them than they are able to realize. They are thus forced to choose among the options available without knowing beforehand which is the right one and without knowing any clear reasons yet. The available options in turn are structured both by societal and—in the case of employment—economic restrictions and potential discrimination, but also by the perception of the individual forced to make a choice (Oevermann, 2004). Autonomy, which is based on habitus, is the prerequisite for constructively confronting new stages of life and thus for overcoming the crisis of moving out of the familiar into an unknown future with the confidence of proving oneself. It is the ability of individuals to act in unknown situations and also to anticipate and bear responsibility for the consequences of their actions. The individual must therefore first recognize what is new in a situation, i.e., feel a need to make a decision, identify the options available, and choose among them in the first place (Oevermann, 2004). New and unknown situations can occur at very different levels—in personal relationships, such as when choosing a partner, or in the world of work, when deciding what to study, choosing a career, or changing jobs, but also in existential life crises, such as illness.

After identifying a situation as new and unfamiliar, individuals must then realize that the previous routines and habits are no longer viable and new actions are required. This ultimately means taking previously untested actions in unknown situations and thereby also enduring the uncertainty that these actions will only prove to be right or wrong in retrospect. Opening up new choices, mastering the unknown, appropriating and "habitualizing" new practices—all this requires autonomy. It also requires the ability to endure the uncertainty of whether these actions in unknown situations are socially appropriate or promising, and also to cope with them productively. "Productively" here means neither fleeing from the unknown, i.e., avoiding a new situation, nor denying the uncertainty or clinging to habitual behaviors, even if previous patterns prove dysfunctional. This ability to cope with crises autonomously is formed gradually during socialization (Oevermann, 2004).

Three aspects are important for the determination of autonomy as an integral part of life practice. The first aspect is *freedom and independence*, which means the possibility and ability to cope with challenges independently according to one's own ideas, not according to the expectations and constraints of others (Oevermann, 2009). This presupposes the ability to form personal preferences and needs. The second aspect is *responsibility*

in the shape of foresight and self-control (Elias, 1978). This is the ability to shape one's life in a way that does not affect or restrict the freedom of others. In other words, the ability to act responsibly means imposing constraints or limitations on oneself as a prerequisite for autonomy. Thirdly, since humans are necessarily always members of a community on which they depend (both the family and a political community), they are expected to commit to maintaining and securing the future of the communities that sustain them. Autonomy consists of individuals deciding how to commit to the community, neither leaving the decisions about their lives to others nor avoiding active decisions altogether (Oevermann, 2009). This means the individuals carry both the *burden* of societal expectations while also having the *freedom of self-determination*.

3. Empirical Basis and Methodology

The empirical basis of our article is a qualitative study applying line-by-line analysis to biographical narrative interviews with 32 cases, of which 16 contrastive cases were included in a qualitative panel (Fuchs et al., 2018). By forming a longitudinal panel out of the initial sample, we followed the "logic of discovery" in qualitative social research, which means that researchers cannot make a valid decision on which cases to include in a study without having previously analyzed a reasonable amount of the data collected (Rosenthal, 2018, p. 76). Apart from sociodemographic characteristics, the criteria for the selection of cases for the panel were based on theoretical considerations: Following the principle of a "maximum contrastive comparison," we created a panel of study participants who on the surface display a maximum contrast with regard to the phenomenon of disconnectedness (Rosenthal, 2018, p. 86). The panel was formed, choosing the 16 most relevant and contrasting cases out of the initial 32 cases, when no further variants could be identified. All of the chosen cases were not in education employment or training (NEET) and had also previously failed to manage the transition to the world of work, i.e., usually at least for the last two years but also up to five years. In addition, the study participants were declared as "almost hopeless cases" by professionals of educational institutions and local employment agencies. To identify these cases and gain access to them, we conducted 43 focused interviews with professionals from the above-mentioned institutions, who also provided contact to potential study participants in some cases. We are aware that the description "almost hopeless cases" is a difficult classification, but we decided to follow this approach during our fieldwork to strengthen our focus on the sub-group most at risk of becoming permanently excluded. To counter this potential bias, two measures were taken. On the one hand, the interviews were conducted based on a broad and open biographical narrative stimulus. This allowed our interview partners to tell their individual story without framing it as a story of a failed transition from the very beginning. On the other hand, the analyses of the interview material, initially, did not take into account the failed transition, since it represents a form of previous knowledge regarding the interview's context. This is in line with the methodological attitude of "artificial naivety," which is applied in the beginning of an analysis to block out any specific previous knowledge of the case at hand and to ensure an analysis that avoids the simple rephrasing of already existing perspectives (Oevermann, 1993a, p. 142). The resulting panel was very heterogeneous. It contained women and men, youths with and without a migration background, and different levels of education and social milieus (see Table 1). The study was conducted at two sites in Germany, both (former) working-class cities in the west of the country with a labor market displaying particular challenges, such as a comparatively high share of (a) long-term unemployment, (b) low-skilled workers in employment, and (c) youths participating in publicly subsidized training schemes because they could not find a training position. The locations were determined by the German Federal Employment Agency, which funded the study.

The methodology applied for the line-by-line analysis of the interviews was based on case reconstructions (Oevermann, 1993b), a method from the interpretative paradigm of qualitative social research, sequence analysis in particular (Maiwald, 2005; Rosenthal, 2018). For this approach, each interview is transcribed verbatim and divided in small units (sequences). Each unit is then extensively and subsequently interpreted and hypotheses are formed regarding the underlying structure of the case. The rationale of this approach aims at not only reflecting the perspective of the interviewee but also analyzing what the presented happening or action means according to objective standards and common meanings (Rosenthal, 2018, p. 63). This implies that the actors' interpretation of a situation may differ from the researchers' interpretation. To derive reasons for processes of disconnecting, our study aimed to identify how the study participants deal with new situations, uncertainties, and status passages (Glaser & Strauss, 1971). Therefore, we reconstructed the patterns of individual choices in the life course and the individual substantiations for these choices (Fuchs et al., 2018). In this article, the main focus of our analyses was on the genesis of habitual autonomy and its subsequent role in mastering the transition from school to work. The two follow-up interviews with the cases of the longitudinal panel addressed the individual biographical progress and were conducted between 2015 and 2017, each after one year. This longitudinal approach allowed us, on the one hand, to trace the life course of the participants over a certain span of time. On the other hand, it opened up the possibility to test hypotheses based on the analysis of the previous interview. Thus, a thorough methodology of empirically deriving and testing hypotheses was applied over the course of the study.

Table 1. Sample of longitudinal panel.

Name	Gender	Age	School-leaving qualification	Vocational qualification	Migrant-background
Andrea	Female	22	Lower secondary	No, multiple discontinued	No
Jenni	Female	23	Lower secondary	Discontinued	No
Jessica	Female	19	Lower secondary, not completed	No	No
Johnny	Male	19	Lower secondary, not completed	No	No
Lukas	Male	17	Lower secondary	No	Yes
Friedrich	Male	24	Upper secondary	No	No
Ralf	Male	23	Lower secondary, not completed	No	No
Markus	Male	20	Lower secondary	Discontinued	No
Veronika	Female	21	Lower secondary, not completed	No	Yes
Anton	Male	21	Lower secondary (subsequently completed)	Subsidized, discontinued	Yes
Marina	Female	17	Lower secondary (subsequently completed)	No	Yes
Umut	Male	16	Lower secondary, not completed	No	Yes
Cem	Male	20	Lower secondary	No	Yes
Sascha	Male	24	Lower secondary	No	No
Naima	Female	18	Lower secondary (subsequently completed)	No	Yes
Anna	Female	18	Lower secondary	Discontinued	Yes

Notes: "Discontinued" refers to the fact that the youth was able to find a training position but this training was terminated prematurely—either by the youth himself or herself or by the employer; "subsidized" refers to training positions provided by the Federal Employment Agency, a form of external training, offered to disadvantaged youths with little or no immediate involvement of employers.

4. Results: Autonomy Deficit and Disconnectedness—Two Factors

Regarding the three interviews with each of the 16 cases chosen for the longitudinal panel, we performed extensive case reconstructions of the study participants. On this basis we want to present two factors that inhibit the development of autonomy and consequently lead to disconnectedness: (a) dysfunctional parent–child relationship and (b) persistence of traditionalism. In order to illustrate the cases and findings, we also present selected interview sequences.

4.1. Factor One: Dysfunctional Parent–Child Relationship

In cases associated with dysfunctional parent–child relationships, individuals do not develop sufficient autonomy at the habitual level because the necessary processes of detachment from the parents were lacking or insufficient. We found two possible variants. Firstly, some individuals are forced early on to assume a degree of personal responsibility that adolescents are not yet able to cope with, because of their habitus. During their family socialization, these youths lack a stable bond with their parents, in which no basic trust could be developed (Erikson, 1963); the family situation is characterized by neglect and sometimes violence, as can be seen in the following quote:

> It all started with my mother, she was never at home. She was at parties at night, I was alone in the street….There were times I only survived because I stole. (Sascha, first interview)

This situation results in a forced independence, to a certain extent, as a survival strategy in very problematic family circumstances. As a consequence, youths who are expected to be too independent at a very early age usually distrust other authority figures at school and in vocational training, or at least avoid trusting relationships because they experienced little stable protection and care from their parents as central reference and authority figures. In our first follow-up interview, Sascha proceeds:

> I'm taking no crap from nobody!...At [name of the vocational training company] you have a probationary period for the first six months and I know I won't pass it.

As a rule, this makes it difficult for them to establish relationships with professionals such as social workers or vocational counselors. Cases displaying this factor include youths with street careers who were thrown out by their parents, but also those who formally had a home but experienced such massive violence or neglect there that they outright fled from their parents and were thus

forced to fend for themselves. In our cases, this went hand in hand with occasional informal work, but sometimes also with crime.

A particular variation of this factor can be found among those youths with failed careers in child and youth welfare services. In this case, public child and youth welfare services were involved early on, but often changing foster families and interrupted foster care meant that the youths experienced no stable bond with regular caregivers and personal authorities.

As a result, these youths distrusted and were downright hostile to any authority, often leading to provocations, conflict, and social deviance, such as delinquency. The following quote illustrates that an interviewee who had been with various foster families and spent time in foster care was no longer able to accept basic instructions from his foster parents. He lacked confidence that anyone was well-intended toward him at all:

> And at some point, I just went crazy. Because at some point I had had enough. I won't let them do this to me. I'm not a dork, so to speak. Yes, because I won't be pushed around, I'm not a puppet. I won't take orders from anyone. What kind of life would that be? I had to go home at five o'clock. At 13 years. Yes, okay, that's alright, but somehow I didn't see it. (Johnny, first Interview)

Although some of the cases associated with this factor habitually showed great motivation, they could not enter into trusting relationships with teachers and instructors, a prerequisite for training relationships. Equally problematic was their willingness to adjust to a group and think ahead, that is, to pursue an issue permanently out of long-term self-interest (Elias, 1978). Especially in conflicts, these adolescents were quickly inclined to withdraw from the situation or reacted with aggression. It seems plausible that this tendency, too, is rooted in a fundamental mistrust and deep insecurity in social relationships. Every conflict was immediately interpreted as a personal attack and a questioning of the entire relationship. They lacked the certainty of being accepted unconditionally. This does not mean that these young people are not self-reliant. Some interviewees developed amazing survival strategies. However, they can only apply this self-reliance individually, not in a team, school, or workplace community. Anomic or desolate family circumstances significantly hamper the development of autonomy in these cases.

A systematic variation of this factor is characterized by a too close and one-sided attachment to one parent as the primary caregiver. In our cases, this is always the mother but, in principle, it could just as well be the father. The adolescents are insufficiently detached from the mother or not at all; an equivalent relationship to the father or another person with parental functions did not exist in our cases. The consequence of an excessive fixation on one parent in early childhood was found to be that dealing with and confronting other authorities is unfamiliar and problematic for these adolescents, if only because they feel threatened by the world outside their dyadic relationship, albeit to varying degrees. In these cases, the primary caregiver did not tolerate his or her offspring's steps toward adolescent independence and a psychosocial moratorium, which in turn led to a lack of stable identity with the offspring (Erikson, 1963). Interviewees who were mainly characterized by this factor found it very difficult to cooperate or productively engage with others. Yet, our sample again shows a variety of reasons for this strong fixation on the mother that extends into adolescence. In some cases, these children, after the divorce of their parents, were made substitute partners by their mother, which impaired their detachment and independence, such as communing with peers (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973; Foelsch et al., 2014). A poignant example is the case of a young woman whose parents divorced during her childhood. The mother forbade the daughter any contact with the father in the following years. At the same time, the bond between mother and daughter was strong, as they were united in caring for one of the mother's younger children, who had a disability. Shortly before she graduated from school, the young woman finally wanted to contact her father. The mother felt betrayed by her daughter, frequently punished her, and finally forced her to move out. In the end, the mother broke off all contact, which caused the young woman to suffer massively:

> I just didn't think it was all right what my mother did, making my life hell like that. Just because she doesn't get along with my father. And that she had to drag me into this, although I actually don't have any grievances against my father….For example, I didn't think it was okay when I came back from staying with my father [and] my mother said: "You are grounded for four weeks." (Jenni, first interview)

The permanent double-bind behavior of the mother—out of great personal bond and sudden rejection—ultimately led to severe insecurity in external relationships, as the young woman no longer trusted in fundamental relationships. Her personal insecurity reached a point that after leaving school she felt unable to enter the working world, which was unfamiliar to her. Instead, this led to a period of disconnectedness lasting several years, during which she lived with friends, received basic welfare benefits, and had no fixed residence. In this case, the limited autonomy resulting from the problematic bond between mother and daughter is expressed on several levels: both in the mother's overall behavior and in the young woman's great vulnerability.

In other cases, although the parents' marriage was formally intact and the youths had already entered vocational training before the phase of disconnectedness, they nevertheless had great problems moving independently through society and outside of the family. In one

example, the sudden death of both parents resulted in a prospective university student withdrawing into the parental home for several years and not seeking help from relatives or public institutions. What stands out is that it was not grief for the deceased parents that produced this behavior, but the fact that his mother had personally and emotionally absorbed him for years, virtually denying the adolescent any engagement with the world outside the mother-child dyad. Also, during the interview, the young man was explicitly stressing his strong bond with his mother while at the same time displaying a clear tendency to devaluate his father—concerning both his career achievements as well as his position in the family.

When his mother died, the young man was deprived of his primary caregiver without having developed gradual autonomy. In this case, again, excessive fixation on one parent made it impossible for the 21-year-old young man to cope with his life autonomously:

> I was too old to get help and too young to know where to go. (Friedrich, first follow-up interview)

All cases of this second variant of the factor "dysfunctional parent–child relationship," which could be traced back to incomplete detachment from the mother as primary caregiver, showed lacking confidence in their own abilities, insufficient self-efficacy expectations (Bandura, 1977) in new or unknown situations, as well as insecurity in dealing with authority figures outside of their families. This lack of autonomy proved to have a strong negative impact on their transition from school to work.

4.2. Persistence of Traditionalism

Among the interviewees which can mainly be characterized by the factor "persistence of traditionalism," it is hysteresis (Bourdieu, 1984) that results in traditional orientations of the parent generation not transforming into orientations at the habitus level characterized by a higher degree of autonomy in the youths we studied. The factor "traditionalism" refers to a habitus formed especially in immobile milieus or immobile societies (Weber, 1978). Immobile or more traditional habitus here means that individuals try to preserve what they are used to, i.e., to reproduce the status of previous generations, but in no way pursue social advancement or try to form a new or own way of life.

Youths with a traditional habitus have robust particular orientations (Parsons & Shils, 1951) and try to identify role models that can be imitated to guide their actions. Although they engage with new, unknown situations, they make no genuinely individual decisions and fail to develop sufficient coping strategies of their own; instead, they merely look for role models or routines to follow. This habitus does not strive for autonomy, or independently shaping or co-shaping one's own life, but tries to adapt to given circumstances. This also becomes evident in these youths' relationship to the future, which they perceive as a fate they cannot alter. Hence, they do not plan far ahead and live mostly in the present. These individuals do not strive to develop their own values and interests, but mostly want to follow authorities.

Even in modern societies, where autonomy, independence, and self-reliance have become more and more important, immobile/traditional milieus and traditional habitus formations can persist and be economically successful. Problems arise, however, when technological and organizational progress render this habitus no longer suitable for the working world. The examples for "traditionalism" we found showed a clear tendency of trying to live up to the expectations of other reference groups—be it the immediate expectations of their parents or milieu-specific expectations. These youths tended to form no individual interests and life plans, thereby also avoiding the related individual responsibility. In terms of Parsons and Shils' (1951) "pattern variables," we found the structures of particularism, diffuseness, and ascription reflected in their tendency to resort to fate. One striking example is a case from the Turkish migrant milieu. The milieu-specific expectation of the young man was that he, like his father, would quickly take a low-skilled but well-paid industrial job after school, earn an income, and marry a girl from his ethnic community, who had already been chosen by his parents:

> Well, he [the father] said: "When I was your age, I [had] already started working by the age of 14." That's what he means, you know. And this is why he is so upset because I'm 18 and still not working….I also have German friends [that], when they were 17 or 18, they [were] already planning to move out. But with us, this is different. With us, when my father grows old, I'm the eldest and I have to work and take care of my family. This is how it works with us. (Umut, follow-up interview)

The adolescent tried with all his might to follow this model, even though this life plan had already failed for his father by then, who had been unemployed for several years. The youth nevertheless stuck to the model, even though the structural conditions for it to succeed no longer existed. He saw no sense in postponing his goals by completing an apprenticeship first, but also did not want to take up a low-paid job. Hence, he failed in several ways: His transition from school to work and his milieu-specific life plan failed because the parents of the chosen bride were not prepared to marry their daughter to a man with a low income.

Of course, traditional habitus persists not only in migrant milieus. There were also youths without a migration background—in our sample, it was always girls—from economically well-off, skilled laborer milieus who displayed a traditional habitus, which resulted in phases of disconnectedness. This was particularly the case when the interviewed girls grew up in families with a traditional

distribution of roles, their mothers were no role models for successful participation in the labor market, and their fathers also referred them to the gender-stereotypical role of housewife and mother. The corresponding interviewees grew up expecting that after school they would find a man to provide for them and enable them to lead a life as a housewife and mother. Although these cases often stayed in the educational system for a long time, they formed no individual interests or goals:

> I was at the employment agency and they said that I should do a year of introductory work, so I did that….And then my mother found out about a school where you can catch up on a middle-school certificate, so I did that….Then I did a year of voluntary social service because my father said: "You have to do something." (Andrea, first interview)

Here the educational system functioned as a "holding pattern" until they achieved their ideal goal of entering into a provider marriage. The young women from our panel who displayed this factor tended to have slightly older partners who already had their own apartment and a job to provide for them. This, they believed, would relieve them of the need to choose their own career and, in some cases, to earn an income beyond a part-time, low-skilled job. Contrary to the young women's expectations, however, these relationships did not prove to be stable in our sample. One study participant stated that her partner ended the relationship after a while because he no longer wanted to support her. As a result, she left the shared apartment and immediately went back to her parents. The parents willingly took in their daughter, and the father furnished her old children's room. From a sociological point of view, there was a seamless change from the status of a housewife back to the status of a dependent daughter, combined with a rapid exchange of personal providers. What stands out is that this type of study participant did not perceive this situation as problematic or as reducing their autonomy. As these examples illustrate, youths who are mainly associated with this factor are essentially concerned with fulfilling goals set by others or the lifestyle standards of their milieu. They see work and professional life not as opportunities to shape their own world and circumstances but as a necessity that serves primarily to secure a livelihood.

5. Conclusion

Our main finding is that an insufficient development of autonomy on the habitual level strongly encourages processes of disconnecting, especially in the cases examined here which are characterized by a wide-ranging and persistent disconnectedness. Although well-known factors such as socioeconomic status, migration background, or early parenthood are also relevant influences and can be found among the youths we interviewed, we at the same time believe that there are further, underlying factors on the habitual level that strongly affect their efforts in the transition from school to work. More severe cases of disconnectedness might also display deviant behavior such as crime, homelessness, or addiction as well as specific family constellations (e.g., conflicts surrounding separation/divorce, violence, problematic parent–child relationships). This is why we also find that a specific way of life and family situation tends to coincide with disconnectedness. To add to these observations, we would argue that the processes of disconnecting we studied are also deeply related to longer processes of socialization, i.e., subject formation processes, and can also be explained from the perspective of classic socialization theory. In the case of "persistence of traditionalism," for example, these are milieu-specific phenomena, above all, persisting outmoded orientations at the habitus level, in the sense of hysteresis (Bourdieu, 1984), which block the necessary transformation of individual life practice and the development of autonomy. "Dysfunctional parent–child relationships," at the same time, are defined by an impaired development of identity and autonomy (Erikson, 1963). This can lead to very drastic forms of neglect, but also to more subtle forms, such as the excessive and one-sided attachment of one parent to the adolescent.

Just as our results do not imply that autonomy fully and exclusively explains difficulties in the transition from school to work, it also does not imply that every case of limited autonomy leads to disconnectedness. However, we show that transitioning from school to work does require a certain level of autonomy, which the youths we studied did not achieve due to their socialization. Especially severe cases of disconnectedness can occur when youths avoid the demands that arise after leaving school or fail to cope with them in the long term. The requirement to make autonomous decisions exists at several stages: (a) in the individualized choice of an occupation, in the sense of an internal evaluation of occupations and an autonomous choice of potential occupations, and (b) in proving oneself in vocational training, including mastering the status passage associated with entry into vocational training. Of course, proving oneself in a training relationship requires a successful application. Whether a young person receives a training place depends, to a large extent, both on the general economic situation of the region where a person searches and the hiring companies. The latter applies selection mechanisms in which pupils with poor or no qualifications, or other factors typically associated with disconnectedness—such as a migration background—are disadvantaged, a criterion that applies to many of our cases. However, the recruitment behavior of companies was not the subject of this study.

In conclusion, our results show the need for a more complex understanding of both the causes and manifestations of these phenomena. This does not preclude further differentiation of our identified factors in future studies. While it might prove difficult to transform our

qualitative approach and findings into a quantitative study, we still see two potentially promising areas for further research based on our results. Firstly, it might be interesting to more closely study factors positively contributing to a process of re-connecting, thus reversing the tendencies outlined in this article. Secondly, especially the more milieu-specific factor of traditionalism could at least partially be particular to the national German context. Thus, research applying a similar qualitative approach to different countries is likely to provide valuable insights into the varying role of milieus and traditionalism in different national contexts.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Article

"They Really Only Look for the Best": How Young People Frame Problems in School-to-Work Transition

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Abstract
This article presents how young people in educational measures experience and discuss tensions between structural and individualised challenges they face in the transition from school to work. The findings are based on an Austrian citizen social science research project that involved conducting participatory research in Vienna with 33 young people between the ages of 15 and 23 years who are in measures for early school leavers that are preparing for further education and training. These co-researchers struggle with constant comparisons to "norm" biographies and their accompanying social pressure as they try to meet the high expectations of school, work, and family. Additionally, mental health was a prominent issue, as the young co-researchers experience stigma and a lack of professional support, which can impede their access to the labour market. The results of our research indicate that young people in employment measures require a more inclusive school and work environment that supports them regardless of their origin, family background, appearance, or mental health status. They negotiate the tension between individual employability and structural disadvantage and demand a recognised place in society, a request that connects to current debates concerning the individualisation of transitions from school to work.

Keywords
citizen social science; early school leavers; education and training up to 18; NEET; participatory action research; school-to-work transition; youth

Issue
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1. Introduction

The fragmented employment biographies of young people have long featured in the discussion about transitions from school to work (Dörre, 2006; Krafeld, 2000; Pohl & Walther, 2007; Stauber, 2013). In Austria, young people who are not able to finish their education—be it school or an apprenticeship—face considerably more difficulties when entering the labour market (Neubacher & Wimmer, 2021, p. 291). Together with young people who do not continue their education after compulsory education, they more frequently experience discontinuous periods of employment later on in their lives compared to young people pursuing other educational pathways (Statistik Austria, 2021a, pp. 7–8). Work and school no longer form a direct continuum and the transition is increasingly characterised by uncertainties. This development has been framed as the destandardisation of life courses (Pohl & Walther, 2007; Spannring & Reinprecht, 2002). Managing the transition is becoming an increasingly individualised endeavour, meaning young people are less able to fall back on collective patterns and must instead resort to individual decisions. Moreover, the Austrian labour market is gradually relying

on a flexible workforce. Although this development is lower than in other European countries, an increase in solo self-employment and temporary contracts can also be observed in Austria (Fritsch et al., 2019, pp. 334–350). The high proportion of women in part-time employment (Fritsch et al., 2019, p. 344) and the increase in subcontracted employment (Riesenfelder et al., 2018) can also be attributed to the trend towards flexibilisation.

While the destandardisation of life courses creates opportunities for some young people, many face heightened risks of social exclusion (Kovacheva & Pohl, 2007; Stauber, 2013), which the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy (n.d.) defines as:

> [The] processes that prevent individuals, groups or communities from accessing the rights, opportunities and resources that are normally available to members of society….The list of young people at risk of social exclusion can be extended almost ad infinitum and it includes young people with disabilities, ethnic, sexual and religious minorities, homeless youth or young offenders etc.

During transitional periods, young people are especially vulnerable to social exclusion, as their lack of work or continuous education creates economically precarious situations and, therefore, issues like poor access to health services and safe housing (Alston & Kent, 2009, p. 93; Webster et al., 2004, p. 3).

The debate about transitions pays special attention to those who do not manage a seamless transition from school and vocational training to work. At both the European level, within in the context of the Youth Guarantee, and the Austrian national level through the 2016 *Ausbildungspflichtgesetz* (Compulsory Education or Training Act), NEETs (young people not in education, employment, or training), and ESLs (early school leavers) have been a recent focus of sociopolitical efforts. Incomplete education can have detrimental consequences for individuals, including higher risks of job loss, longer periods of unemployment, and the greater associated potential for social exclusion (Bacher et al., 2014). Educational and employment measures are therefore continually being expanded to increase young people's chances and to minimise these risks. While such measures were initially seen as a temporary necessity, they have been continually developed (at least in Germany and Austria) since the 1980s (Oehme, 2020).

When discussing employment measures for young people, there is a prominent relationship between individualised and structural causes and responsibilities of early school leaving. The literature frequently asserts that failed transitions from school to work are ascribed to individuals without considering sociopolitical structures and the related unequal distribution of resources. Pohl and Walther (2007, p. 534) analyse activation policies in the EU and argue that because they "rely largely on over-simplistic assumptions about young people's motivations for taking an active role in their transitions, they contribute to the individualisation of structural problems." Individualising the causes of youth unemployment attributes the main source of failure to a lack of motivation, ethics, and values (Berthet & Simon, 2017; Otto et al., 2017, p. 4). This depicts young people as not being willing or suitable enough to take up employment, which results in measures aimed to enhance their employability (Pohl & Walther, 2007). Besides affecting the individual, this approach also affects their families. As Oehme (2020, p. 130) argues, measures that are intended to compensate for ascribed individual problems promote the exclusion and stigmatisation of young people's living environments, such as their families or peer groups, since these are classified as being responsible for a lack of orientation towards or competencies for the labour market.

This article investigates how young people experience this tension between the individualisation of problems and structural inequalities. In our research project, CoAct (Co-Designing Citizen Social Science for Collective Action), we work with the concept of citizen social science (CSS) that was inspired by participatory action research (PAR). This means that we collaborate with young people as co-researchers to learn how they analyse their position in employment measures. We jointly examined obstacles and challenges in the search for education and a career path. The young co-researchers have frequently addressed two particular factors in this line of research: (a) the demands and expectations placed on them by trainers, families, and the labour market while they are experiencing structural barriers that are framed as individual deficits; (b) psychological problems as exclusionary in the field of work and education. Although the research project took place during the Covid-19 pandemic, the article does not focus on the issues raised by young co-researchers regarding the restrictions and effects this had on their lifeworld.

In line with participatory research, we started with the idea that persons affected by a problematic situation have a specific, often-ignored perspective on this situation. Linking personal experiences with social science research methods potentially enables these usually excluded perspectives to be included in scientific knowledge as well as in sociopolitical action. In her research on precarity, Dörre (2006) emphasises the importance of tracing how certain conditions are subjectively processed, e.g., how people address uncertain job opportunities or discrimination in the job market. We furthermore follow Evans's (2007, p. 92) concept of "bounded agency" that grasps how the past and the imagined future of individuals, as well as their "subjective perceptions of the structures they have to negotiate," influence their agency. From this perspective, individuals are neither overdetermined by sociopolitical structures, nor are their actions only a result of their individual behaviour. This understanding of agency is useful in participatory research that is equally concerned

with personal experiences and structural conditions of social exclusion.

2. Context

The general structure and organisation of training measures for young people—especially for those not in the regular educational system—constitute our research context. In 2016, Austria introduced a new law called the *Ausbildungspflichtgesetz* (Compulsory Education or Training Act), which made attending school, vocational training, or a preparatory measure mandatory up until the age of 18. Since 2017, the number and formats of existing training initiatives have expanded alongside the establishment of corresponding administrative bodies. The new structure is called *Ausbildung bis 18* (Education and Training up to 18, later shortened E&T up to 18). At the end of compulsory schooling (at the age of 15), students who are at risk of discontinuing their education are invited to "youth coaching" sessions where social workers help them define and plan their future education or training goals. Those who struggle to find an apprenticeship or do not want (or are unable or not allowed) to attend school participate in preparatory courses and training. These courses are designed to develop social and technical skills and prepare young people for working environments.

Despite its objectives to involve all young people in preparatory measures or formal education, some individuals fall outside the E&T up to 18 system. Reasons include structural and personal challenges like the lack of apprenticeship placements, a selective school system, family problems, little educational support from families and friends, other responsibilities, or health problems (Bacher et al., 2014; Steiner et al., 2019). This is especially true for young people experiencing multifaceted problems, who often quit measures they perceive as too restrictive or demanding (Steiner et al., 2019).

Different categories define and describe young people who are not within the formal educational system: First, the Anglo-American term "early school leavers" (ESL) refers to those aged 18 to 24 whose highest level of education is ISCED 3c short. This corresponds to a short period of education after lower secondary school, e.g., at a one-year school (cf. Steiner, 2009). Conversely, Statistik Austria (2021b) uses *Frühe AusBildungsAbbrecherInnen* (early education dropouts, or FABA) to describe those aged 15 and older who have no education beyond compulsory schooling, are not currently enrolled in formal education or employed, and are not receiving a personal pension, i.e., people who are neither integrated into the formal education system nor the labour market. Likewise, NEET shares similarities with FABA, but concerns people aged 16 to 24 who are neither currently in education or training nor employment (Bacher et al., 2014). This definition, however, does not consider the highest level of educational attainment, making the group more heterogeneous than FABA or ESL. Tamesberger and Bacher (2014) stress that NEET subsumes disadvantaged adolescents who are involuntarily excluded from educational institutions and the labour market (e.g., due to illness, forced migration, or caregiving duties) with more privileged individuals who intentionally take time off. Hence, barely half of the adolescents in their sample of young people with NEET status are ESL.

Most of the young people we worked with belonged to the FABA category and failed to complete their schooling or find a vocational training placement. Although Austria has a lower share of early school leavers than the EU average (7.9% and 10.6%, respectively; see Strauss, 2018), an estimated 16,000 young people are candidates to participate in E&T up to 18 measures (Steiner, Pessl, & Karaszek, 2016, p. 79). By contrast, Statistik Austria (2021b) defined 46,902 persons between the ages of 15 and 19 as FABA as of 31 October 2017, not all of whom were in E&T up to 18 measures.

While several quantitative studies on Austria address NEET (e.g., Bacher et al., 2014; Tamesberger & Bacher, 2014) or ESL (e.g., Steiner, 2009, 2014), little academic literature investigates E&T up to 18. Two important exceptions are, first, an extensive report that estimates the benefits of E&T up to 18 on a macroeconomic and societal level and establishes recommendations for several E&T up to 18 subfields (Steiner et al., 2019). However, the report does not evaluate its implementation. The authors ultimately determine that E&T up to 18 will yield several benefits from a strong macroeconomic return on investment, as well as improved social justice and more options and support for individual young people. They approve of the methods of prevention, intervention, and compensation in E&T up to 18, but stress there are areas for improvement; for example, strengthening support systems at schools and other training sites (e.g., psychologists, supervision) and intensifying partnerships between different institutions. The second text is more critical, wherein Atzmüller and Knecht (2016) document the neoliberal transformation of labour market activities and policies for young people during their transition from compulsory school to work. The authors analyse ministerial papers and expert interviews with employees of political and administrative institutions, as well as those working directly with young people, and conclude that young people are expected to adapt to a competitive economic environment, while pathologising failure, deviation, or refusal ("adolescent madness"), or attributing it to dysfunctional, lower-class families (Atzmüller & Knecht, 2016, p. 130). The shift from *Ausbildungsgarantie* (guarantee of education) to *Ausbildungspflicht* (obligation of education) is an indicator of this neoliberal transformation.

However, no qualitative or participatory research currently addresses young people's perspectives on E&T up to 18. This is why our research project conducts collaborative research with young people who are the target group of this new educational structure.

3. Research Methodology: Citizen Social Science and Participatory Action Research

Our project is based on principles of CSS, a relatively new and emerging research approach (Albert et al., 2021; Mayer et al., 2018; Purdam, 2014) with no universal definition (Albert et al., 2021). Scheller et al. (2020, p. 10) define CSS as "participatory research co-designed and directly driven by citizen groups sharing a social concern." CSS has its roots in activist and participant-led research, citizen science, as well as PAR (Albert et al., 2021; Scheller et al., 2020). Our research project draws mainly on PAR, which originated in American and Latin American psychological, sociological, educational, and international development traditions (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991; Whyte, 1991). PAR perceives scientific knowledge as an instrument of power, which might exclude or even exploit people for the sake of science. It was influenced by Freire (1970/1992), who states that every person can use education and knowledge to develop a critical consciousness about the world around them and thereby develop a sense of agency in society's political and social fields. PAR strongly values individual lifeworld experiences as a valid basis for researching social issues. In this regard, PAR is deeply committed to using social science research as a means to question power relations and inequality (Kindon et al., 2007). It works in a participatory manner regarding the research and the practical implementation of research outcomes. This means that people who are not trained or professional researchers are engaged as co-researchers and are involved in defining the topic of the research object, the research conceptualisation, data collection, and analysis, as well as disseminating the results and their practical applications into practice (von Unger, 2014). However, participation is a fluid process with varying levels of engagement throughout a research project (Hart, 2007).

Multiple approaches have been developed within PAR, and collaborative research with children and young people is especially relevant to our work (e.g., Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Kellett, 2010). Kellett (2010) asserts that it is advantageous to include children in the research process in an active and co-determining manner because of their unique perspectives that cannot be captured by adults. Whether in peer-to-peer research or lifeworld experiences, children and youth bring a distinct stance to a research project. Cammarota and Fine (2008) furthermore stress the capacity of participatory research to engage young people in its reflection upon social structures and inequalities—especially when combined with postcolonial and feminist theories that likewise focus on challenging power relations. Although PAR is considered a mutual learning process between all participants, including the academic researchers, it focuses on its ability to develop critical and reflexive thinking and to empower young people to "inquire about complex power relations, histories of struggles, and the consequences of oppression directly related to their lives" (Desai, 2019, p. 125).

4. Research Activities and Data

The core of our research project was the collaboration with young people who attended E&T up to 18 measures. The research activities relevant to this article include one two-day online research session, and four "project weeks" in face-to-face settings with a total of 33 young co-researchers between the ages of 15 and 23. The research activities took place between November 2020 and October 2021 (see Figure 1). Information about further research activities done within the scope of the project can be found on our homepage (https://coactproject.eu and https://coactproject.univie.ac.at). Another important aspect of the project was building a "knowledge coalition"—a dynamic network of Austrian practitioners, public administration, policy institutions, service providers, youth organisations, and academic researchers. Building this network enabled the professional research team to work with different actors in the E&T up to 18 field and directly share the issues raised by young co-researchers during the project weeks with decision-makers, scientists, and practitioners, and vice versa.

The project weeks and the two-day online research session were organised with the help of the heads and trainers from the E&T up to 18 institutions attended by the young people. In some institutions, youth were compelled to be present, but the organisers of the research project gave all young people the opportunity to decide whether they wanted to actively participate in the research project or not. At other institutions, it was possible to advertise the research project, allowing young people to become familiar with the idea and the professional researchers beforehand. Mostly, the young people took interest in the project because it was a change from their everyday routines at the educational measure and because they could pursue their own interests. The research was structured in a way that the young co-researchers could choose their own research topic, collect information and data, analyse their data, and reframe their results in policy recommendations.

Since the project was working with a lifeworld-oriented approach, the research topic was not only youth employment but could encompass all social or societal issues the young co-researchers deemed relevant. Hence, the research topic and research question were developed by the young researchers themselves after a preparatory interactive exercise on their needs, topics, and challenges, as well as issues they wanted to transform. Figure 1 shows the topics the young co-researchers chose to research and which methods they used to collect and analyse data. They were able to choose from a range of research methods that were introduced to them in a playful way, such as conducting mutual interviews or doing photo research. The data collected in the joint research was analysed by adapting steps from qualitative content analysis, grounded theory, and situational analysis so the methods could

	Overview Research Activities				
	Project Week 1	Project Week 2	Project Week 3	Project Week 4	Online Research
General	• Pilot • November 2020 • 3 young people	• August 2021 • 6 young people	• September 2021 • 9 young people	• October 2021 • 8 young people	• May 2021 • 7 young people
Topics	• Corona and searching for jobs	• Mental illness and work requirements • Expectations put on young people	• Racism • Military • Climate (justice)	• Equality • Mobility: Transport, country and city	• Digitalisation • Racism
Methods of data collection	• Qualitative interviews	• Qualitative interviews (expert&street interviews) • Autoethnographics comic	• Interviews (expert&street interviews) • Group discussions • Photo research	• Online survey • Interviews (expert&street interviews) • Photo research • Group discussions	• Quality Interviews • Photo research
Methods of analysis	• Stop'n'Go • Coding with # • Discussions	• Stop'n'Go • Coding with # • Discussions	• Stop'n'Go • Coding with # • Discussions	• Stop'n'Go • Coding with # • Discussions	• Stop'n'Go • Coding with # • Discussions • Situational mapping
Outcome	• Video	• Video	• Video	• Video	• Posters created with an online design tool
	33 young people & 4 institutions				

Figure 1. Overview of participatory research activities.

be used by young co-researchers. In Figure 1, we call this "Stop'n'Go" and "Coding with #" (Wöhrer et al., 2018). All the steps were done collaboratively and were supported by one professional researcher. To enable the young co-researchers to publish their results, the professional research team chose graphic recordings or explanatory videos in advance as a target group-oriented dissemination tool for project weeks. The outcomes can be viewed on the CoAct Vienna YouTube channel (https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCw9KE2iUG74tcLab3p16ojQ/videos).

The young co-researchers' participation was very high with regards to setting the research topics as well as conducting and analysing data, but rather low concerning other project-related activities, e.g., organising funding or collaborating with stakeholders. Hence, their participation levels varied throughout the project. Although the initial plan was to enable as much participation as possible, especially in disseminating the overall project results, e.g., in the media or at conferences, this was hindered by Covid-19 restrictions and the resulting lack of opportunities for in-person follow-up meetings. In addition to the co-analysis depicted in this article, the research project entails activities beyond its collaborative research with young co-researchers, e.g., formulating final policy recommendations. Although these data analysis and dissemination steps will not be done collaboratively, the young co-researchers' previous co-analysis, demands, and suggestions will still be highly influential during this project phase.

5. Results: How Do Young People Negotiate Expectations in the Transition (From Measure) To Work?

As noted, many young people within E&T up to 18 measures face social exclusion, especially during transitional periods. This was also evident during project weeks when young co-researchers discussed the struggles and problems they faced in their lives—whether at school, in training, in their families, or among their friends. They seemed to be constantly on edge and under enormous pressure. They discussed being first burdened by social inequalities like racism, ableism, and mental health stigma—and thus structural disadvantages—and second by their more individualised effects in areas like care work, language skills, and lack of motivation. Considering the constant struggles young people experience, it seemed quite fitting when one young co-researcher described herself as someone who was mainly concerned with trying to survive. This strong language encapsulated the youth's lifeworld quite well by pointing to the multifaceted problems E&T up to 18 participants face, with looking for an apprenticeship or another form of education being only one of many obstacles to overcome.

To shed more light on the tension between structural and individualised challenges, we, the authors, focus on presenting the results from the co-analysis done together by the professional researchers and the young co-researchers during the project weeks and the two-day online research session. We will first discuss the demands

and expectations placed on young people by trainers, families, and the labour market. Finding apprenticeships in Vienna is highly competitive because of limited placements for too many young people, meaning companies often only hire those with "perfect" CVs. Additionally, we address mental health, as it clearly illustrated how inequalities affect youth education. The topics were main themes in three project weeks and were also repeatedly discussed by other groups of young co-researchers. For this article, we, the authors, summarised the outcomes of this joint research and framed the findings within a theoretical context to enable connecting the research to a larger discourse on youth in transition.

The following sections include quotes from young co-researchers who participated in the project weeks, which were all translated from German to English by the authors.

5.1. Requirements for Young People or How to Be a Wunderwuzzi

In our participatory research project, all research groups of youth and young adults discussed and analysed the expectations placed on young people by their social and professional environments. Based on their own experiences and interviews with E&T up to 18 professionals as well as other youth, the young co-researchers identified tensions between what they were expected to achieve and their assessments of their actual career potential. When analysing the current labour market situation, young people felt like they must be *Wunderwuzzis* ("whiz kids," which was used by one expert in an interview conducted by the young co-researchers)—a person who already knows and can do everything and who has to have above-average skills—to have any chance of being considered for the job. The young people questioned company demands for previous work experience even for those in their age group. They regarded it as a flawed system since companies selected people who needed the least amount of training, which was inconsistent with the very purpose of training young people and reduced opportunities for those with fewer skills. Furthermore, the young people described the contradiction where, on the one hand, there was an apparent lack of suitable personnel, while on the other hand, many young people did not gain an apprenticeship. As one young person summarised, this places pressure on everyone involved:

> It's like she [the interviewee] said, they really only look for the best. And if they don't find the best, then they don't take anyone. Of course, they have pressure and we have pressure because we don't have a job.

To the young co-researchers, the companies transferred their pressure onto the young people by demanding too many prerequisite skills and knowledge. They experienced requirements for a comprehensive CV, which is hard for young people who are attending educational measures to achieve. Accordingly, they feared that registering with Austria's employment service (AMS) would further minimise their chances of getting hired. As one young co-researcher explained, "going to the AMS at fifteen is suicide, so to speak." Their fear was also related to existing stereotypes about unemployment benefit recipients. This worried another young co-researcher when he stated: "And then the employer also thinks, 'what did he do there?' because some really take advantage of the AMS, some.''

These expressive quotes made it clear that young people constantly feared being considered stupid, lazy, or leeching off of social welfare benefits, which all diminished their chances of getting a good education or job. This fear of individualised failure was contrasted by the reference to structural conditions: The young co-researchers refused to exclusively see their difficulties in transitioning from school to work as an individual deficit. In their opinion, they were not prepared for the current requirements (e.g., the digitalisation of work changed tasks and duties they had not been trained for). They especially criticised schools for having hardly taught them any work life-related competencies and ambivalently discussed the necessity for a higher school leaving certificate. On the one hand, young people noticed that companies preferred graduates from, for example, technical upper-level secondary schools and recognised that jobs increasingly required a secondary school leaving certificate. On the other hand, they observed that a secondary school leaving certificate without work experience counted for little when looking for a job. Another structural factor regarding the difficulty of finding education was that, especially in Vienna, the discrepancy between applicants and positions for both internships and apprenticeships was so high that young people received countless rejections for applications—if they received them at all:

> For example, I know this from the internship. We had to do a hundred and thirty hours, and a lot of people really struggled because a lot of people apply in the summer. A lot of people do that. And there were many monotonous applications, yes, of course, they are then immediately thrown o—thrown away, and really only one, two are then invited to the appli—uh, to the interview. What are you supposed to do then?

Besides not being considered by companies due to the sheer amount of applications, the young co-researchers discussed how discrimination based on nationality or religion affected their application processes, e.g., not getting a job because of wearing a headscarf. They addressed those and other structural conditions such as job security and the lack of information about jobs when articulating demands for stakeholders, institutions, and politicians, as presented in Section 6.

Apart from the implicit or explicit expectations stated by companies and the welfare service, young people

were also confronted with their parents' expectations. For example, some young co-researchers argued with them about which jobs or careers were acceptable or worthwhile and which were not. They concluded that the older generation was not well-versed about new jobs in, e.g., the creative sector, and did not know about potential salaries. Some jobs deemed unsuitable by parents need to be considered as worthwhile—not because of the social status, but because of the associated salary. A commonly-invoked theme was the pressure parents place on young people concerning education and career choices. A young co-researcher described this as: "Because every day my dad is like: 'When are you going to get an apartment? When are you going to get a decent job?' Every day he asks that, although that question is getting annoying." Another young co-researcher spoke in more detail about the situation at home:

> My parents don't earn well, I have a sister who is in a wheelchair, my mother can't work because of that and now the whole burden is on me because my father wants me to get a good education, to earn money. And, it's not just because of the family that I give them money, but so that when I grow up I don't have to live like that. That's mainly what my father wants from me.

In both quotes, young people expressed that they fell short of their parents' expectations. The demand for (currently) unachieved independence and success built up pressure from the expectation to either no longer depend on their parents' income or to contribute to the household income. This was even harder for young people with migration histories who experienced both their parents' hardships (e.g., not having access to social welfare or having difficulties learning the official language) and the expectation to seize the opportunities their parents had provided for them. This experience was especially shared by girls, who mentioned that their parents were not necessarily strict—except for when it came to school.

The young people's statements demonstrate that E&T up to 18's status was not perceived as a normal or legitimate educational path, but as a failure. This means that participating in these measures was equivalent to having failed to obtain a regular educational or training placement. Young people in E&T up to 18 are stuck in a *sozialer Ortlosigkeit* (Abbenhardt, 2019), which is a situation where a positive social positioning is made impossible because it does not correspond to the norm biography and does not receive social recognition. Furthermore, as elaborated upon below, many E&T up to 18 participants bring a "package" of troublesome and energy-intensive issues but lack adequate support.

5.2. Let's Talk About (Mental) Health

Based on their study conducted between 2013 and 2015, Wagner et al. (2017) state that in Austria, 23.9% of young people surveyed between the ages of 10 and 18 experienced mental health problems. This increased during the COVID-19 pandemic (Dale et al., 2021) due to, e.g., lockdowns affecting schools and employment measures, a lack of social contacts, and stress. Mental health problems have previously been identified as a contributing factor to dropping out of school (Steiner, Pessl, & Bruneforth, 2016, pp. 170–172). It is, therefore, unsurprising that two of the research groups addressed mental health in the context of education and work, as well as concerning fairness within the health system. Based on their own experiences, the young co-researchers discussed what young people need to "survive" while navigating careers and continuing education. Because most of the young people we worked with had precarious economic backgrounds (Livanos & Papadopoulos, 2019) and psychotherapy is usually expensive in Austria, they had trouble obtaining professional support. During the research activities, the young co-researchers shared within the research group how the healthcare system generally favoured those who could afford services and put those who lacked financial resources at a disadvantage. Additionally, they did not feel supported in finding the right places and services that met their needs due to a combination of limited spaces and long waiting lists. However, parents and members of older generations seemed to be overwhelmed by support needs, which led to feelings of isolation and abandonment:

> At home, for example, my mother doesn't take it seriously at all, for example, [her mother describing her] "she's pretending to be depressed again," although it was diagnosed by a psychologist long ago…[she says] I'm faking it, I don't really have anything, I just want to take a vacation, so to speak, and that's why I'm going on sick leave.

These feelings of not being taken seriously and isolation were reinforced through mental health still being taboo in Austria and its association with shame and weakness. Furthermore, young people spoke about their lack of trust in authorities and institutions due to bad experiences at school, work, or with doctors, as they did not feel understood and supported. The lack of awareness and education about the topic was accompanied by many stereotypes that young people faced. Some experienced being labelled as crazy, lazy, weak, or unreliable when struggling with depression or mental illnesses. As described above, young people generally resisted these mental health ascriptions. This links back to our earlier comments about personal traits during job searches, highlighting how young people struggle against stereotypes and associated characteristics concerning mental health. The prevalence of mental health stereotypes promoted experiences of exclusion by colleagues or classmates through discrimination and mobbing. One young co-researcher argued: "If someone simply says you are sick [in the sense of crazy] or something,

something like that, that is just absolutely not true, it is not your fault." Hence, one young co-researcher summarised what needed to change as follows: "In my opinion, the most important thing is not to make people think that they are different."

Looking at these experiences from a professional researcher's perspective revealed that there is a lot more going on in the young people's lives than just finding a job or attending a school. It was not that they did not *want* to find a job or apprenticeship, but that this seemed very difficult, especially when their struggles had direct consequences on work and education or vice versa. As one young co-researcher stated: "It definitely helps if you feel better in your private life because if you feel like shit in your private life, you feel like shit at work…or vice versa."

The young people shared examples of how their mental illnesses had negative consequences on their work life. For example, some had to leave school or training, lost their jobs over extended hospital admissions, or were unable to work for longer periods and were accordingly trying to regain their footing:

> If you're absent, for whatever reason, if there's no damage, you will be gone after the second or third time. Some people, for example me, it is extremely difficult to get up, because of the effects [of depression]. Then I don't have the strength to call somewhere, whether it's [name of institution] or somewhere else. You're just in bed all the time and you practically can't move.

Therefore, they sometimes pretended to be physically ill to go on sick leave. One young co-researcher described having a "nervous breakdown" in the morning, but being afraid of not being taken seriously, so she called the doctor and said she was sick without mentioning the mental health issues. Besides missing work itself, other work-related disadvantages included young people being unable to openly address their mental health situation in job interviews or during training without the fear of job loss or discrimination.

Likewise, the young co-researchers did not feel sufficiently supported within their employment measures, since trainers were limited in their capacity to support mental health issues. One trainer described how she used her additional qualifications in psychology to work with young people. However, this was the exception and not the rule. Most young co-researchers had a good relationship with their trainers, as they felt supported with all work-related issues, but there was still a lack of general support:

> At school, there was a coach who was there for the kids who had problems with learning and with such psychological…here [in the training measure] you can always go to the coach, but it's not the same. They help us with the work; they don't listen to us in such a way that we really let everything, everything out.

The young co-researchers all participated in measures that did not specialise in mental health problems (which some measures do). As some administrators recognised, mental health was a general topic affecting all E&T up to 18 measures. To the young co-researchers, however, there was still a need for improvement regarding specific areas like psychological support or more open attitudes towards the issue. They desired more approaches to mental health that include awareness, understanding, and support from colleagues and employers as well as trainers and family. This was accompanied by desires for fair access to the health system, where they could receive support regardless of financial resources.

6. Conclusion

As the insights in the analysis and narrations of the young co-researchers demonstrate, young people in E&T up to 18 must constantly compare themselves with "norm" biographies, which are far from normal due to changing labour market conditions, reformulated work-life balances, the digitalisation of work, and other factors that contribute to general work life-related uncertainty (Kovacheva & Pohl, 2007; Stauber, 2013; Walther & Stauber, 2007). The collaborative analysis done by researchers and young co-researchers of their personal experiences and sociopolitical environments shows that the young co-researchers' lack of legitimate position for themselves (Abbenhardt, 2019) is most immanent. This creates constant feelings of social pressure to perform better and achieve more, which applies both to labour market expectations and mental health. The young co-researchers are constantly fighting existing or potential stigmatisation from peers, employers, or parents. At the same time, they struggle for the legitimisation of their position as FABA within the nexus of education, apprenticeship, and work. As shown above, knowledge of social inequality and structural disadvantage, e.g., due to discrimination or lack of training places, does not prevent young people from attributing their failure in the normative educational pathway to themselves. Rather, it leads to increasing uncertainty about how it is even possible to navigate one's work life under these adverse conditions.

Regarding this challenge, CSS aims to develop agency for individuals in unjust environments. This is achieved by collectively developing an understanding of the existence of and the relationships between sociopolitical structure and the individual, the social conditions, and injustice. Participatory and action-oriented CSS supports co-researchers to both analyse situations relevant to them and also formulate demands for relevant stakeholders. The idea of social change based on the experiences of those affected by a problem is inherent to CSS and is well-established in our study through the partnership with different E&T up to 18 stakeholders. When addressing those in charge, e.g., politicians or persons responsible within the social service landscape,

the young co-researchers formulated several demands regarding the labour market and mental health: They appealed for easier labour market and apprenticeship access for young people with little work experience. This not only includes more information about possible career choices, but also the need for more apprenticeship places. Young co-researchers urged companies to create apprenticeship places and take time and effort to train them. Furthermore, they advocated for fair pay and social recognition for all occupations. The young co-researchers demanded better job security, which was especially urgent in the face of economic uncertainty driven by the Covid-19 pandemic. Regarding mental health, young co-researchers desired for mental health taboos and stigmas to be eliminated and identified the need for a more general discussion about mental health in society, and especially in work settings. One of the most essential demands articulated by the young co-researchers was access to affordable therapy, as well as including people with mental health problems in the regular labour market. Their appeals reflect literature and current political debates, e.g., about the lack of (affordable) therapists or institutions that specialise in this target group (Medical University of Vienna, 2017; Steiner, Pessl, & Bruneforth, 2016, p. 174).

The young co-researchers, thus, advocated for a more inclusive and just school and work environment—not only for those with mental illnesses, but for all young people regardless of nationality, ethnicity, age, or educational attainment. The same applies to the debate over the role of E&T up to 18. As Steiner et al. (2019) argue, E&T up 18 must tackle the causes of ESL instead of its effects only. This also includes macroanalyses, e.g., about how the structures of mandatory school regulations promote ESL in Austria (Moser & Lindinger, 2016) as well as a relational comprehension of how different stakeholders and social structures promote dropping out of school (Stuart, 2020). Young people need support that productively addresses the "complexity of (post)modern life" (Kovacheva & Pohl, 2007), meaning it should reflect the uncertainty and individualisation of current labour market conditions. To counteract the stigmatisation of young people in employment measures, services must connect with the lifeworlds of young people and approach them by enabling self-determined development. However, if support measures for early school leavers only "build" competencies, they will ignore the socioeconomic factors that negatively affect opportunities for transition (Oehme, 2020). The young co-researchers resisted accepting social exclusion, as they refused to see their life courses as predetermined over not receiving enough support during their early school years or because they faced other challenges like discrimination, health problems, or economic disadvantages. They challenged being denied a recognised place in society (Abbenhardt, 2019; Castel, 2000; Flecker & Zartler, 2020). Returning to Atzmüller and Knecht (2016) demonstrates that young people do not simply adapt to a competitive economic environment, but demand changes in systems of school-to-work transitions.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Article

Negotiating the "Maze": SEN and the Transition From Lower Secondary Education in Austria

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Abstract
Austrian students with special educational needs (SEN) face many obstacles in the transition from lower to upper secondary education. Using administrative data from national statistics, we analyse the trajectories of these students focusing on two questions: First, what is the impact of the former setting on further pathways for students from special schools compared with mainstream schooling? Second, can low-threshold training or apprenticeship projects (the "transition system") compensate for educational disadvantages in former school careers and serve as a "second chance" or do they reinforce exclusionary practices by perpetuating "special tracks"? Regarding the first question, our research findings confirm those from several studies conducted in other German-speaking countries that show advantages for graduates from mainstream education compared to those from special schools, as they face a lower risk of institutional exclusion. In respect of the second question, at first glance, our findings differ from prior research results. Participating in the transition system is associated with a slight increase in participation in upper secondary education, some increase in employment, and an important reduction concerning inactivity. As revealed by a regression analysis controlling for socio-demographic characteristics, participation in this system has a distinct integrative influence. We conclude by hypothesising that this is due to the structure of the Austrian transition system offering pathways back to mainstream educational systems and formally recognised educational qualifications.

Keywords
Austria; educational trajectories; inclusion; mainstream education; special educational needs; special needs education; transition system

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1. Introduction

The transition from lower to upper secondary education presents Austrian students with special educational needs (SEN) with severe obstacles. From an inclusive perspective, the Austrian education system resembles a complex "maze" with a high level of segregation between educational tracks and groups of students, and with legal restrictions for graduates from special needs education (SNE). In addition, the differences at the regional and socio-demographic levels create unequal opportunities for navigating this maze. The share of students with SEN in Austria totalled 3.9% in 2016–2017 and varied from 3.1% in Styria and Tyrol to 5.7% in Vorarlberg, from 4.4% for German-speaking students in grade 8 (aged 14) to 8.4% for their non-German speaking peers. Mainstream schooling instead of enrolment in special schools or classes among these students was 55% in urban areas but 73% in rural areas of Austria (Oberwimmer et al., 2019, pp. 162–164). In Germany,

compared to children from privileged families, children from socio-economically disadvantaged families are more likely to attend special schools rather than mainstream education (Kocaj et al., 2014; Schmidt, 2017).

Inclusion, understood as enabling joint education and learning processes in the context of diversity (Köpfer et al., 2021) and different needs, among them SEN, is at first glance predominantly implemented in Austria. Enrolment in mainstream education is the most common track for students with SEN (61% in 2016–2017) and has intensified over the last decade. However, inclusive education cannot be reduced to the joint enrolment of students with and without SEN but must ensure that optimal participation is available for each student and discrimination avoided by any means (Feyerer, 2019, p. 66). The practice of joint enrolment of students is, in addition, limited to certain types of schools and levels, as will be shown in the next section, and therefore far from being a core element of the overall education system. Generally speaking, the multi-tracked Austrian system embodies a segregative orientation, featuring numerous special schools besides mainstream schooling (Feyerer, 2019). Bearing this in mind we use the terms "mainstream education" or "mainstream schooling" instead of "inclusive education" in our article when referring to the practice of students with and without SEN being enrolled together.

Students with SEN encounter particular obstacles during their transition period. This is evidenced in an average of 85% of graduates from SNE becoming early school leavers (Steiner et al., 2016, p. 191). Early school leaving means that at most they have a lower secondary school qualification and are not enrolled in any subsequent education or training. From the standpoint of the capability approach, early school leaving is linked to a loss in "effective opportunities to functionings that are necessary to participate in society" (Broderick, 2018, p. 31). Equality of access to all levels of education is a key element of the UN Convention of the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) yet is not sufficiently provided for. However, our argument starts a step before the discussion relating to equal learning environments and equality of outcomes because it is already at the entry point to upper secondary education and the transition from school to work that students with SEN are particularly affected by exclusion.

This article is divided into eight sections. In Section 2, complexity, segregation, and formal restrictions are described as elements of the Austrian (special) education system. In Section 3, we present former research findings on the transition from lower to upper secondary education for students with SEN. In doing so, we refer to research from Austria, Germany, and Switzerland, as the setup of SNE is similar in those countries. We then outline the aim of our research, our research questions and the methodical design in Sections 4 and 5 before presenting the findings of our research in Sections 6 and 7, referring to particular questions and data in each section. Finally, we draw conclusions and discuss the limitations of our study as well as the potential for further research (Section 8).

2. The Austrian Context of Special Needs Education

The reference group in our article are students with SEN who, in many cases, but not necessarily, overlap with students with disabilities. On the one hand, the Austrian approach to SNE is narrow compared to more universal approaches that perceive disability as potentially affecting every human being or that entitle students to receive supporting measures without diagnosis as a precondition, like in Finland (Björk-Åman et al., 2021). In Austria, students are attributed SEN via an official notification, namely in the case that special educational provisions to facilitate their education are indispensable due to a permanent mental or physical disability (Republic of Austria, 2022, article 8). Such provision can involve tailored teaching materials or additional teaching staff. Hence, pupils with disabilities who are not ascribed any need of extra pedagogical support measures are not entitled to special education. On the other hand, the processes involved in attributing SEN are handled quite excessively when it comes to certain groups of students. While lacking German proficiency or learning difficulties must not justify SEN, an above-average proportion of migrants are attributed SEN status, and the same is true for boys (Bruneforth & Lassnigg, 2012, p. 88) as it is for students from disadvantaged social strata in other European countries (Dyson & Squires, 2016). The label SEN, aimed at providing more resources to facilitate their learning, bears the risk of becoming a stigma for the students concerned (Tschanz & Powell, 2020, p. 157). From the point of view of theories of social reproduction, one can argue that ascribing special needs in this context negatively sanctions a socially non-privileged habitus, among other social practices (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1973).

In 2018, roughly half of the students attributed SEN (3.9% of all students) were taught according to a SEN curriculum (1.8%), which in Austria is called "special school curriculum," although it is not restricted to students in special schools. The other half followed the mainstream curriculum. There are different "special school curricula" according to particular disabilities. In 2016–2017, 52% of the students were schooled according to a "general special school curriculum" aimed at students with "learning disabilities," 29% according to a curriculum for students with "extraordinary needs for support" due to complex or multiple disabilities, while curricula for different other disabilities account for only small numbers of children each year (Steiner et al., 2019, p. 233). A SEN curriculum can comprise all or only a part of the usual school subjects. The fact that it has been applied to a student is noted in the school leaving certificate (Republic of Austria, 2022, article 8). We will refer to this group as "students with a SEN curriculum" and put them at the centre of our analyses. This is firstly due to restrictions concerning the analysis of the educational trajectories

of pupils with SEN. The characteristic "special needs" is deleted in administrative longitudinal data sets for data protection reasons. Secondly, a school leaving certificate that points to "a special curriculum" can, and in fact does, lead to even higher barriers in the further course of education. It is therefore especially worthy of detailed investigation.

Starting from entry into primary education, students with SEN (and accordingly those with a SEN curriculum) can be enrolled either in special schools (segregated) or in any other school—primary schools and both the academic and general track in lower secondary education and prevocational schools (in mainstream education). The overall share of learners in mainstream education has risen slightly from 55% in 2006–2007 to 61% in 2016–2017. Yet differences between the lower secondary tracks are clear. Although the educational act refers to the "social integration" of children with disabilities in all lower secondary schools, mainstream schooling for students with SEN is limited to general secondary and prevocational schools and extremely rare in academic secondary schools.

Unlike in Nordic countries or in Germany where special needs support is explicitly provided in all upper secondary tracks, in Austria no reference is made to students with SEN in the respective regulations. A school leaving certificate of lower secondary education indicating a special school curriculum does not entitle graduates to access upper secondary schools. Graduates can be accepted based on a decision by the schools in question and their "goodwill" (Gitschthaler et al., 2021, p. 72). The situation is different for dual apprenticeship training, which is very popular in Austria. First, there are no legal requirements relating to entry to this track, although formal qualifications from lower secondary education are an important prerequisite. Second, there is a vocational education track targeted at students with special needs: An apprenticeship training scheme with an option to either extend the training period to acquire the full content of the professional profile (extendable apprenticeship), or to acquire a reduced professional profile (partial qualification). Apprentices in the expandable training scheme can achieve a regular upper secondary qualification, while partial qualification is not recognised at this level. For both schemes, personal assistance is offered throughout the training period, helping the apprentices to cope with learning or other difficulties, and training companies receive financial incentives. This scheme is not restricted to persons with previously recognised SEN. It also addresses young people who did not complete lower secondary education or who failed their final exams, young people with an officially recognised disability, and finally young people with personal difficulties that hamper them in attending regular apprenticeship training, although an official diagnosis must be provided. This track has increased in popularity since its introduction in 2004, accounting for 7.6% of all apprentices in 2019 (Dornmayr & Nowak, 2020, p. 81).

3. Earlier Research on the Transition From Lower Secondary Education

As shown in earlier research, students who graduate from SNE meet distinctive obstacles in their transition to upper secondary education. First, they meet formal barriers since a certificate indicating a special school curriculum does not formally entitle participation in upper secondary school education. In Germany, only a small share of students in special schools receive a formally recognised qualification (Blanck, 2020; Pfahl & Powell, 2010). Among graduates from special schools focused on "learning difficulties," integration into further vocational education or training differs remarkably according to whether they have gained a fully recognised qualification at the lower secondary education level. Graduates holding a school leaving certificate from a general secondary school (*Hauptschule*) participate in the VET system more often compared to their peers who left school without such a certificate, and they show a NEET status (i.e., are not in education, employment, transitions system, or registered unemployment) to a less extent (Menze et al., 2021). Second, at the institutional level, graduates are confronted with contradictory norms and have to cope with them: The stigmatising label "special educational needs" guided their former routes throughout education on the one hand. On the other hand, they have to prove themselves ready for competition and achievement to succeed during further education or in the transition from school to work (Blanck, 2020; Schmidt, 2017; Tschanz & Powell, 2020). Third, they are confronted with a bundle of typically low expectations regarding their ability to continue education. Low expectations prevail among actors in school and guidance services as well as among parents (Fasching, 2013). Students in special schools are more likely to be recommended sheltered workshops and less likely to be recommended work placements by career guidance staff (Fasching, 2017; Ginnold, 2009). What is more, students develop deficit-oriented self-conceptions as an outcome of the biographical experience of incorporating (learning) disabilities (Pfahl, 2011). Fourth, researchers show less progress in learning in special schools compared to students integrated into mainstream education, with the majority of studies confirming this result (e.g., Kocaj et al., 2014). Fifth, the role of structures aimed at supporting the transition of disadvantaged school graduates into formal education or employment is strongly challenged by research. Here again, if participation in respective low-threshold projects (e.g., vocational preparation schemes) is associated with stigmatising labels without the chance of gaining a formally recognised qualification, it constitutes further reinforcement of exclusion rather than supporting the transition (Pfahl & Powell, 2010; Schmidt, 2017). Continuing segregation once more leads to the same obstacles being encountered during the next transition. However, the outcomes depend on the setup of the projects in question. Training on the job

that enables the acquisition of skills and knowledge in a meaningful context, like company-based training, has proved to foster routes into further education (Ginnold, 2009; Podlesch, 2009).

Transition points within educational systems have long been identified in sociological research as paramount drivers of inequalities between students (e.g., Blossfeld et al., 2019). Hence, students with SEN can be perceived as a point case in this discourse, both in terms of quantity and qualitative aspects. Still, when it comes to transitions, inequality, and SEN in Austria, research remains scarce. It is this gap we aim to fill to a certain degree.

4. The Aim of Our Research and Questions

We aim to explore in detail the transition from lower to upper secondary education of students with a SEN curriculum. Using administrative data from official statistics, we can provide insights into the transition of the whole cohort. Our contribution seeks to add to national research on graduates with special needs based on surveys (Fasching, 2013). One advantage of using administrative data is the avoidance of selection bias that can affect surveys. Another goal is to gain insights into the situation in Austria as comprehensive studies on the educational trajectories of students with SEN are currently lacking. Thereby we focus on two questions:

1. What is the impact of the former setting for graduates from special schools as opposed to those who were integrated into mainstream schooling on their risk of being excluded from further education, employment, and support structures?
2. Can low-threshold projects in preparation for entry to further education or employment compensate for educational disadvantages in former school careers and serve as a "second chance" or, on the contrary, do they reinforce exclusionary practices?

5. Data and Methods

Our analyses build on administrative data from school, employment and other statistics provided by Statistik Austria. For our first research question, we used the monitoring of education-related employment behaviour ("BibEr") which links data on school careers and transition into employment for the whole cohort of graduates since 2008 (Statistik Austria, n.d.). For the second research question, we use a register-dataset which combines (among others) educational and employment data as well as data from the public employment service (AMS) and the social ministry service (SMS). Both datasets shed light on the question of whether students during their transition from lower to upper secondary education are enrolled in further education, if they participate in support structures, or are employed or unemployed at certain reference dates. Despite the advantages of using highly reliable administrative data, there are also limitations. No information on the socio-economic status of students is collected in these statistics and therefore analysis of social inequality is possible only in terms of gender and migration background. Furthermore, limitations arise due to data protection reasons. The question concerning the impact of the former setting—mainstream education vs. special school enrolment—will thus be answered descriptively because only aggregated rather than individual data is available. As the dataset for analysing the impact of low-threshold projects provides individual information, it enabled the performance of regression analyses. Since students from SNE are likely to graduate from lower secondary education when older than their peers without SEN (Fasching, 2013), and we preferably want to explore the trajectories of the whole cohort, both analyses refer to students aged 13 and above. In the first case, all students aged 13 to 18 years who either graduated or dropped out of education at the end of lower secondary education are included to maximise the number of cases (n = 18,065). In the second case, we refer to graduates and dropouts from SNE aged 14–23 years (n = 34,258). Therefore, the time elapsed since termination of lower secondary education varies to some extent, which is a limitation of this source.

6. Impact of the Former Setting

To answer the first question, we build on data on students for whom a SEN curriculum (named "special school curriculum" in Austria) was drawn up at the end of compulsory education and who graduated or dropped out between 2008–2009 and 2016–2017. As seen in Table 1, after 24 months, almost all have left lower secondary education. With shares of around 3% in upper secondary schools, this track is extremely rare, whereas a higher share of 20% continue their career via dual apprenticeship training. Participation in the transition system (13%) means being enrolled in training courses organised by employment agencies, courses within adult education, or low-threshold projects offered, for example, by factory schools. Employment and registered unemployment are not very common options for these young people with shares of 7% in both cases.

All in all, what is evident is that a major proportion of students from SNE, that is 47%, neither participates in any form of education or training or employment nor uses support structures provided by employment agencies, etc. We use the term NEETs to capture this group, knowing that it differs from the official definition that does not include registered unemployed persons. In doing so we refer to a group that is excluded from most of the available institutions for young people in transition, meaning they are subject to a certain level of social exclusion. As prior research shows, it can be confirmed using empirical evidence for the whole cohort

Table 1. Transition routes of students with a SEN curriculum 24 months after graduation or dropping out.

	Absolute numbers	Relative numbers
Formal and non-formal education	7,051	39.0%
lower secondary education	*494*	*2.7%*
upper secondary schools	*586*	*3.2%*
apprenticeship training	*3,656*	*20.2%*
transition system	*2,315*	*12.8%*
Employment	1,257	7.0%
Unemployment	1,307	7.2%
NEET status	8,450	46.8%
Total	18,065	100.0%

Source: Statistik Austria (2021, 13–18 years old).

that exclusion in the transition from compulsory school upwards is massive for students from SNE.

A closer look at the differences in the share of NEETs (see Table 2) indicates that it is higher for graduates (49%) than for dropouts (44%). A school leaving certificate that indicates a special needs curriculum may thus act as a negative sign when it comes to the further school career, more than the fact of having dropped out. Boys, who are assigned SEN much more often than girls, are however better off when it comes to transition: The risk of exclusion amounts to 44% among male students and 51% among female students. The same is true regarding migration background: Students who speak German as a first language have a higher share of NEET (49%) than students speaking another language (42%), the latter being enrolled in SNE above average.

As evident from Table 2, the former setting plays a crucial role: Those who were enrolled in mainstream education at the end of compulsory education have a much lower risk of exclusion (28%) when compared to former students from special schools (51%). Noteworthy, enrolment in a special school predominates at this transition point with 14,440 students, whereas only 3,625 are integrated in mainstream education. The total differences between students from special schools and those in mainstream schooling are the most pronounced. However, this finding deserves some caution as the chance of enrolling in either setting differs between socio-demographic groups. As seen in Table 3, mainstream schooling has been more prevalent for dropouts than for graduates and the share is also elevated for female students with a migration background.

Accordingly, in a final step, odds-ratios are calculated for each of the groups illustrating the relative risk of students from mainstream education compared to their peers from special schools of becoming NEET (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 shows the relative risk for a NEET status among learners from mainstream schooling compared to those from special schools. Hence, lower rates indicate a comparatively lower risk of becoming NEET. Overall, if learners have been integrated into mainstream schooling before graduation or drop out, their risk is reduced to 55%. The ratios are alike for every one of the groups, although levels vary. The most pronounced odds-ratios can be found in favour of dropouts, irrespective of gender and language. Patterns for students with German as a first language and non-German speaking students are

Table 2. Transition routes into NEET status according to different characteristics.

	n	NEET status
Graduates	10,108	49.2%
Dropouts	7,957	43.7%
Male	11,426	44.1%
Female	6,639	51.3%
German language	13,107	48.8%
Other language	4,958	41.5%
Former setting: mainstream education	3,625	28.3%
Former setting: special school	14,440	51.4%
Total	18,065	46.8%

Source: Statistik Austria (2021, 13–18 years old).

Table 3. Share of students enrolled in a special school vs. mainstream education.

	n	special school	mainstream education
Graduates			
Male German lang.	*4,632*	*86.1%*	*13.9%*
Male other lang.	*1,639*	*87.0%*	*13.0%*
Female German lang.	*2,871*	*85.2%*	*14.8%*
Female other lang.	*966*	*82.9%*	*17.1%*
Dropouts			
Male German lang.	*3,668*	*74.2%*	*25.8%*
Male other lang.	*1,487*	*74.0%*	*26.0%*
Female German lang.	*1,936*	*70.7%*	*29.3%*
Female other lang.	*866*	*67.9%*	*32.1%*
Total	18,065	79.9%	20.1%

Source: Statistik Austria (2021, 13–18 years old).

quite similar with slightly more pronounced odds-ratios among male students speaking a first language other than German. For females, the differences in exclusion for graduates according to the former setting are smaller compared to their male peers. Thus, even if the analyses of the transition are related to highly differentiated groups, former mainstream schooling decreases the risk of exclusion.

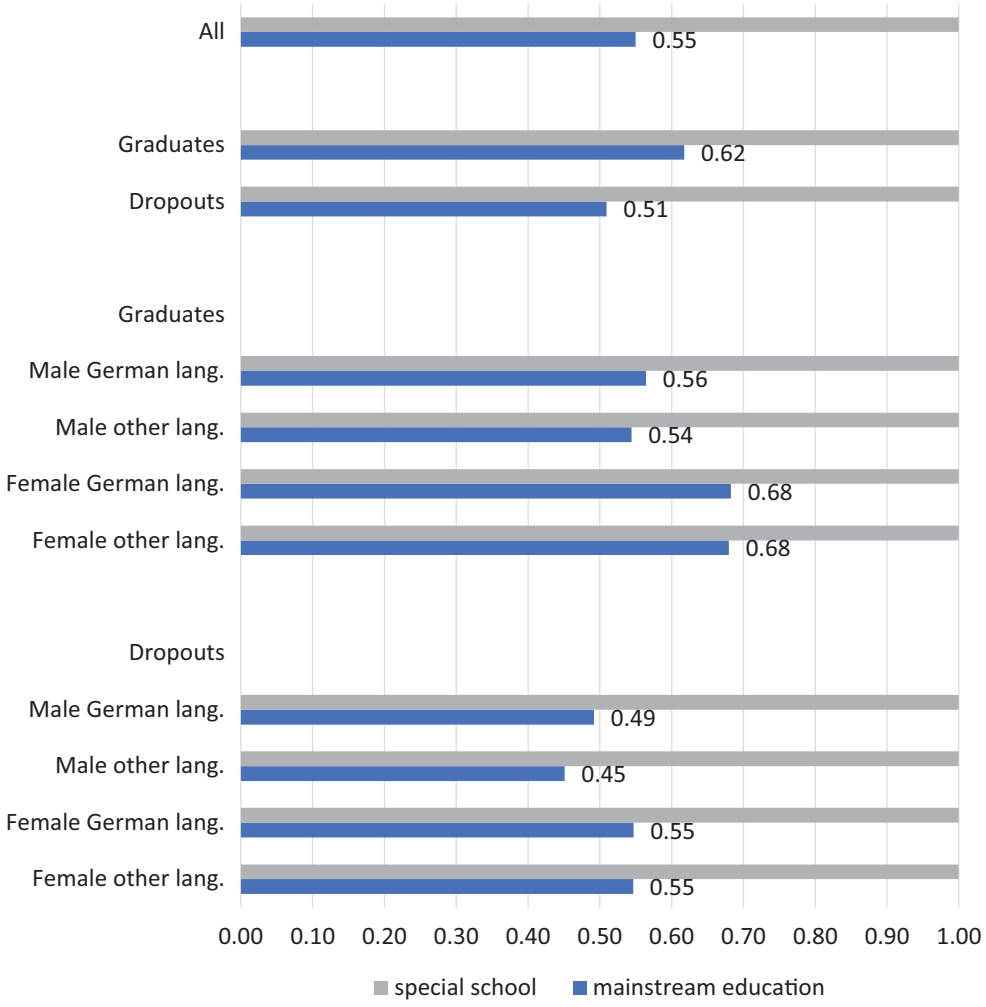

Figure 1. Odds-ratios for becoming NEET according to the former setting (n = 18,065). Source: Statistik Austria (2021, 13–18 years olds).

7. Impact of Transition Support Structures

After graduation from compulsory education with a SEN curriculum, trajectories diversify. Some students will move on and participate in low-threshold projects preparing them for further education or employment. We investigate if these projects compensate for educational disadvantages in former school careers or, on the contrary, if they reinforce exclusionary practices as they perpetuate "special tracks" that are not recognised in the formal system.

To do so we used a register-based dataset as previously described and included 34,258 people aged 14 to 23 years whose last educational achievement had been graduation or dropping out from education with a SEN curriculum during the period 2014–2018. The cohort here is older than the one discussed above. 3,287 of them attended low-threshold projects in the first half of our two-year observation period and 30,971 did not. We compare the development of the trajectories of both groups. The results differ from those reported in Table 1 due to a different age cohort (14–23 vs. 13–18 years in Table 1) and to a different definition of sub-groups (here we provide figures for participants in the transition system and non-participants whereas we focused on the group as a whole in Table 1).

As can be seen in Table 4, 24 months after the reference date (1st of July) the proportion of persons still in the transition system among participants declined to 22.5%. Hence, people are not "stuck" in the transition system. Nearly 32% of them moved on to a status of complete (labour market) inactivity since they only appear on the Austrian mandatory residence register, which means they do not show any other status or involvement in (supportive) structures. Another 10% can be referred to as out-of-labour-force (OLF) since they are retired, on maternity leave, etc. Both groups together can be referred to as NEETs. Roughly 14% were employed two years after the reference date, which is similar to the percentage reported as unemployed; 7.8% were completing an apprenticeship, thus in combination with those in formal school education and in the transition system, 31% were involved in formal or non-formal education or training.

Comparison to a reference group enables better interpretation of these results. Graduates and dropouts with a SEN curriculum who have not participated in the transition system in the first half of our two-year observation period served as the reference group to those attending the transition system. Among non-participants, a majority (54.4%) only appear on the Austrian mandatory residence register and, additionally, nearly 14% can be referred to as out of labour force. As shown in Table 4 compared to the reference group, students who participated in the transition system showed more integrative trajectories.

Among the participants, the share of those appearing only in the mandatory residence register after 24 months declines by 22.8% points. As a first result, we interpret that participating in the transition system seems to have an enormous activating effect. This result is supported by a decrease of 4.3% points in OLF status. Involvement in the transition system rises by nearly 15% points, apprenticeships by 5% points, which means that integration in education or training is 20% points up for those who have participated in the transition system compared to those who have not. Employment rises only marginally, unemployment by 7.2% points. This last result also indicates a form of integration since registered unemployment signals readiness to enter the labour market and is linked to tailored support. Overall, our descriptive results suggest that attending low-threshold projects in the transition system has a positive influence on further career paths of students with SEN.

In a second step, we now try to prove these descriptive results by conducting regression analyses using the same dataset as before but focusing only on data from 2018. We aim to explain integration in education or employment 24 months after the reference date. The status "education" combines participation in formal school education, apprenticeship or the transition system. Variables used to explain this integration include socioeconomic ones and personal characteristics (gender, age, migrant background, living in a big city) on

Table 4. Trajectories of students who participated in the transition system compared to non-participants, 24 months after the reference date (n = 34,258).

	Trajectories of participants	Trajectories of non-participants
Only mandatory residence register	31.6%	54.4%
Formal school education	0.8%	0.8%
Apprenticeship	7.8%	2.9%
Transition system	22.5%	7.9%
Employed	13.5%	13.1%
Unemployed	14.1%	6.9%
Other/OLF	9.6%	13.9%
n	3,287	30,971

Source: Statistik Austria (2020, 14–23 years old).

the one hand as well as intervening variables (participation in transition system and/or youth coaching) on the other. Youth coaching is a supportive measure aimed at impeding early school leaving or reintegrating early school leavers in education and training via tailored guidance and case management.

In model 1 we focus on personal/socio-economic variables to explain integration in education or employment. By doing so, they all show a significant impact, as seen in Table 5.

Young graduates/dropouts with a SEN curriculum who do not live in a bigger city (more than 50,000 inhabitants) but in a more rural area have greater chances of integration (odds-ratio 1.247) 24 months after the reference date. The same is true for young males whose chance of integration is 30.2% higher than that of young females. We also find increasing difficulties for integration with growing age (15.8% decreasing chance for integration per year of age, odds-ratio 0.842). We noted what is at first glance a rather surprising result concerning migration background (meaning both parents were born abroad). Young people without a migration background face higher obstacles for integration (odds-ratio 0.783) than those with. Their chance of integration is 27.7% higher than that of young people without a migration background. This, in part, is due to a higher level of integration into the labour market. Our hypothesis for this surprising result is based on discriminating recruiting practices relating to education with a SEN curriculum for pupils with a migration background. The result of this practice might be, for example, that pupils with a migration background are entitled to SEN and educated according to SEN curricula only due to lacking German-language proficiency and without any disability. Therefore, we suggest that among migrant students with the respective curriculum, there may in fact be a considerable share of pupils without a genuine indication for SEN. Since, compared to their colleagues without migration background, many of them do not suffer from disabilities, this increases their chance of integration.

The variance explained in model 1 (Nagelkerke R^2 = 0.062) rises considerably in model 2 (Nagelkerke R^2 = 0.102) when we introduce another variable to explain integration in our logistic regression. The new variable is participation in the transition system. Whereas all the other variables discussed largely remain the same in explaining power and direction of influence, participation in the transition system shows a major impact on the chance of integration. If young people with a SEN curriculum background do not participate in the transition system within the observation period, their chance of integration is only 39% of that for students who did participate. Vice versa: participating in the transition system increases the chance of integration by 256.4% (1/0.390).

In model 3 we introduce participating in youth coaching, which is, as mentioned above, a programme for early school leavers and pupils at risk of leaving school early, as an additional intervention variable. Participation in youth coaching also proves to be significant and highly influential although it does not show the same level of impact as participation in the transition system. For the young people who were not participating in youth coaching, their chance of integration is 72.4% compared to those who did participate. Variance explained improves slightly in model 3 (Nagelkerke R^2 = 0.105).

In summary, the regression analyses confirmed the descriptive results. Even when we control for age, gender, migration background and place of residence, we find participation in the transition system to have a strong positive and significant influence on integration in education or employment.

Table 5. Logistic regression models explaining integration in education or employment 24 months later (n = 7,340).

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B	S.E.	Exp(B)	B	S.E.	Exp(B)	B	S.E.	Exp(B)
Constant	2.277	0.218	9.744 ***	2.227	0.221	9.275 ***	2.350	0.24	10.490 ***
Living in bigger city: no	0.221	0.055	1.247 ***	0.271	0.056	1.311 ***	0.279	0.056	1.322 ***
Sex: male	0.264	0.055	1.302 ***	0.264	0.056	1.302 ***	0.265	0.056	1.303 ***
Age	−0.172	0.011	0.842 ***	−0.134	0.011	0.874 ***	−0.127	0.012	0.881 ***
Migrant background: no	−0.245	0.058	0.783 ***	−0.219	0.059	0.804 ***	−0.216	0.059	0.806 ***
Participation in transition system: no				−0.941	0.063	0.390 ***	−0.921	0.063	0.398 ***
Participation in youth coaching: no							−0.322	0.090	0.724 ***
Nagelkerke R^2	0.062			0.102			0.105		

Note: ***p < 0.001. Source: Statistik Austria (2020, 14–23 years old).

8. Conclusion, Discussion, and Future Research Potential

Coming back to our two research questions, first of all, our findings on the impact of the former setting on the further careers—enrolment in special schools vs. mainstream schooling—are in line with several studies conducted in Austria, Germany and Switzerland. In a nutshell, our results show that graduates who were previously integrated into mainstream education have an advantage: Their risk of exclusion from further education, training, employment, or support structures is reduced to 55% compared to graduates from special schools. Longitudinal research shows that this is also true after controlling for potentially relevant facts like gender, nationality, socio-economic background, performance at school or abilities (Haeberlin et al., 2011; Sahli Lozano, 2012). In our study, this finding shows up again when comparing students by gender and migration background.

Our second question addressed the impact of the transition system: Does it compensate for disadvantages or reinforce exclusion? At first glance, our findings contradict results from former studies (Pfahl & Powell, 2010; Schmidt, 2017). We found increased chances of integration in education or employment for young people participating in the transition system rather than an increased risk of exclusion. We hypothesise that this "contradictory" result is due to the structure of the transition system in Austria. It is not as strictly institutionalised as is the case, for example, in Germany where it forms a third column beneath the apprenticeship system and school education at the upper secondary level. This facilitates more flexibility, reduces stigmatisation, and lock-in effects. Besides, the subsidised cross-company apprenticeship training scheme plays a crucial role in the Austrian transition system. It aims to foster pathways into "regular" apprenticeship training or leads to a formally recognised qualification at the upper secondary level by itself. At this point, our results again align with other studies pointing to the beneficial effect of training on the job that enables the acquisition of skills and knowledge in a meaningful context for students' trajectories (Ginnold, 2009; Podlesch, 2009).

In addition to these contributions to the academic discourse, our research also has some limitations. First, despite its advantages, administrative data is restricted in terms of information on social background. Second, our analyses only captured a short period. We can neither draw conclusions about longer-term educational attainment nor about obstacles that may arise in a subsequent transition. Research that applies a more longitudinal perspective, based on both biographical research and quantitative research using register data covering whole careers, would allow such limitations to be overcome and would be necessary also given the scarce research on students with SEN in Austria. Overall, the share of NEETs among former students with a SEN curriculum is enormous. This indicates a worrying tendency towards exclusion at a very young age. Access for all, to all levels of education, as laid down in the UNCRPD, is currently far from being realised in Austria.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Article

Participative Cooperation During Educational Transition: Experiences of Young People With Disabilities in Austria

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Abstract
The results of international research studies show that early and careful planning, preparation, and implementation can contribute significantly to a successful transition from compulsory education to vocational training and employment. One key aspect in this respect is participative cooperation (i.e., involvement and active participation in the planning process), above all of the youths with disabilities themselves as the target group, but also of their parents. The project Cooperation for Inclusion in Educational Transitions of the Austrian Science Fund is the first Austrian project conducting research into participative cooperation. It aims to find out about and analyse the experiences of cooperation of youths with disabilities and their parents with professionals during the period of transition from education to vocational training and employment. Based on qualitative, longitudinal data material from the project, the present article illustrates the experiences of participative cooperation of the youths with disabilities who participated in the project along with their parents. Our main aim is to show the experiences reported by the interviewed youths and their parents concerning cooperation during the period of transition from education to employment. An additional goal is to provide impulses to improve the planning of vocational transition from education to employment in relation to the inclusion of youths with disabilities.

Keywords
Austria; disability; education-to-employment transition; participative cooperation; vocational transition; youth with disabilities

Issue
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1. Introduction

Educational transitions generally act as intersections that facilitate discrimination in terms of risks and opportunities for those who undergo them (Kutscha, 1991, p. 128). Existing social inequalities (e.g., education, gender, social and cultural background) take increasing effect during these transitions, and additional processes of inclusion and exclusion come into play to further promote the process of social selection (Walther, 2011). In particular, youths with disabilities find that their transition from compulsory school to continuing education, vocational training, and employment bears a number of risks and uncertainties (Atkins, 2016; Fasching, 2010, 2014). They find their transition particularly difficult, taking detours, making wrong choices, and sometimes facing failure. In most cases, this transition process cannot be managed without extensive support (Tarleton & Ward, 2005; Turnbull et al., 2011). Many of the young people undergoing this transition rely on professional support, as do their parents or guardians. Cooperation between all those involved in the process is essential for successful

transition planning (Bacon & Causton-Theoharis, 2013; Hetherington et al., 2010; Landmark et al., 2007; Murray et al., 2013). There is a need for research into inclusive educational transitions, and more specifically that of youths with disabilities. Such research should place the voice of the target group at the centre of attention (Aston & Lambert, 2010; Pallisera et al., 2016; Todd, 2007) as it is for the members of this group that the measures are being devised. The aim of participative cooperation must be to actively involve youths with disabilities and their parents in the structures of cooperation for transition to allow them to take part in shaping the support process.

This article reports on the results of empirical research into the experiences that youths with different types of disabilities have had, as well as their parents or guardians, concerning participative cooperation with professional support providers in their transition planning process from school to continuing education, vocational training, and employment. The results were obtained from a five-year longitudinal research project. Section 2 provides an overview of the political and institutional framework for the support of young people with disabilities during their transition from school to vocational training and employment in the Austrian context, as well as some theoretical reflections embedded in the international context. Section 3 explains the research project and research design. Section 4 provides a detailed analysis and interpretation of the experiences of participative cooperation. Section 5 discusses research results in relation to the question "What is needed for participative cooperation?" in the context of inclusive transition planning and support from school to the employment of youths with disabilities. Lastly, in Section 6, we propose some recommendations for optimising educational transition planning and make some critical reflections.

2. The Austrian Context: Political and Institutional Framework in the Transition From Compulsory School to Vocational Training and Employment

On an international level, the legal basis for participation in education, vocational training, and employment of persons with disabilities in Austria is determined following articles 24 and 27 of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD). On a national level, the legal basis is founded principally on the National Action Plan on Disability 2012–2020 as an implementation strategy of the UN CRPD and the Austrian Federal Disability Equality Act, the Employment of Persons with Disabilities Act, parts of the Occupational Training Act, and the Compulsory Training Act on Education Up to 18. Educational and training systems take different forms in different countries (Esmond, 2021; Euroguidance Austria, 2021). In Austria, compulsory schooling ends after year 9, usually at age 14 or 15. Considerations related to the transition to other forms of schooling or vocational training begin at an earlier point. The 9th and last compulsory school year can be completed at different types of school including a polytechnic-type school focused on vocational orientation. After the nine years of compulsory schooling, all young persons must continue with higher secondary schooling in an academic secondary school (upper cycle, at the end of which a university entry exam can be taken), or attend either an intermediate or higher vocational college.

Nowadays, in Austria, inclusive schooling for pupils with disabilities or impairments at the higher secondary level is possible only on an experimental basis or in private schools. For this reason, except schooling on an experimental basis, a "normal curriculum" that does not include provision for children with special educational needs is imposed at the higher secondary level (Moser, 2018). After completing the final compulsory year of schooling it is also possible to transition directly to employment via dual training/apprenticeship (part-time vocational school and apprenticeship in a training company) rather than pursuing higher levels of education (Euroguidance Austria, 2021). Youths with disabilities or certain other important disadvantages also have the option of integrative vocational education. This can take different forms (extended apprenticeship or partial qualification), but mostly involves an apprenticeship on the regular labour market (Fasching, 2010).

In Austria, the Compulsory Training Act on Education and Training up to age 18, adopted in 2016, aims to ensure that every youth undergoes some form of schooling or dual vocational training up to that age, whether it be in a regular, extended, or partial qualification form (Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, 2016). However, the non-regular labour market is considered in cases where it is impossible to find or maintain employment in the regular labour market, resulting in a prolonged stay in the transition system. Employment in non-regular labour markets is principally a measure of vocational rehabilitation, one of the tasks of which is to promote reentrance into the regular labour market. If youths up to the age 18 are in neither of these two schemes (the so-called NEET, i.e., not in education, employment, or training), if they drop out of school or vocational training early (EAL, or early school leavers), or if they are undecided as to their educational/vocational future, then they are encouraged to participate in one of the measures of the so-called "transition system" (Bacher et al., 2013). The transition system is viewed as a sub-system of the vocational training system and contains diverse measures which do not aim at vocational qualification, but rather act as a sort of bridging offer. They serve as a type of vocational orientation, vocational preparation or qualification for vocational training, and thus as orientation towards competencies that are relevant for vocational training (Kohlrausch, 2012). Thus, at the higher secondary level, the systems of education, vocational training, and transition run in parallel. It is common that youths transitioning from school to employment go back and forth between these systems.

2.1. Individual Transition Planning and Support for Inclusive Transitions to Employment for Youths With Disabilities

Based on inclusive schooling in regular systems, the goal is to thoroughly prepare and support youths with and without disabilities who are undergoing this transition process so that they will be successful in choosing their paths following their abilities and possibilities. An inclusive transition, meaning access to continued education, training or employment in regular systems, must be made available (UN Convention, 2006, articles 24, 27). The timely and thorough planning, preparation, and implementation of the transition from school to continuing education, training and employment are critical for its success and can be referred to as the individual transition planning (ITP) process (Soriano, 2006). Such a process generally starts one or two years before finishing compulsory education, addressing decisions about education and professions at the transition from compulsory school to continuing schooling or employment. Teachers, the youths, their parents and additional external professionals are jointly involved in the process. However, the youths are the focus of attention, which is why the participation of the youths themselves, as well as their parents, is essential (Soriano, 2006, p. 26). The ITP of the European Agency was developed primarily for pupils with special needs or disabilities and emphasises the importance of participative cooperation of all those involved in the ITP process. In Austria, the ITP is an offer of a voluntary nature that is accepted with varying degrees of enthusiasm by the different types of lower secondary schools (Fasching, 2012; Husny & Fasching, 2020). In the USA, in contrast, this type of ITP is compulsory for all pupils as established by the 1996 Educational Act (Defur et al., 2001; Trainor, 2017; Wehmeyer et al., 2018). In Austria, this has yet to happen.

As previously mentioned, integrative secondary schooling for youths with disabilities in Austria is likely to encounter different types of obstacles. The change to a vocational training system with dual training (theoretical part in the vocational education school together with the acquisition of professional skills in a training company) receives more political support and is more successful in practice (Esmond, 2021; Moser, 2018). Nonetheless, very few manage to directly transition to vocational training. In Austria, therefore, graduates of compulsory schools with disabilities often end up in the so-called "transition system"—also known as the "repair system"—with diverse offers of vocational orientation and qualification. The *Netzwerk Berufliche Assistenz* (NEBA; https://www.neba.at), or network for vocational assistance, is one of the most well-known offers. Commissioned by the Federal Office of Social Welfare, it gathers the most relevant projects and activities from the field of counselling, assistance and guidance of youths with disabilities and other youths in danger of exclusion under the label "NEBA services" and implements them in close cooperation with the most important strategic partners (e.g., public employment service, the regional coordination service "AusBildung bis 18," that is, education and training up to 18, regional service providers, schools and companies). The Austria-wide NEBA offer, which exists in all nine federal states as a voluntary, free, and low-threshold support offer, currently comprises five types of measure: youth coaching, the project Fit for Vocation, vocational training assistance, workplace assistance, and job coaching with differing content focuses (see Table 1). All the measures pursue the common goal of supporting an inclusive transition process from school to continuing education, training, and employment. Below, we provide a brief description of each of these measures.

Inclusion in the regular education system and on the regular labour market must receive preference over qualification and employment in segregation (Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, 2016). The offer of support measures presented above is largely in line with the demands of the UN Convention with respect to labour market policy and the provision of active support offers for persons with disabilities (UN Convention, 2006, article 27). Article 27 of the UN Convention, related to work and employment, refers to the aspect of vocational participation of persons with disabilities and explicitly emphasises the active promotion of people with disabilities in accessing post-school education and qualification. It states: "Enable persons with disabilities to have effective access to general technical and vocational guidance programmes, placement services and vocational and continuing training" (UN Convention, 2006, article 27d).

2.2. Transition From School to Work in a European Context: Theoretical Reflections and Transitional Regimes

The careful planning, preparation and implementation of the transition from school to training and employment are crucial for vocational integration. Different countries respond to this challenge in different ways. Walther, when searching for patterns in the different institutional and structural setups across borders, developed a heuristic typology of "transitional regimes" (Walther, 2006, pp. 124–126, 2011, pp. 73–98; Walther & Pohl, 2005, pp. 38–41) according to which the national transition systems in Europe can be divided into four regime types: the universalistic regime (Nordic countries), the liberal regime (Anglo-Saxon countries), the subprotective regime (Mediterranean countries), and the employment-centred regime (continental countries). The Austrian transition system is an employment-centred regime, characterised above all by high standardisation, high differentiation, and a high degree of social selection. As already mentioned, Austria has a broad range of highly differentiated measures and offers numerous support measures for the transition from school to employment;

Table 1. Institutionalised measures of inclusive transitional support in Austria.

Youth coaching	Professional counselling to prevent the premature dropout from vocational training and foster skills and knowledge which are crucial for employment. After an initial meeting between the youth and the professional, the two develop a long-term plan and the latter assists the youth in finding employment.
Project Fit for Vocation	This measure teaches basic competencies, relevant cultural techniques, and social skills. These can be summarised as soft skills in an institutional setting.
Vocational training assistance	This measure, which is only available for youths with a disability, helps the youths receive vocational training. The professionals mediate with an employer and support the youth's learning process throughout the period of the contract between the youth and the employer.
Workplace assistance	This is a measure explicitly for youths with a disability and aims at supporting them in their vocational lives and with their mandatory task of interacting with government agencies. The assistance professional also communicates with the employer.
Job coaching	The professional job coach fosters the youth's skills regarding independent workplace competencies and soft skills. The coach is also responsible for sensitizing and coordinating the wishes and concerns of the employer.

Source: Fasching and Fülöp (2017) and Husny and Fasching (2020).

it can also count on the participation of a large number of institutions (Public Employment Service, Federal Office of Social Welfare, schools, social partners, diverse collaborators, coordination offices on the national and regional levels, and different umbrella organisations for vocational integration).

What is normal and what is not normal, what constitutes a successful or a failed transition are predefined by the system. Such preconceptions are rooted not only in individuals and in institutions, but also in society (Walther, 2014, p. 78). So-called "transition regimes" can be understood as nationalistic frameworks in which transition paths are predetermined. They are "constellations of the societal regulation of transitions" (Walther, 2014, p. 80). Transition regimes become visible through legislation, through structural requirements, and the moment and extent of gatekeeping processes on the part of professional actors on different levels. This means that the actors who support these transitions, as well as the youths themselves and their parents, find they have a limited scope of action which is pre-structured by this logic. Transition schemes can be seen as nationalistic assumptions of normality, interwoven with socio-economic and institutional processes (Walther, 2014, p. 78).

The political framework conditions and institutional support systems and measures which have been described in this article must always be reflected not only in regard to their possibilities but also to their limitations. Nevertheless, there is a need for inclusive support measures which are based on individual needs to support youths with disabilities in their transition from school to employment. There is an equally urgent need for participative elements of cooperation (between professional support providers, the youths, and their parents) to be able to prevent risks of exclusion. Herein lies the importance of our research project. By providing empirical research into participative cooperation we aim to make an important contribution to the further development of research and improvements to the current practices in school-to-employment transition in the context of inclusion.

3. Cooperation for Inclusion in Educational Transitions: Methods and Methodology of the Project Design

This article discusses data obtained from a qualitative longitudinal study in the framework of the project Cooperation for Inclusion in Educational Transitions, funded by the Austrian Science Fund (https://kooperation-fuer-inklusion.univie.ac.at/en). The project duration was five years (October 2016 to September 2021), during which the experiences of cooperation of youths with disabilities and their parents (with or without disabilities) were explored in depth. The project applied the constructivist grounded theory of Charmaz (2014) for interviews (intensive interviewing) and data analysis (initial coding, focused coding).

The data were surveyed by conducting a qualitative research circle which was repeated three times. The key research question was: What are the experiences of cooperation of pupils with disabilities and their parents/families with professionals at the transition from lower secondary to higher secondary or employment? (for more details on the research design see Fasching et al., 2017). This question was explored using two qualitative methods (intensive interviewing, reflecting team) and their triangulation in a research circle (for more

details on triangulation see Flick, 2013). At the beginning of the research circle, the whole sample was interviewed (18 families of different formations: youths with different types of disability and/or their parents with or without disabilities). Charmaz (2014) recommends the method of intensive interviewing for grounded theory studies. The application of this method in our multi-annual grounded theory study proved to be successful due to its flexible character (e.g., adaptation of the guidelines). In line with the iterative proceeding in grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014), the data analysis was initiated in parallel with the data survey.

In addition to the interviews, four youths with disabilities and four parents (with/without disabilities) participated in so-called reflecting teams, which have their origin in systemic family therapy (Andersen, 1987) and are mainly applied in counselling and coaching contexts (e.g., Cox et al., 2003). Nowadays, they are also attracting increasing attention in the social sciences in the context of disability (e.g., Anslow, 2013). This method was adapted as a participatory research approach for the project at hand to place special focus on the individual needs of the youths with disabilities and their parents (Fasching & Felbermayr, 2019). We worked with the reflecting teams for two main reasons: (a) It was possible to discuss the initial hypotheses from the interview analysis with the participants in the reflecting teams, which (b) allowed for a continuous theory generation on participative cooperation. Reflecting teams were formed with both the youths and with the parents. An additional reflecting team was also formed that comprised professionals working in school and non-school contexts (vocational counselling at school, post-school qualification project, vocational training assistance, and family counselling for parents with a child with a disability transitioning from school to employment; see also Husny & Fasching, 2020). As the professionals were not interviewed, this allowed us to additionally survey and consider the perspective of these professionals.

Of the whole sample (18 families), we interviewed five families on three occasions throughout the longitudinal study. Concerning the method, it should be noted that an uninterrupted sample is always a major challenge for longitudinal designs (Thomson & Holland, 2003). For reasons of research ethics, the participants were informed that they could abandon the project at any point without repercussions, and this was respected at all times (Thomson & Holland, 2003; Walford, 2005).

4. Experiences of Participative Cooperation

What are the experiences of cooperation of youths with disabilities and their parents at the transition from education to vocational training and employment? What aspects must be fulfilled to speak of participative cooperation and what are its characteristics? In the following analysis, we consider two cases from the sample (all names changed). Interviews were conducted with two youths with physical or learning disabilities and three parents (two mothers, one father). This selection was made based on the fact that (a) it was possible to interview them three times and (b) the transition from school to vocational training and employment was the focus of attention. The first intensive interviews (Charmaz, 2014) were conducted at the end of form 8 (final year of lower secondary), while the other two were conducted one and two years later, respectively. This allowed us to observe the transition and the cooperation experiences continuously over two years. In our two sample cases, the settings differed after transition: One youth transitioned from school to a vocational training institution for youths with disabilities and the other to an institution for persons with special needs. The main focus of both institutions was to orientate the youths and help them obtain qualifications. The youths received no vocational training certificate upon completion.

4.1. Cooperation

We use the term "cooperation" as opposed to "competition" (P01_02_Em_I05) and in relation with "team" (*team work*, *team player, team working skills,* etc.). The information in brackets are interview codes that varied over the course of the study and according to the different participants in the interviews. Cooperation thus means "*working as a team*" (P02_01_Ep_I06): conceiving oneself and others as players in a common team, not as competitors. The youths and their parents felt that three aspects had to be accomplished to ensure successful cooperation within a team: (a) willingness to cooperate (*wanting to cooperate*), (b) communication (*wanting to speak*), and (c) activity (*wanting to act*). A more specific concept than cooperation, participative cooperation refers to the explicit involvement of the youths with disabilities and their parents in transition planning and the related research (participatory cooperation). As a result, cooperation takes place in a triangle between youths, parents, and professionals. Cooperation can be seen as the basis of participative cooperation. Only when what is needed for cooperation has been established can the more specific participative cooperation take place. Figure 1 below offers an overview of the surveyed aspects which characterise (participative) cooperation according to the views of the youths with disabilities and their parents. The figure is depicted in circular form to illustrate that experiences of participative cooperation cannot be understood without a previous understanding of the general concept of cooperation. The general aspects of cooperation also apply to participative cooperation.

4.1.1. Wanting to Cooperate

The category *wanting to cooperate* indicates the willingness of each individual to cooperate. The "Kraft" family said that the willingness to cooperate increased when the cooperation partners were familiar with each other.

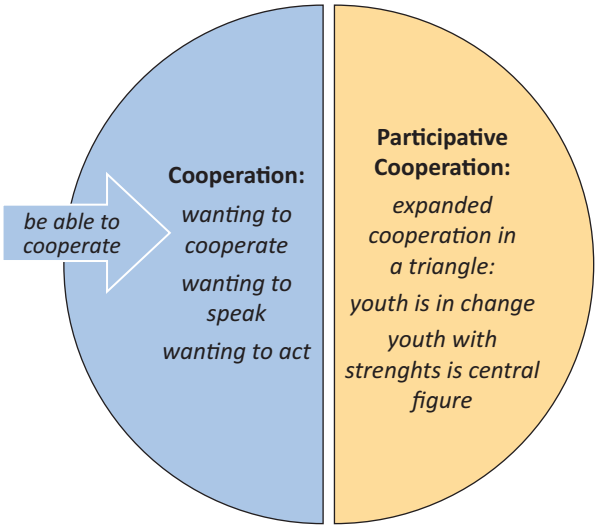

Figure 1. Aspects of (participative) cooperation.

This raises the question of how a relationship of trust can be established between the cooperation partners. Additionally, it must be taken into account that cooperation partners (e.g., counsellors) are often assigned ad-hoc in many cases of transition, and therefore a relationship of trust cannot exist from the beginning. The parents further mentioned that a situation in which all the cooperation partners shared the same values increased the willingness to cooperate. This includes above all a resource-oriented view of the youth (focus on strengths, not weaknesses), honesty, and a respectful, attentive, and appreciative attitude towards the resources (e.g., time) of all those involved. Moreover, it requires similar ideas about the abilities and possibilities of the youth in terms of their education and outlook. This is reflected in one mother's statement: "Well, cooperation would mean that everyone works together towards a goal" (P01_01_Em_I02). The participants mentioned that they were pursuing the regular labour market. This goal must be pursued by all those involved in educational transition in order to ensure that the cooperation is successful and the goal is reached.

Apart from the individual requirements for cooperation, such as values, certain structural framework conditions must also be in place to *be able to cooperate*. At school, exchanges with other parents take place in the context of teacher–parent meetings, described by one father as "a place to meet and talk to each other" (P01_01_Ep_I03). However, this requires structures for parents to meet and interact. The following quotation shows how, in many cases, structures have yet to be established: "Well, there should…one should (6) create structures (8) in which group activities (4) can take place, yes" (P01_01_Ep_I03). This raises the general question about the necessary (structural) preconditions for cooperation. If the interviewed youths with disabilities are to gain experiences of cooperation, for instance at work (e.g., during internships), they must gain access to such contexts. This can be accomplished by receiving positive evaluations of their vocational skills. The youths with disabilities thus depend on the evaluations of other people to open the doors to companies for them. This illustrates that apart from *wanting to cooperate*, the pertinent framework conditions must also be in place (*being able to cooperate*).

4.1.2. Wanting to Speak

Communication is an essential characteristic of cooperation. Without the willingness to communicate (*wanting to communicate*), cooperation will have little success, if any. This was also noticeable in the interviews when successful cooperation depended on the willingness to communicate of the individual. Cooperation thus depends not only on whether the individual persons *want to speak* but also on how much information they will give to the other cooperation partners. The potential of the work in/with groups becomes evident in this context. Group settings can increase the participants' willingness to speak and communicate. This manifested itself in the project at hand when the youths with disabilities were more talkative in the reflecting teams (group setting) than in the interviews, which raises the question about the role of peers for cooperation processes in groups.

4.1.3. Wanting to Act

Communication is not the only requirement for cooperation. The youths with disabilities and their parents felt that a willingness to act (*wanting to act*) was also necessary. Cooperation, therefore, means to *speak* and to *act*. The youths felt that acting was only possible when all those involved (including the youths themselves) were willing to act. In this way, each individual person has a responsibility to make cooperation work. This was also emphasised by the parents. Cooperation in the sense of team work does not take place automatically but relies on the activity and the initiative of those involved.

The parents mentioned above all two aspects which for them characterised activity in the context of cooperation: (a) activity on equal terms in the sense of "giving and taking" (P03_01_Ep_I02) and (b) viewing the activity as "meaningful" (P03_02_Em_I07). For the parents, activity meant activity of all those involved. However, they only expanded on and demanded activity on the part of adults (counsellors, teachers). For instance, they demanded teacher activity in terms of provision of information. Cooperation thus always relies on the trust of the individual cooperation partners—trust in people to become active and to provide (sufficient) information. This is directly related to *wanting to speak*.

4.2. Participative Cooperation

In terms of structural framework conditions, the analysis showed that participative cooperation—meaning the involvement of youths with disabilities and their parents in the transition planning (and research)—existed only in formalised settings in the context of compulsory school, taking place in obligatory talks between children, parents, and teachers (German term *KEL talk*, where K stands for *Kind*/child, E for *Eltern*/parents, and L for *Lehrer*/teacher). These talks are set up for pupils at compulsory school (forms 1 to 8) and their parents on a regular basis and seek to address the future paths of the youths after lower secondary (form 8). Even though the structural conditions are favourable, in the interviews these talks were not mentioned in detail and were not viewed as opportunities for participative cooperation. This, in turn, means that the setting and the "taking part" alone is not enough to experience talks as (positive) experiences of cooperation.

Positive experiences of cooperation were gained outside the school context, namely in projects of the transition system. These projects, which plan for the transition from school to employment and guide the youths throughout the process, were accessed by the youths with disabilities and their parents voluntarily. Some forms of structure for participative cooperation are thus required. Rather than being spontaneous and unplanned, participative cooperation takes place in formalised settings. In contexts outside school, however, an expansion of the concept of participative cooperation can be observed. Expanded cooperation in a triangle takes place through the involvement of additional cooperation partners. Talks do not only take place between youths with disabilities, their parents, and professionals; other important family members, for instance, also participate. This context provides for two positive aspects: (a) youths are in charge and (b) youths with strengths are the central figure.

4.2.1. Youths in Charge

One positive impression of this form of expanded cooperation is that a youth with a disability chooses the additional cooperation partners. One father stated: "Well, the parents aren't in charge there, [of] what they want…the child really does that himself…and organises [too], when it'll take place, who it'll be with, where it will happen" (P01_01_Ep_I03). This statement emphasises the active role of the youth with a disability, who is "in charge." Youths with disabilities decide who they want to invite for the counselling sessions as cooperation partners. In this way, in addition to the youth with a disability and one parent or both, other people that the youth views as relevant are present, resulting in an expanded cooperation circle. For the parents it is also a form of relief when the invited person participates in supporting the youth in the school-to-work transition by, for instance, finding an internship. Talks take place with the additional cooperation partners in an expanded triangle. Cooperation takes place in that all those involved work towards a goal together, "as a team" (P01_02_Em_I05).

4.2.2. A Youth With Strengths Is the Central Figure

Lastly, the longitudinal component must be taken into consideration in terms of the kind of changes that could be observed during the survey period. There were surprisingly few changes in the cooperation partners at school and outside school. New cooperation partners were included only in a few cases. When problems or questions arose in the course of the transition period, the parents turned to the cooperation partners they were familiar with, which means that the parents were aware of which contacts were available and approached them actively. This also applied for projects outside the school context in which experiences of participative cooperation were made and which were accessed proactively by the families. What was also revealed through the longitudinal analysis of the interviews is that the interviewed youths with disabilities and their parents repeatedly faced deficit-oriented views. By contrast, expanded cooperation facilitates a focus on the strengths of the youth with a disability. Parents especially pointed out that the strengths of the youth served as a starting point from which the team jointly planned the youth's future path, and that "the focus is *not* on the weaknesses" (P01_02_Em_I05).

5. Discussion

The analysis shown in the previous section shows the general requirements for cooperation at transition from school to employment as well as the specific requirements for participative cooperation. The participants described the topics of willingness to cooperate (*wanting to cooperate*), communication (*wanting to speak*), and activity (*wanting to act*) as preconditions for a positive experience of cooperation. Participative cooperation manifests itself as expanded cooperation in a triangle which can include additional cooperation partners. As regards positive impressions, according to the

participants the youth with a disability is in charge and is the central figure with his or her respective strengths (Atkins, 2016). The concept of expanded cooperation in a triangle with additional cooperation partners as presented here is similar to the concept of personal future planning with support circles for people with disabilities (Niedermair, 2018; O'Brien & O'Brien, 1999). Similarly, participative cooperation is possible when youths and their parents are actively involved in the support process, when the youths' desires and concerns are heard and understood, and when the focus is on their abilities and possibilities. One precondition for this is a common language for "all" and a professional-pedagogical working relationship which is characterised by an open mind and a respectful and appreciative attitude (Fasching & Felbermayr, 2019). This professional and "inclusive attitude" is essential for a valuable working relationship. Beyond this, regular exchange and reflection, as well as a willingness to make change happen and to opt for an inclusive attitude towards the participation of professionals, are necessary for participative cooperation in a pedagogical process (Fasching et al., 2020; Husny & Fasching, 2020).

This is in direct reference to the structural framework conditions which are required on the part of the institutions, meaning that a *willingness to cooperate* (*wanting to cooperate*, *wanting to speak*, *wanting to act*) also requires the pertinent structures for participative cooperation (*being able to cooperate*), as shown by interview analyses. Experiences of participative cooperation require a formalised setting. Participative cooperation does not, according to the data, take place spontaneously and without planning. Furthermore, and vitally, one framework condition that is necessary for participative cooperation is time. Time is needed, for instance, to invite additional people to the setting; the invited persons must have time to be able to participate; and, finally, time is necessary to build a relationship of trust with the cooperation partners. This relationship of trust is essential, as our data analyses show that cooperation between persons who are familiar with each other tends to be evaluated more positively. Time is also required to reflect on what is needed to increase the willingness of all the cooperation players to communicate and act. The potential of participative cooperation lies in the involvement of additional cooperation partners to support the transition of youths with disabilities from school to employment. Time is a vital framework condition in this respect (quality of the process) in the context of inclusion. This is reflected in the title of the project at hand: Cooperation for Inclusion in Educational Transitions. Abundant time is necessary to implement "cooperation for inclusion" because dealing with variety and diversity also requires more time. After all, variety also bears the potential for conflict. Accepting variety, understanding lifeworlds which are different from one's own, and learning common processes of communication require time. It is precisely in this regard that the constraints of time as a characteristic of pedagogical quality most probably have their greatest impact (Fasching et al., 2020).

6. Conclusions and Implications

What relevance do these research outcomes have for the transition of youths with disabilities from school to work? The experiences of cooperation of the youths with disabilities and their parents constitute valuable feedback for optimising the transition planning and for further developing its quality in connection with the inclusion and participation of youths with disabilities. What is especially important in this context is to establish structures within which (expanded) participative cooperation in a triangle can take place. Even if some good examples exist, especially outside school, it is of utmost importance to implement them on a macro-level (politics) and on a meso-level (measures). The following recommendations should be considered: (a) formalised settings for participative cooperation (e.g., talks between child, parent, and teacher) in the context of vocational orientation at school in the Austrian educational system and in all school types of the lower secondary level, (b) an increased offer of personal future planning with a support circle, and (c) a transition planning process which starts at an early stage (as early as the penultimate form of compulsory education) and which is obligatory for all pupils.

If these recommendations are followed, it will be possible to implement a participative form of cooperation (counselling in a triangle between the youth, their parent(s), and professionals) that will above all enable youths to participate actively, support them, and afford them the possibility to plan and manage their own future and make their own decisions about it. Time and personal resources are necessary for ITP processes so that a respectful and appreciative communication on equal terms can be implemented as a quality-assuring characteristic of a successful and professional-pedagogical working relationship.

To conclude, we would like to offer some critical reflections on transition research. Firstly, it should be noted that the educational approach to transitions classifies them as thresholds or obstacles, thus creating further transitions. Secondly, selection or discrimination mechanisms are strongly interwoven with the organisational aspects of educational institutions. In this way, the field of education itself tends to (re-)produce hierarchisation and inequality (Walther, 2016). With this in mind, we want to highlight the limitations of educational action at transition. This is precisely why (inclusive) transition research in the educational sciences should not assume that transitions are natural events and then, from this perspective, interpret them as individual failures due to delay or non-compliance. Instead, "the agenda of a transition research as conducted by the educational sciences, which conceives of itself as reflective, must be characterised precisely by not considering transitions as

matter of course and instead declare its creation as the very subject of study" (Walther, 2016, p. 127). In the context of education, transitions can be conceived as constructs of heuristic research (Walther, 2016), especially in regard to the character of their process, to counteract rash classificationism. This is equally valid for research into participative cooperation. Consequently, professional educational work has a key role at the intersection with institutions.

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Conflict of Interests

Co-author Katharina Felbermayr left the project on 8 September 2021. Her statements in this article were made as a private individual.

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Article

Health, Personality Disorders, Work Commitment, and Training-to-Employment Transitions

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Abstract
School-to-work transition research has persistently provided empirical evidence for the theoretical predictions of human capital, signaling, and credentialing, thereby emphasizing the importance of school performance and degree attainment for labor market entries. However, hitherto, research in this tradition has paid less attention to noncognitive and socio-emotional factors. We address this gap by analyzing the influence of mental and physical health, coping abilities, cooperativeness, and work commitment on the transition from apprenticeship training to first job. For this purpose, this study draws on a unique dataset of 1,061 individuals from Germany, combining rich survey (i.e., information concerning baseline health, personality disorders, and work attitudes) and register (i.e., labor market information) data. The results of linear probability models reveal that only physical health is associated with finding a first job within six months. Physical and mental health are associated with a smooth transition into the labor market, i.e., a situation in which an individual transitions into regular employment without any job search gaps. Overall health and coping abilities are important to finding decent employment. However, after taking important preselection variables (i.e., educational outcomes and training firm characteristics) into account, these associations are weakened and become statistically nonsignificant. Overall, this study provides evidence that health and personality disorders have the potential to induce inequality at an important life course stage.

Keywords
anxiety and depression; apprenticeship; cooperativeness; coping; health; school-to-work transition; SF-12; work commitment

Issue
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1. Introduction

School-to-work transition outcomes are crucial for status attainment (e.g., Müller & Gangl, 2003), adolescents' mental development (e.g., Schoon & Mortimer, 2017), and the life course development of health and subjective well-being (e.g., Kratz & Patzina, 2020; Leopold & Leopold, 2018). A key explanation provided by labor market research has consistently shown that labor market entry positions have long-lasting impacts on individuals' careers (e.g., Scherer, 2004). Even in labor markets with strong apprenticeship systems, which typically provide smooth transitions into labor markets, entry positions are important because prolonged periods of job searches and youth unemployment also occur in such institutional settings (e.g., Kratz et al., 2019; Müller & Gangl, 2003).

Human capital theory (e.g., Becker, 1964), signaling theory (e.g., Spence, 1973), and credentialing theory (e.g., Collins, 1979) have provided the main theoretical explanations for differences in short- and long-term labor market outcomes for different educational groups. Empirical findings from the "school-to-work transition" literature have supported these theoretical notions since studies in this area have emphasized the fact that the attainment of signals and credentials is of pivotal importance for successful transitions into the labor market (e.g., Fossati et al., 2020; Jacob & Solga, 2015; Patzina & Wydra-Somaggio, 2020). Additionally, the literature has provided evidence for the notion of human capital and has indicated that school performance (i.e., good grades) in upper-secondary education predicts high wages at the time of labor market entry (e.g., Wydra-Somaggio & Seibert, 2010). An emerging body of research has supplemented the classical strand of school-to-work research and shown that certain personality facets, such as self-efficacy, have a direct effect on school-to-work transition outcomes (e.g., access to vocational education and training [VET] or labor market entry) that is independent of degree attainment and school performance (e.g., Ng-Knight & Schoon, 2017; Pinquart et al., 2003; Protsch & Dieckhoff, 2011).

Hitherto, the literature has not provided systematic evidence concerning the impact of noncognitive and socioemotional factors like mental and physical health, personality disorders, or work commitment on individuals' starting positions during transitions from education into labor markets. In particular, research on noncognitive and socioemotional factors has mainly focused on within-school analyses (e.g., Cornaglia et al., 2015; Di Giunta et al., 2013; Duchesne & Ratelle, 2010) or educational dropout (e.g., McLeod & Fettes, 2007). Research in this area has also mainly relied on overall mental health assessments and has not distinguished between physical and mental health or between general and specific mental health domains. Additionally, research concerning the influence of personality disorders and work attitudes on transitions into the labor market has been scant. To address this research gap, we formulate our main research question as follows: Do mental and physical health, personality disorders, and work attitudes affect training-to-employment transitions?

To answer this research question, we use a novel dataset on young individuals from the apprenticeship system during their final year of training. At approximately 63% of the total, a majority of individuals within a birth cohort continue to enter training in Germany. Thus, apprenticeships still constitute the dominant pathway for school-to-work transitions despite educational expansion and increasing levels of university enrollment. Due to the firm-based nature of such training, retention rates are high after graduation, and youth unemployment risks are rather low (e.g., Wolter & Ryan, 2011). The data employed for our study combine both survey and register data (i.e., the Integrated Employment Biographies [IEB]; see Frodermann et al., 2021) and have two key features that are required to answer our research question. First, the data allow us to distinguish among overall health, mental and physical health, and domain-specific mental health (i.e., anxiety and depression). Distinguishing among these health factors is important because research has indicated that depressive symptoms particularly influence individuals' school performance and perceptions of the future (e.g., Leykin et al., 2011; Roepke & Seligman, 2016), both of which are factors that are highly important in school-to-work transitions. In other words, in distinguishing among different facets of health, personality, and attitudes, our study contributes to the scholarly understanding of largely overlooked factors in theoretical and empirical research on transitions into labor markets.

Second, our dataset allows for the investigation of the contributions of noncognitive and socioemotional factors to three interesting training-to-employment transition outcomes. First, we are able to determine whether individuals find a job within six months after completing training. Thus, we investigate whether noncognitive and socioemotional factors enable individuals to avoid long-term youth unemployment (e.g., Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013, 2013; Kelly et al., 2012). Second, our data allow us to investigate whether apprentices can enter the labor market without any interruption after completing training. Third, our detailed register data allow for the analysis of individuals' transitions into decent first employment. Thus, we can contribute to a classic strand of sociological research analyzing horizontal inequalities in transitions to labor markets.

Based on rich linked survey and register data, linear probability models, and an analysis of the effect of individual resources that are typically not observed in conjunction (i.e., mental and physical health, personality disorders, and work attitudes) on training-to-employment transition outcomes, this study advances our knowledge concerning the role of noncognitive and socioemotional factors at a crucial life course stage. In so doing, our study investigates the influences of health, personality disorders, and work values net of the effects of learning environments and schooling outcomes. Analyzing the additional effects of these factors is important because the literature has unambiguously demonstrated that within-school health selection processes contribute to poor schooling outcomes. Thus, if we were to find additional adverse net effects of poor health, personality disorders, and low work attitudes, our findings would suggest a double disadvantage for individuals who already face disadvantages during labor market entry as a result of their poor performance at school. Moreover, investigating the processes that lead to inequality during a crucial period in individuals' lives is important because inequalities are likely to accumulate over an individual's life course (e.g., DiPrete & Eirich, 2006), and even small differences at early ages could lead to greater inequality at later life course stages (e.g., Dannefer, 2003).

2. Empirical Findings on Labor Market Entry

2.1. Grades, Formal Degrees, and Labor Market Entry

Research on labor market entry cohorts has provided evidence for the theoretical predictions of human capital theory (e.g., Becker, 1964), credentialing theory (e.g., Collins, 1979), and signaling theory (e.g., Spence, 1973), emphasizing the pivotal roles of degree attainment and educational performance. For instance, Scherer's (2005) findings indicated that not attaining vocational education (i.e., school dropouts or graduates with lower-secondary degrees) in Germany is associated with long durations between dropping out or graduating and finding a substantial first job. In addition, Becker and Blossfeld (2021) found that the quality of entry positions (as measured by occupational prestige) decreases only for the low-educated (i.e., for individuals without vocational degrees) in Germany across labor market entry cohorts (1950 to 2010). The analysis of transitions to first jobs is important because the quality of entry positions is crucial to the development of stable labor market careers (Scherer, 2004).

In addition to the effects of degrees, labor market research has also indicated that school performance (i.e., grades) during postsecondary education influences individuals' transitions into the labor market, thereby providing empirical evidence for the importance of human capital formation. Hoeschler and Backes-Gellner (2018) show that an increased grade point average (GPA) improves the likelihood of an apprentice receiving a job offer by his or her training firm at the end of training. Pinquart et al. (2003) demonstrated that, in the German context, even school grades influence school-to-work transition outcomes, as good students exhibit the lowest rates of youth unemployment at the age of 21. In addition to job offers and employment opportunities, research has also suggested that an increased GPA leads to an increase in wages at labor market entry (Wydra-Somaggio & Seibert, 2010). This GPA effect even persists in models that take into account training firm size, educational degree, and training occupation.

2.2. Health and Labor Market Entry

Although there is a sophisticated body of research concerning the causal relationship between (un)employment and (mental) health (e.g., Krug & Eberl, 2018) in the tradition of Jahoda et al. (1932/1971), research pertaining to the impact of (mental) health on labor market entry remains scarce. To understand the potential impact of (mental) health for our study, which focuses on transitions from the education system, research about the selection mechanism of health appears to be most important. In contrast to the causation literature, which mainly focuses on individuals who have already made the education-to-work transition and which mainly investigates the causal effect of (un)employment on (mental) health, work concerning selection mechanisms primarily focuses on within-school processes.

The prominent research on health selection within educational systems stresses that childhood health conditions causally influence educational attainment and health during adolescence and adulthood. Based on longitudinal data from the US, McLeod and Fettes (2007) were among the first to show that poor mental health during childhood and adolescence has a negative effect on schooling outcomes (i.e., high school completion and college entry). Interestingly, the authors also found that the effect of mental health is mediated by educational expectations net of school performance and disruptive behavior (e.g., suspension from school). Thus, mental health appears to involve alternating perceptions about the future, which turns out to be important for actual educational behavior. Furthermore, individuals who exhibit mental health problems during childhood appear to perform worse in school than do those who develop mental health problems during adolescence (McLeod & Fettes, 2007). McLeod et al. (2012) also show that mental health is important for GPA. Their analyses indicated that while depression has no direct effect on GPA, attention problems (e.g., attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder) predict poor GPA. However, depression appears to have only a proxy effect on schooling outcomes, as depressive symptoms have a negative and statistically significant effect on school outcomes when other mental health domains and behavioral variables are not included in the modeling (McLeod et al., 2012).

Evensen's (2019) study adds to these findings from the US by showing that poor mental health is associated with poor school achievement. In her study, the author further showed that the effects of poor mental health differ by grade, as mental health effects appear to have the most impact at the lower end of the distribution. In addition, Evensen found that mental health problems more often occur among low-achieving school students, which corroborates the earlier work by Haas (2006), who emphasized that socioeconomic differences in early childhood health exist and accumulate over an individual's life course. This process of accumulation leads to poor schooling and poor health in adolescence. Thus, poor health and schooling interact, thereby strongly influencing status attainment within a society.

2.3. Personality Disorders, Work Commitment, and Labor Market Entry

Regarding labor market entry, a study in Germany (Pinquart et al., 2003) indicated that particularly high academic self-efficacy beliefs between the ages of 12 and 15 years reduce unemployment risk and increase job satisfaction at the age of 21. For Swiss apprentices, Hoeschler and Backes-Gellner (2018) found that grit (a concept that is strongly related to self-efficacy) and Big Five personality traits constitute very important predictors of receiving job offers at the end of training.

For the United Kingdom, Ng-Knight and Schoon (2017) provided an analysis of the risk of being classified as "not in employment, education or training" (NEET) from ages 16 to 20 and the relevance of an internal locus of control (i.e., individuals' believe that they have control over the outcomes of certain life events). One main finding by those authors was that as individuals' levels of internal locus of control increase, the risk of labor market exclusion between the ages of 16 and 20 decreases. While the literature review showed that previous work has already provided some insights into the influences of certain personality facets on school-to-work transition outcomes, research on coping abilities and cooperativeness (i.e., the constructs used in this study) has been scarce.

In contrast to the literature concerning personality traits, research focused on the role of work commitment in the school-to-work transition has been scant. However, a seminal study by Bielby and Bielby (1984) on female college graduates in the US indicated that as levels of work commitment increase, women exhibit greater attachment to the labor market than do men. According to this empirical finding, we also expect that high levels of commitment ease the transition into the labor market for apprentices in Germany. Moreover, it is noteworthy that the measure employed in our study deviates from the standard sociological construct. While most sociological research on work commitment has focused on women and used measures that approximate "the subjective relative importance of work over family as a source of well-being and satisfaction" (Gangl & Ziefle, 2015, p. 531), our study relies on a psychological measure that aims to identify the general attitudes of individuals toward work (Warr et al., 1979).

2.4. Expectations for Empirical Analysis

Since findings from the literature concerning health and schooling have identified increased dropout risks and low school performance for individuals with mental health problems, we might expect that decreasing health leads to poor school-to-work transition outcomes. However, since research has indicated that individuals' health constitutes a driving force underlying degree attainment and school performance, it is not clear a priori whether health is an important predictor in training-to-employment transitions. Particularly in the context of our empirical study, two important selection barriers have already been overcome: first, health selection within the general school system, and second, health selection during the transition from general schooling into training. Thus, if selection and sorting according to health occur for schooling outcomes and learning environments, we would not find any association between health outcomes and labor market entry after considering GPA, degrees attained, and training firm characteristics (e.g., firm size or training firm wage levels). Therefore, in terms of the importance of health, an interesting question that emerges pertains to whether health has a net effect on transitions to first jobs, i.e., whether health continues to predict transitions to first jobs after selection by schooling outcomes and training environments has been taken into account.

Regarding personality disorders and work commitment, our literature review revealed only scarce examples of research that scrutinizes the role played by these factors in school-to-work transitions. In general, however, we might expect similar impacts from personality disorders and work commitment in the context of school-to-work transitions, as suggested by the health and education literature. Again, the interesting question that emerges pertains to whether personality disorders and work commitment continue to have predictive power after taking important preselection processes into account.

In summary, our study provides novel insights into an important life course transition for a large proportion of German school leavers. In scrutinizing the roles of health, personality disorders, and work commitment, we advance our current knowledge concerning the noncognitive and socioemotional dimensions of disadvantage in the field of transition research. Moreover, by investigating the direct effects of health, personality disorders, and work commitment (net of schooling outcomes and selection by the learning environment), our study scrutinizes a potential double disadvantage in labor market entry for individuals who already face disadvantages in the school-to-work transition based on their poor schooling outcomes.

3. Methods

3.1. The Jugalo Study and Sample

The Jugalo Study (youth unemployment, mental health, and labor market outcomes) focuses on a representative sample of apprentices from the dual apprenticeship system. The sample population (individuals in sample frame N = 19,975) consists of apprentices included in the IEB data (Frodermann et al., 2021) from 2015 who are assumed to have been in their third (and typically final) year of training during the spring of 2016, i.e., at the time of the interview. The sample frame was drawn from the IEB, which comprises the full population of dependent workers in Germany, including apprentices. The register data included the postal addresses of the selected sample. Selected individuals were either invited to respond to a multicolor, printed pencil-and-paper (PAPI) questionnaire or were granted computer-assisted web interview (CAWI) access: 43.5% opted for the PAPI mode and 56.5% opted for the CAWI mode. The interviews occurred from January to May 2016. Selectivity analysis revealed typical but weak bias in the final sample, based on education, social origin, citizenship, and gender.

The baseline survey consists of measures of respondents' health, personality disorders, and work

commitment. These measures (see Section 3.2) constitute the key explanatory variables used in this research. In addition, the survey contains information about critical life events, health-related behavior, social support, schooling outcomes, and sociodemographics. In the final sample (N = 1,801), 1,259 individuals consented to match baseline information to register-based social security data, i.e., the IEB data. This situation enables us to observe aspects of the learning environment and various outcomes of the school-to-work transition for 69.9% of the full sample.

To produce our final analytical sample, we stipulate two limitations. We employ only data from individuals who provided consent for the data linkage, and we analyze only full cases. Selectivity analysis reveals that consent for data linkage depends on the coping abilities of individuals, school degree, and performance. Thus, individuals with better coping abilities, a high school diploma, and better grades are slightly overrepresented. However, the selection model explains only 2.6% of the variation in consent propensity, which is rather low and suggests that the analytic sample is not highly selective for the main explanatory variables or other observables. Furthermore, school degree and performance are controlled for in the final specifications of our model, which reduces the likelihood of potential bias. Regarding the decent job model, we perform a data-driven selection: For technical reasons, the register data do not contain information regarding the mean wage level of some training firms, leading to the exclusion of a further 162 cases. The final sample includes information on job transitions of 1,061 individuals from the register data.

3.2. Measures

3.2.1. Dependent Variables

Concerning dependent variables, this study employs three outcome measures that stem from the register data. First, we analyze whether an apprentice found a first job within six months of completing VET. We choose a cutoff point of six months because, after this unemployment period, young individuals enter long-term unemployment (e.g., Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013, 2013; Kelly et al., 2012). Second, we determine whether an apprentice found a first job without employment interruption, i.e., directly after completing training. In so doing, we examine whether young individuals have a smooth school-to-work transition. Additionally, in the German case, this outcome can often suggest that apprentices are retained by their training firms—a circumstance for which many apprentices strive (e.g., in our sample, approximately 50% of apprentices were retained by their training firm).

Figure 1 shows that over 75% of the sample experienced a gapless school-to-work transition (e.g., retention after training or no search time). This finding reflects the fact that from 2015 to 2018, entries into youth unemployment in Germany were rare, and almost every apprenticeship graduate found employment. Third, we investigated whether apprentices access a decent first job. We define a decent first job as employment that lasts longer than 182 days (i.e., longer than the probation period) and pays a greater-than-average wage. Here, we do not merely use an indicator to determine

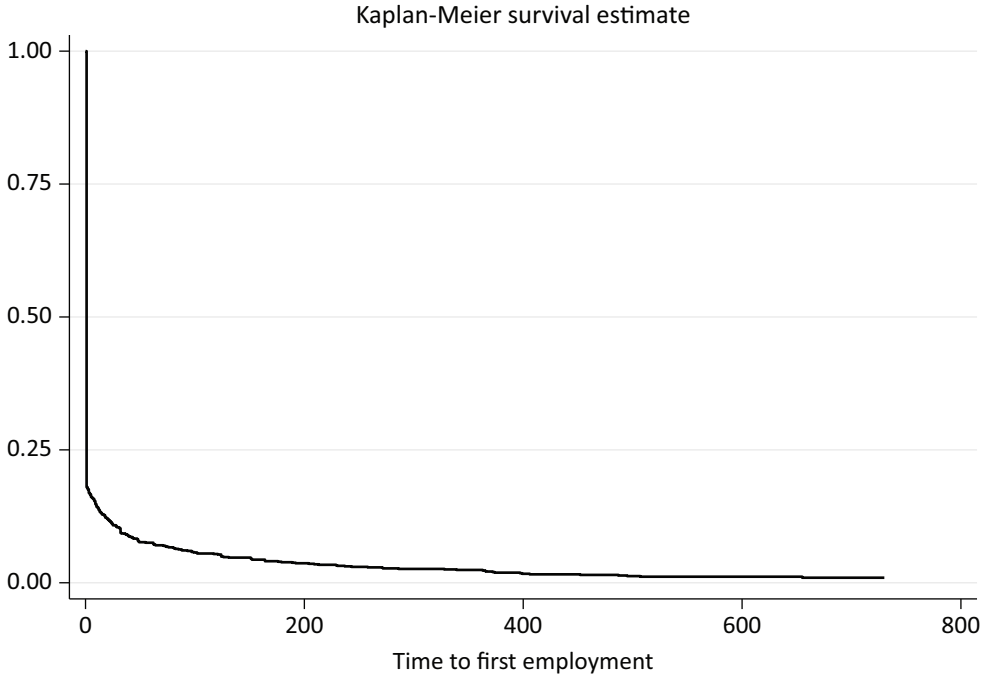

Figure 1. Time to first employment after completing training. Source: Own calculations based on the Jugalo Study (Dietrich, 2018).

whether individuals' wages are greater or less than the sample median. Instead, we investigate whether individuals from the same training occupations (roughly 300 in Germany) earn a greater-than-median wage in their current jobs. Comparing only within-training occupation medians has the advantage of accounting for the occupational structure of the German labor market. To identify what constitutes a greater-than-average wage, we rely on a full sample of all apprentices from the 2016 graduation cohort, which allows us to calculate the median wages of labor market entrants conditioned on their training occupation. We use the German classification of occupations, KLDB-1988, to retrieve median wages at a three-digit training occupation level. We merge this information with our analytic sample based on these codes.

3.2.2. Health

We employ indicators to approximate mental, physical, and overall *health*. To measure anxiety and depression risks, we employ the HSCL-10 scale, which constitutes a reduced form of the Hopkins symptom checklist (Derogatis et al., 1974). The ten items employed in our study demonstrate high internal validity, as indicated by a Cronbach's alpha of 0.856, and factor analysis indicates a one-factor solution (eigenvalue = 3.83). To measure overall health, we employ nine items from the well-established SF-12 scale, which constitutes a reduced form of the SF-36 (Radoschewski & Bellach, 1999). This measure also demonstrates high internal validity, as indicated by a Cronbach's alpha of 0.875 and a one-factor solution (eigenvalue = 4.00). We additionally employ the two subscales of the SF-12 that approximate the physical (pSF-12) and mental (mSF-12) health domains.

3.2.3. Personality Disorders

We employ a subscale (11 items) of the personality functioning scale developed by Parker et al. (2004), which measures two domains of *personality*. First, the scale includes a measure of cooperativeness. The scale approximates individuals' beliefs regarding problems in terms of their interactions with friends, colleagues, and strangers in general. Second, the Parker scale includes a measure of coping. This measure is highly related to other personality constructs, such as self-efficacy and internal locus of control. The internal validity of the constructs employed is only moderate. Cronbach's alpha for the cooperativeness subscale is 0.665, while that for the coping subscale is 0.630. Despite the low Cronbach's alpha values, factor analyses indicate a one-factor solution (the eigenvalues are 1.48 and 1.31 for the cooperativeness factor and the coping scale, respectively).

3.2.4. Work Commitment

We employ the Work Involvement Scale (Warr et al., 1979), which is based on six items. These items measure work commitment by asking individuals to evaluate statements concerning the importance of being employed, the mental burden of unemployment, and anxiousness during (potential) periods of unemployment. Furthermore, individuals rate items that ask whether working is the most important thing in life and whether they would work despite receiving high unemployment benefits or winning the lottery. Cronbach's alpha for the Warr scale in our data is 0.747, and factor analysis indicates a one-factor solution (eigenvalue = 1.90).

Since all internal validity measures indicate at least moderate internal consistency and factor analyses indicate one-factor solutions, we construct additive measures (i.e., sum scores). In the analyses, we use z-standardized measures, which have the advantage that their results are comparable across the different scales and models employed (Table A1 in the Supplementary File provides an overview of all dependent variables and all unstandardized distributions of explanatory variables).

3.2.5. Control Variables

Concerning control variables, we include two types of control variables in this study. First, we consider variables that structure individuals' integration into training. Second, we rely on a set of control variables that likely constitute preselection variables. As important structural variables, we consider gender, migration background as measured by a dummy variable indicating non-German citizenship, birth year, social origin (i.e., a dummy variable indicating whether an apprentice originates from a household receiving welfare benefits), and a dummy variable indicating apprentices located in East Germany. Research has provided evidence that all these variables are important for integration into training (e.g., Diehl et al., 2009; Dietrich et al., 2019; Hillmert et al., 2017; Kleinert & Jacob, 2013; Lindemann & Gangl, 2019; Seibert et al., 2009). Moreover, we include a dummy variable indicating whether the interview takes place via an online survey (the baseline is a paper-and-pencil survey).

Since our literature review revealed that health and personality influence educational performance and achievement (e.g., McLeod & Fettes, 2007; Pinquart et al., 2003), we consider as preselection variables individuals' level of education, performance, and a dummy variable to indicate prior VET education. Moreover, research has indicated that educational performance and degree attainment within the upper-secondary educational system ease transitions into the labor market (e.g., Müller & Gangl, 2003). Furthermore, since health, personality, and work attitudes are also likely to influence transitions into certain training firms, we include firm size and median wage levels as preselection variables. These dimensions are important training environment characteristics because they influence the quality of first jobs (e.g., Dietrich et al., 2016).

3.3. Analytical Strategy

We analyze the impacts of health, personality disorders, and work commitment on all three outcomes individually. We employ linear probability models, in which we introduce the measures in question separately (refer to Tables A5 to A7 in the Supplementary File for the results of logistic regressions, which do not substantially differ from the results based on linear probability models). A final, full model always includes the significant coefficients of the partial models. We conduct this workaround twice for each outcome. We first present associations from models that adjust for structural variables (i.e., sociodemographics, region, and survey mode). Second, we present the net effect of the measures in question conditioned on important preselection variables. In further analyses, we also acknowledge the sequential nature of the second and third analysis steps (i.e., finding a first job without employment interruption and finding a decent first job). However, the results of the sequential logistic regression models do not substantially differ from those based on linear probability models. The results from this workaround are available upon request.

Additionally, we conduct a factor analysis to elaborate on the interdependence between the constructs used. This workaround revealed that the HSCL-10 and SF-12 approximate one latent construct of health. This finding has three implications. First, concerning our modeling, if we were to find statistically significant correlations of the HSCL-10 and SF-12 in the partial models, the full model should only include one of these two variables. Second, regarding our young population, the SF-12 construct appears to be dominated by mental health. Third, at young ages, mental health problems appear to be more prevalent than physical health issues.

We furthermore provide a correlation matrix for all independent variables in the Supplementary File (refer to Table A8). While the table mainly shows moderate correlations between the constructs employed, it indicates that the mental health dimension of the SF-12 construct strongly correlates (0.65) with the HSCL-10 measure. Thus, both measures approximate anxiety and depression risks. Moreover, this result suggests that we should not include both measures in one regression model.

4. Results

4.1. Finding a First Job Within Six Months

Table 1 shows the results of the linear regression models. While Panel A shows associations of health, personality disorders, and work involvement in finding a first job within six months from models conditional on structural variables (i.e., sociodemographics, region, and survey mode), Panel B displays the results from regressions that adjust for educational outcomes and the learning environment. Panel A shows that mental health, personality traits, and work involvement are not associated with finding a first job within six months. The likelihood of finding a job increases only with increasing levels of physical health (see Model 3 of Table 1). Panel B indicates that this association holds when we condition our models on schooling outcomes and learning environment. Thus, individuals with poor physical health experience difficulties finding employment under very prosperous labor market conditions. Since the literature also indicates that individuals with health problems are likely to be low-performing school students, these results hint at a double disadvantage for low-achieving youth.

4.2. Finding a First Job Without Employment Interruption

Table 2 shows the results of the linear regression models. The associations depicted in Panel A indicate statistically significant correlations among the constructs in question. Only work commitment is not statistically significantly associated with gapless transitions to first jobs. The results indicate that as overall (mental or physical) health increases, the likelihood of transitions to first jobs without employment interruption also increases. Additionally, the associations presented indicate that as levels of cooperativeness and coping abilities increase, the likelihood of gapless transitions also increases. When we test for overall health and personality traits jointly, however, the model indicates that only overall health remains statistically significant, and the coefficient barely changes, indicating that overall health, rather than personality disorders, is an important factor in gapless transitions.

Panel B of Table 2 shows the regression results, taking into account educational outcomes and the learning environment. While the results indicate that the health measures are only weakly affected by the inclusion of these variables, associations among personality disorders become statistically nonsignificant. The full model suggests that there is almost no association between personality disorders and gapless transitions, while overall health is directly associated with gapless transitions to a first job. Again, this finding hints at a double disadvantage for low-achieving youth in the school-to-work transition.

4.3. Finding a Decent First Job

Table 3 shows the results of linear regression models that investigate the associations between health, personality disorders, work commitment, and the likelihood of finding a decent first job. Panel A depicts associations from models that account for sociodemographics, region, and mode effects and shows that physical health, overall health, and coping abilities are statistically significantly associated with the outcome. Panel A shows that as levels of physical or overall health increase, the likelihood of finding a decent first job also increases.

Table 1. Finding a first job within six months.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Panel A						
Anxiety and depression	0.005					
	(0.006)					
Mental health		0.002				
		(0.006)				
Physical health			0.014**			
			(0.006)			
Overall health				0.009		
				(0.006)		
Work Commitment Scale					0.003	
					(0.006)	
Coping ability						−0.002
						(0.006)
Cooperativeness						−0.000
						(0.007)
Adj.-R^2	0.006	0.006	0.011	0.008	0.006	0.005
F value	1.522	1.477	1.874	1.632	1.482	1.367
Panel B						
Anxiety and depression	0.006					
	(0.006)					
Mental health		0.002				
		(0.006)				
Physical health			0.012**			
			(0.006)			
Overall health				0.008		
				(0.006)		
Work Commitment Scale					0.002	
					(0.006)	
Coping ability						−0.004
						(0.007)
Cooperativeness						−0.001
						(0.007)
N persons	1,061	1,061	1,061	1,061	1,061	1,061
Adj.-R^2	0.003	0.002	0.005	0.003	0.002	0.001
F value	1.123	1.081	1.243	1.144	1.083	1.050

Notes: Results from linear probability models; coefficients of z-standardized variables; standard errors in parentheses; constant not shown; significance levels: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, and *** $p < 0.01$. The results from logistic and sequential logistic regression do not differ substantially (Table A5 in the Supplementary File shows results from logistic regressions; results from sequential logistic regressions are available upon request); full regression results appear in Table A2 of the Supplementary File. Panel A controls for sociodemographics (social origin, birth year, gender, migration background, and East Germany dummy variable) and mode effects. Panel B additionally controls for educational level, educational performance, second VET, and learning environment (training firm size and mean wage level training firm). Source: Jugalo Study (Dietrich, 2018).

Table 2. Finding a first job without employment interruption.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	Full
Panel A							
Anxiety and depression	−0.049***						
	(0.013)						
Mental health		0.057***					
		(0.012)					
Physical health			0.047***				
			(0.012)				
Overall health				0.063***			0.058***
				(0.012)			(0.013)
Work Commitment Scale					0.018		
					(0.012)		
Coping ability						0.023*	0.007
						(0.013)	(0.014)
Cooperativeness						0.022*	0.017
						(0.013)	(0.013)
Adj.-R^2	0.042	0.048	0.042	0.052	0.030	0.035	0.053
F Value	4.593	5.088	4.563	5.513	3.523	3.786	4.950
Panel B							
Anxiety and depression	−0.047***						
	(0.013)						
Mental health		0.055***					
		(0.012)					
Physical health			0.041***				
			(0.012)				
Overall health				0.059***			0.056***
				(0.012)			(0.013)
Work Commitment Scale					0.015		
					(0.012)		
Coping ability						0.016	0.001
						(0.013)	(0.014)
Cooperativeness						0.020	0.015
						(0.013)	(0.013)
N persons	1,061	1,061	1,061	1,061	1,061	1,061	1,061
Adj.-R^2	0.053	0.059	0.050	0.061	0.041	0.044	0.060
F value	3.452	3.749	3.326	3.863	2.902	2.963	3.621

Notes: Results from linear probability models; coefficients of z-standardized variables; standard errors in parentheses; constant not shown; significance levels: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, and *** $p < 0.01$. The results from logistic and sequential logistic regression do not differ substantially (Table A6 in the Supplementary File shows results from logistic regressions; results from sequential logistic regressions are available upon request); full regression results appear in Table A3 of the Supplementary File. Panel A controls for sociodemographics (social origin, birth year, gender, migration background, and East Germany dummy variable) and mode effects. Panel B additionally controls for educational level, educational performance, second VET, and learning environment (training firm size and mean wage level training firm). Source: Jugalo Study (Dietrich, 2018).

Table 3. Finding a decent first job.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	Full
Panel A							
Anxiety and depression	−0.019 (0.014)						
Mental health		0.011 (0.014)					
Physical health			0.034** (0.014)				
Overall health				0.025* (0.014)			0.015 (0.015)
Work Commitment Scale					0.021 (0.014)		
Coping ability						0.037** (0.015)	0.034** (0.015)
Cooperativeness						0.005 (0.015)	
Adj.-R^2	0.024	0.023	0.028	0.026	0.025	0.029	0.030
F value	3.022	2.931	3.374	3.152	3.071	3.259	3.327
Panel B							
Anxiety and depression	−0.013 (0.014)						
Mental health		0.006 (0.014)					
Physical health			0.020 (0.014)				
Overall health				0.015 (0.014)			0.009 (0.014)
Work Commitment Scale					0.018 (0.014)		
Coping ability						0.022 (0.015)	0.020 (0.015)
Cooperativeness						0.002 (0.015)	
N persons	1,061	1,061	1,061	1,061	1,061	1,061	1,061
Adj.-R^2	0.064	0.064	0.066	0.065	0.065	0.065	0.066
F value	4.040	4.014	4.097	4.056	4.084	3.961	3.975

Notes: Results from linear probability models; coefficients of z-standardized variables; standard errors in parentheses; constant not shown; significance levels: * p < 0.10, ** p < 0.05, and *** p < 0.01. The results from logistic and sequential logistic regression do not differ substantially (Table A7 in the Supplementary File shows results from logistic regressions; results from sequential logistic regressions are available upon request); full regression results appear in Table A4 of the Supplementary File. Panel A controls for sociodemographics (social origin, birth year, gender, migration background, and East Germany dummy variable) and mode effects. Panel B additionally controls for educational level, educational performance, second VET, and learning environment (training firm size and mean wage level training firm). Source: Jugalo Study (Dietrich, 2018).

Regarding personality disorders, only coping abilities are positively related to finding a decent first job. When investigating the joint predictive power of overall health and coping abilities (Table 3, full model), the findings suggest that only coping abilities are statistically significantly associated with transitions to a decent first job. While the coefficient of overall health is reduced by almost half, that of coping ability is only slightly affected.

Panel B of Table 3 shows the results of models considering educational outcomes and training firm characteristics. This part of Table 3 indicates that after additionally accounting for school performance, educational

degree, and training firm characteristics, the coefficients of all constructs are significantly reduced and are no longer statistically significant. Given the empirical evidence that good training firms (i.e., firms that invest in the human capital of their apprentices) lead to high wages after graduation (see, for instance, Dietrich et al., 2016), these findings strongly suggest that individuals with good overall health and high levels of coping ability exhibit good schooling outcomes and are selected into firms that provide a smooth transition into the labor market. Thus, since starting points in the labor market are crucial for career development (e.g., Scherer, 2004), selection based on health and coping abilities after individuals finish general schooling has the potential to introduce long-term inequality within labor markets.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

This study uses a novel dataset that combines both survey and register data to investigate how noncognitive and socioemotional factors relate to training-to-employment outcomes among graduates of apprenticeships. The study reveals the following main results.

First, while mental and overall health, personality disorders, and work commitment are not associated with finding a first job within six months, physical health does appear to be important for such transitions. Second, the overall health of individuals is positively correlated with finding a first job without employment interruptions even in models conditioned on preselection variables (i.e., schooling outcomes and training firm characteristics). Moreover, our results indicate that the association between personality traits and gapless transitions appears to be mediated by individuals' schooling outcomes and firm characteristics. For gapless training-to-employment transitions, work commitment appears to be unimportant. Third, while mental health, cooperativeness, and work commitment are not associated with transitions to decent first jobs, overall health and coping abilities appear to be important. However, models that include overall health and coping abilities suggest that only coping abilities demonstrate a statistically significant association in this context. Additionally, preselection variables mediate the association between coping abilities and transitions to a decent first job.

In sum, our findings provide hints regarding a double disadvantage for low-achieving youth (Jacob & Solga, 2015) in the German apprenticeship system. A potential double disadvantage occurs because of the independent effects of health and personality measures on training-to-employment transition outcomes even when we condition on preselection variables. If the disadvantage-generating process was solely the result of selection into training, we would not find any statistically significant associations at the time of labor market entry. However, since we continue to find independent effects, particularly in the cases of physical and overall health, in models that are conditioned on selection into educational outcomes and training firms, these findings suggest a double disadvantage for individuals with health impairments. Thus, future work should investigate the interaction effects among schooling outcomes, firms, and noncognitive and socioemotional factors further. In general, our findings imply that since starting points in labor markets are crucial for career development (e.g., Scherer, 2004), selection based on noncognitive and socioemotional factors after individuals finish their general schooling has the potential to introduce long-term inequalities.

Overall, our results suggest that noncognitive and socioemotional constructs have the potential to shed new light on school-to-work transitions. Moreover, our findings indicate that job centers should acknowledge these factors. In addition, officers from job centers, policy makers, and other practitioners should become more aware of young people's mental health issues and provide needs-oriented guidance and counseling activities. Moreover, more findings from the research focused on noncognitive and socioemotional factors in training-to-work transitions should be acknowledged when designing new labor market schemes to support adolescents' integration into training and employment (Reissner et al., 2014).

A shortcoming of our study is that we cannot control for preselection in early childhood or during general schooling. Research has shown that both factors are highly important in explaining health selection (e.g., McLeod & Fettes, 2007). However, we continue to find associations even when controlling for school grades and educational degrees, which indicates that some of the constructs used by our study have additional explanatory power. Moreover, we consider only a short-term perspective. Future work should adopt a medium- and long-term perspective. Additionally, future work should incorporate individuals from school-based training and higher education to validate the study's main findings further.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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