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# Some Things Never Change: Youth and Occupational Preferences

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to study patterns of occupational preferences among young people in Norway. What do they consider important when they are planning their future occupation? Are their preferences the result of gender, residence or the education of their father? There are different ways of understanding the formation of individual preferences and values. Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus is a perspective where such preferences are considered to be the products of structural variables such as educational background, geographical background and gender. As an alternative, a perspective is presented where the underlying assumption is that such determinants have ceased to function and individual freedom is central. In the second part of the article, empirical data are used to test the hypotheses posed by these two opposing perspectives. The data are from a survey conducted among upper secondary school pupils in Norway. The pupils were asked what they regarded as important and less important when choosing their future occupation. The results indicate that, although many pupils embrace post-material values such as self-realization, others think differently. Some of the differences may be explained by educational background and gender. This leads to the conclusion that both perspectives, structural reproduction and individual freedom, are justified when modern society is being discussed.

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## 1. Introduction

Choosing their future occupation is one of the most significant decisions young people face. For most people this choice will determine what their everyday lives will be like for the next 30–40 years. It will lay the premises for their living standard and social status, and – according to theories of social reproduction – it may even influence the probability of success for their children when they grow up. In this article I discuss the kinds of preferences young people consider important when they are planning their future occupation. I also investigate whether these are the results of structural variables, such as educational background and gender.

To set the theoretical scene for this subject matter, I first present different ways of understanding how the preferences and values of individuals are formed. Are they products of structural variables such as educational background, geographical background and gender, or has the influence of these 'old-fashioned' determinants been replaced by more individualized preferences? In the second part of the article, I test alternative hypotheses using data from a survey conducted among upper secondary school pupils in Norway. The theoretical outlines and the empirical analyses are discussed further in the final part of the article. Here I seek to de-emphasize the apparently dramatic differences between structural and individualistic perspectives, and aim to show

that both have justification in discussions concerning modern society.

## 2. Theoretical issues

### ***Occupational preferences as a product of structural variables: direct and indirect encounters***

In sociological theory, work and the functional differentiation of society based on the division of labour traditionally constituted the main parameters for analysing societies and actors in Western industrial societies (Casey 1995; Kumar 1995). Marx, Weber and Durkheim analysed societies where the social basis was organized around the productive economic activities of the people, with an extended division of labour and a rationalization of economic and social processes (Casey 1995). The relationship between work and identity has long been taken for granted, and has been the focus of several social scientists (Baethge et al. 1988; Baethge 1992; Casey 1995). Casey formulates it in the following manner:

In modern society people have defined themselves, and in turn been socially defined, by the type of work that they do in the public sphere. Work that is socially determined and usually paid for in the form of a wage or salary has been a primary factor in socialization, in social cohesion and personal identity formation in modern societies. (Casey 1995:28)

If we envisage this connection as a confrontation between an actor and a social field, it may be direct or indirect.

Direct confrontation refers to what we usually know as work socialization. In a work situation, participants are socialized into the present culture of the workplace, and may come to identify themselves with it, its culture and their fellow workers. Sverre Lysgaard (1967) has given a comprehensive description of this process in his book *Arbeiderkollektivet* (The Collectivity of Workers). Direct confrontation usually takes place after the completion of an education – short or long. That is, it takes place in a life stage beyond that in which the upper secondary school pupils in my survey are at the moment. Even though they may, of course, already have experienced working life through evening and weekend employment, and summer jobs, it is not likely that this experience will represent a major identity-forming factor, at least not to the extent of the work experience

they will encounter later in life, when work has become their primary endeavour. Despite evening employment at a hamburger stand, their 'we' will probably still include classmates rather than fellow workers at the chip counter.

The logic of indirect confrontation is different as it takes place long before direct confrontation is even a conceived possibility. Indirect confrontation begins as the actor is introduced into a social space as a social actor for the first time, i.e. in early childhood, and is related to both the acquisition of cultural capital and the constitution of a *habitus*, in the sense of Bourdieu (1990b). It refers to how youngsters first encounter work through their immediate social environment – usually that of their parents. That is, they encounter work indirectly through the direct experience gained by their parents within their field of work. Even though indirect confrontation takes place long before the youngster is introduced into working life, it has the potential to determine where and how consequent encounters between actor and work will take place.

Indirect confrontation creates orientations, preferences and attitudes towards work, and these are consequently structurally determined. It does not, however, have ramifications only for orientations relating to work, but also for most areas where structurally determined attitudes are expressed. The functional differentiation of society will be a starting-point for the identity of the individual, and indirect confrontation sets the analytical scene for a number of identity-related areas.

Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* may serve as a conceptual tool for an analysis of occupational preferences in a perspective where both direct and indirect confrontation are important. *Habitus* may be regarded as the product of the latter. It is most easily defined as a system of dispositions that monitor the actions of the actor. Individuals acquire these dispositions through their early childhood experiences, and the *habitus* is therefore a product of biographical experience (Bourdieu 1993:46) and, as such, is unique for each individual. However, one may talk about classes of childhood experiences. That is, some experiences may be the products of how the parents are positioned within a social field, and children within a specific social segment may therefore have certain experiences in common. *Habitus* is formed when we acquire knowledge about the world that surrounds us, and this knowledge has already been structured by others, usually

our parents. The child will therefore, so to speak, 'adopt' the world as it is perceived by his or her parents, and Bourdieu (1977:72) therefore states that habitus is structured structures. At the same time, it is unique to each individual and is shared by groups of people. According to Bourdieu, habitus is the motor behind all action and the unit that generates action. Different life conditions will produce different habitus. The world is perceived differently according to one's position within the social structure. Attitudes in regard to the educational system are part of this specific perception. Individuals from different social classes will not, according to Bourdieu (1977), have the same 'objective probability' of succeeding within the educational system; that is, the percentage of individuals from lower classes who attend higher education is lower than the corresponding number of individuals from higher classes. This is a fact that is intuitively felt by members of the different classes, and they will have a collective knowledge of how far they are able to go within the educational system. Differences in habitus between individuals from different social backgrounds in this way create differences in occupational preferences. Children from low social backgrounds are more likely to 'know' that they do not have the possibility to succeed within the educational system and will therefore more readily desist from developing preferences that are attached to the educational system. This does not mean that lower-class individuals do not recognize the type of values that are part of the cultural capital in a society. They do, but they just do not recognize them as part of their own lives. Or as Paul Willis expresses it in his book about working-class boys in an industrial city in England, their own culture makes it clear that 'this is not for them' (Willis 1977).

### ***Occupational preferences in post-industrial society***

The paradigm of the social and cultural basis of society as being organized around economic production is an understanding of the world that has been challenged over and over again in recent decades. Alternative concepts include the post-industrial society, the information society, the post-Fordist society and the postmodern society. What is behind these terms is a shared assumption that Western industrial societies in recent decades have witnessed technological and social development of such a magnitude that it justifies claims about a qualitatively new

society. The changes that have taken place within the field of production are probably most striking, and several social scientists have also claimed that the role of work in the lives of individuals has changed (Bell 1978; Lasch 1991; Ziehe 1993). Based on considerable changes within the productive sphere, including increasing and continuing unemployment, Catherine Casey (1995) asks whether it is still possible to conceive of work as a fundamental basis for social organization and a primary constituent of self-formation as it has been during the entire modern industrial era. She claims that the post-industrial condition has led to a dissolution of both traditional and modern bindings related to social solidarity and a metamorphosis of the character of the modern self. Baethge et al. (1988) claim that the societal conditions under which individuals now live are to a decreasing degree controlled by the norms within the field of work. This development induces changes in the normative foundation of society, in the structures of needs and motivations felt by individuals and in their modes of conduct, and several theorists have therefore claimed that the formation of identity is about to be liberated from the work role (e.g. Beck 1984). In other words, the significance of both the direct and the indirect encounter for identity formation has been at least considerably reduced. Pierre Bourdieu (1990a) sees an emergence of new attitudes towards work, which, he says:

are sometimes described, with great naivety, as an 'allergy to work', and which are evident in the dying-out of any pride in one's trade, of any sense of professional honour, or any liking for a task well done, etc. (pp. 89–90)

Whereas people used to spend the majority of their waking hours at work, work for the modern person is only one of several important arenas of life. Obviously, this does not mean that work is no longer important, and for some groups of people it may even be a more significant part of life than it used to be. However, considerable changes seem to have taken place. Whereas work used to be first and foremost a means of gaining material subsistence, it now has other functions, too, which have more to do with other dimensions in life. Almås (1997) discusses this in terms of a deterioration of the Protestant work ethic. He claims that work has lost its status; from being the central leitmotif for practically everyone across genders and generations, it has become a

secondary motive of less importance. A Protestant work ethic is noticeably absent in the youngest generation, and we have moved from a society where the emphasis was on hard work, moderation and self-discipline to one where the realization of the individual, expression and intimacy have come to the fore (Almås 1997). According to Almås, young people look upon work as a means for consumption, entertainment and individual development, and not as an end in itself. Bourdieu (1984) believes this change to be part of a more general shift in morality:

Thus, whereas the old morality of duty, based on the opposition between pleasure and good, induces a generalized suspicion of the 'charming and attractive', a fear of pleasure and a relation to the body made up of 'reserve', 'modesty' and 'restraint', and associates every satisfaction of the forbidden impulses with guilt, the new ethical avant-garde urges a morality of pleasure as a duty. (p. 367)

All this means that direct confrontation has lost its identity-forming power. Logically, this must imply that indirect confrontation is also in a state of decline, or soon will be, and several social theorists have claimed that this is the case. Ulrich Beck employs the concept of individualization to describe the developmental features pertaining to loss of traditions in modern society (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 1996). According to Beck, the modern individual is increasingly disintegrated from formerly existing social forms such as social class and status, gender roles or family. The relationships of your parents to their work and the experience they acquire through their working life thus become less important when you make your own choice.

The German sociologist Martin Baethge (1988) points out that, as a result of a delayed introduction into working life, young people are confronted with the business norms of purposive economic rationality at a relatively late stage in life. They will therefore experience an extended period during which errors and failures are met with greater tolerance than would be possible within job situations. In addition, they spend more time in learning situations that are disassociated from practice, with their peers and in circumstances that contribute to the development of an individual rather than a collective code of performance, and in individual identity-forming patterns. Baethge refers to this shift as a move from productionist to consu-

merist socialization, and claims that this restructuring of the field of youth experience has had an impact on the development, conduct and opinions of young people and their attitudes towards society and work (Baethge 1988). Young people acquire what Baethge calls a more normative orientation towards work. To explain this development, Johan Fornäs (1995) also stresses increased material welfare. He claims that welfare creates time, space and raw material for cultural practice, and a growing economic well-being in certain social strata has made it possible for some people to put more energy into 'post-material' needs and interests.

### **From work to leisure**

Several authors believe that the leisure arena has replaced work and production in processes connected with identity formation. According to Claus Offe (1985), leisure is increasingly important in the lives of modern individuals, whereas the working sphere has become correspondingly less important. The leisure arena demands other kinds of experience, orientation and needs than those that are significant within the field of work. The values and norms that are present in the leisure arena become the values and norms of society as a whole, and these are characterized by an emphasis on fun and self-indulgence instead of performance and duty. Zukin (1992) claims that as more and more people become employed in the service sector, it might be expected that they will distinguish their 'real' or 'genuine' identities from the form of production in which they are employed. Other forms of identities become more important; for example identities attached to a particular hobby.

Young people as a group are often awarded a cardinal role in this new world. They are believed to be the carriers of the spirit of the time, the *Zeitgeists* (Ziehe 1993), and changes in patterns of identity, norms and conduct are believed to originate in the younger generations. Paul Willis (1990) regards identity formation as a kind of symbolic work that requires space for creativity and freedom, something that paid work usually is unable to offer young people. He says that their jobs are often poorly paid, insecure and ungratifying, because they usually have no control over the tasks or how to execute them. To the extent that symbolic work actually exists in the workplace, it is not an intrinsic part of the work itself. Instead, it may be connected with the efforts of

the workers to make their work meaningful or find compensation for its lack of meaning. Hence, Willis claims that informal arenas such as the leisure arena therefore become increasingly important for identity formation. The leisure arena is where growing up takes place and where actors are creating and internalizing new identities.

Modern society offers individuals a wide variety of possibilities and choices, a condition that presents them with a number of new challenges. Almost everything seems to be open for the modern individual to reflect upon and then decide amongst. The individual is not only able to choose between a wide range of options, but is also forced to do so with a new kind of reflection. According to Ziehe (1993), this leads to a new kind of 'makeability', by which he means that it seems possible to create everything. The individual becomes, so to speak, the creator of his or her own world. It is no longer possible to say that things are as they are because they are inherited or endowed by nature. However, this idea of a range of options may often exist merely at the level of awareness. The individual is aware that these options exist, but whether he or she is actually in a position to make use of them is quite a different matter. Ziehe claims that, as a consequence, a gap in expectations between dreams and reality evolves, which is growing in modern society. Whereas lower-class individuals, in the opinion of Bourdieu and Willis, will not hope for something they cannot have, Ziehe's modern individuals live in a world where the guiding principle is that everyone can have anything.

### **Women and work**

Gender has always been an important factor when matters relating to work and education have been discussed. The labour market is still astonishingly gender differentiated. Rose Laub Coser (1991) explains this in terms of what she calls the cultural mandate of women. According to Coser, throughout their early lives at home and in school, women learn that their commitment to values differs from that of men. The woman is to be the caretaker of the family. This is the cultural mandate of women, and it puts them in a premodern role. Coser points out that, although it has now become acceptable for women to seek careers, the term 'career woman' still has a negative connotation. Girls do not have choice of occupation in the forefront of their consciousness with the same intensity as boys do, and the formation of a girl's identity

as a woman does not depend as much on her future occupation as does the formation of a boy's identity. Even though girls may have to make choices that affect their futures, they are usually convinced that having and caring for a family is the most important thing for them to do. As a result of this, Coser believes that only the over-achievers among the girls will aim high within the field of work.

Coser's statements may, however, seem somewhat old-fashioned. Modern society confronts its members with a number of new challenges, some of which are specifically defiant for girls. According to Almås (1995), young people today are career conscious, and further education is no longer a question of choice but is essential if they are to succeed in the labour market. This is also true for girls. Women are expected to educate themselves, make a career and earn a living (Roalsø 1994; Holstein-Beck 1995). Furthermore, the majority of girls grow up with working mothers as role models. It may therefore be claimed that present-day girls have a 'natural' relationship to work, and being part of working life is the obvious choice for most. Holstein-Beck (1995) claims, however, that despite these changes the gender system continues to exist. Young girls meet many of the same expectations regarding family responsibilities as the previous generation had to face. As a result, modern girls are expected to be able to combine the role of being the centre of the family with a working role. Holstein-Beck therefore claims that girls must make decisions about education and occupation in a way that will enable future employment to be combined with motherhood. At the same time as they consider their choice of education, they must consider their future family role. Hence, in the view of Holstein-Beck, the fate of the modern woman is to belong to two groups with basically antagonistic norms and interests. Whereas Coser seems to claim that the primary task of women is still to take care of family responsibilities, Holstein-Beck argues that the two separate worlds of home and work are equally entitled to demand the undivided attention of women. This situation supposedly creates a new, problematic tension in the lives of modern women.

I will now move on to present the results of an analysis of data from a survey of Norwegian upper secondary school pupils. The pupils were asked to rank the importance of different issues relating to their choice of future occupation. Some of these issues are directly related to the

nature of the work; for example they are asked to rank the importance of the job being interesting in itself. The pupils are also asked to rank the importance of features that are indirectly related to the nature of the work; for example the importance of income or advancement opportunities. And finally, the pupils are asked to rank the importance of issues that have nothing to do with the work in itself; for example whether it is important that the job can be combined with family life. Background variables under consideration are gender, region and father's education. The following research questions will be pursued:

- What do young people consider important when they choose their future occupation?
- Do their preferences depend on background variables such as gender, geographical background or parental education?

### 3. Empirical section

#### **The study**

The study was conducted in 19 schools in 11 local authorities in the county of Troms, the second northernmost county in Norway. The remaining 14 local authorities in the county do not have upper secondary schools, and pupils usually attend a neighbouring one. In Norway, about 96 per cent of adolescents continue from lower to upper secondary school (Statistics Norway 1999). Upper secondary schools are both academically and vocationally oriented, offering 3-year courses to pupils usually in the age range of 15–19 years. The survey took place among final-year pupils (VK2 courses) in 1998, and was a self-report survey administered at the schools by the teachers. The pupils completed the questionnaires anonymously.

Out of a total of approximately 1,245 pupils, 902 were selected through a random sampling procedure, 746 of whom actually completed the questionnaire. The sampling procedure was designed to generate a representative sample of final-year upper secondary school pupils in Troms. With a response rate of approximately 83 per cent, representative results can be expected.

#### **The measures**

*Region.* This variable is measured as 'urban' versus 'rural', and was coded so that 'urban'

comprised students from the two towns in Troms, Harstad and Tromsø.

*Father's education.* This variable is measured in four categories. In the lowest category, the father has only primary and lower secondary school education, usually 9 years or less. In the next category, the father also has upper secondary school education, usually giving an additional 3 years. In the third category, the father has a further 4 years or less of college or university education. In the highest category, the father has college or university education amounting to 5 years or more.

*Work preference.* To grasp this concept I have constructed four dimensions, each expressing something about the direction in which preferences lay. These preference dimensions were generated through factor analysis, where 13 variables were reduced to 4 factors. The results are presented in the Appendix. The factors show underlying patterns that describe different approaches to the choice of occupation made by the pupils. The first dimension deals with the extent to which they feel that *altruistic* aspects are important when choosing an occupation. Respondents who report that dealing with people is very important or that they have a strong desire to help other people score high on altruism. The second dimension explicates how important it is to make a career. This dimension has been called the *career-oriented dimension*, and respondents who emphasize high income, steady employment, and good future prospects and opportunities for advancement achieve high scores here. The third dimension relates to whether an occupation is chosen for reasons of safety or comfort; for example that the job is in the home place, or that one knows many people with the same occupation, or that the occupation is popular. The last dimension covers the importance of having a free and independent job situation, and the extent to which the work itself is interesting. I have called this the *self-realization dimension*.

#### **Empirical results**

In Table 1 it is shown how the pupils responded when asked to rank different factors that might affect their choice of occupation.

More than one-third of the pupils consider interesting work to be the most important factor when they choose their future occupation. However, steady employment and income are also regarded as important aspects. In addition, for some pupils, the occupational choices are

Table 1. Responses to the question 'What is most important, second most important, least important and second least important when you choose an occupation?' (percentages,  $n = 746$ ).

	Most important	Second most important	Least important	Second least important
Income	14.3	23.3	0.6	0.4
Steady employment	21.6	18.5	0.4	0.6
Good future prospects/opportunities for advancement	4.9	7.6	1.8	0.4
Able to get work where I live now	1.7	3.2	12.2	13.2
Free and independent work situation	4.7	7.3	0.7	1.7
Possible to combine with family life	7.4	9.8	1.7	2.0
Know people with the same occupation		0.1	24.5	29.3
Interesting work	36.5	16.7	0.3	0.7
Popular occupation		0.4	35.7	25.6
Enjoy dealing with people	2.9	5.2	2.3	2.4
Enjoy technical work	0.1	0.8	15.6	13.9
Enjoy practical work	0.8	2.4	0.4	3.7
Desire to help other people	5.0	4.6	3.8	6.1
Total $n$	718	713	711	704

influenced by how compatible the job is with family life. Few seem to regard the popularity of the occupation they choose as important, nor do they believe it is important to know other people in the same occupation. Few seem to think it is important that work is available where they live (2 per cent).

To investigate this further, I used a linear regression analysis to analyse how the preference dimensions (factor scores) relate to the variables of gender, geographical background and parental education. The analyses are presented in Table 2. Model 4 in Table 2 concerns interaction analyses of independent variables, and is only included in a panel in the Table where interactions between independent variables are significant. Model 1 in Table 2 demonstrates that gender is a powerful predictor of emphasis on altruistic values. Thus, the choices made by girls tend to be much more influenced by altruistic motives than those of boys. Hence, girls on average are more inclined to have their choices influenced by a desire to help others, a wish to work with people, and so forth. This model accounts for almost 20 per cent of the explained variance. The regional variable was added in Model 2. While gender remains a significant predictor after controlling for this variable, the urban-rural dimension does not have any significant net effect on emphasis on altruistic values when controlling for gender. Finally, in Model 3, I added the father's level of education, which does not have a significant net effect on emphasis on altruistic values when controlling for gender and region.

The inclusion of the structural variables, region and father's education, increases the variance explained by only 0.7 per cent beyond the effect of gender. Therefore, gender proves to be the most important predictor of emphasis on altruistic values. Model 4 shows the interaction effects between the independent variables. The model indicates that there is interaction between gender and father's education when predicting altruism. Further inspection of the gender\*father's education interaction revealed that girls whose fathers have a low level of education obtain higher scores on the altruistic dimension than girls whose fathers have a high level of education. The distinction is greatest between those whose fathers have a college or university education and those whose fathers lack any form of higher education.

Concerning career orientation, Model 1 in Table 2 demonstrates that gender is a significant predictor of emphasis put on career-oriented values, i.e. boys put more emphasis on career-oriented values than girls. The regional variable was added in Model 2. While gender remains a significant predictor when controlling for this variable, region does not have any net effect on emphasis on career-oriented values after controlling for gender. Finally, in Model 3, father's level of education was added, but this does not have a net effect on emphasis on career-oriented values when controlling for gender and region. Model 4 indicates that there is interaction between gender and region when predicting career orientation. Inspection of the gender\*region interaction revealed that boys from rural

Table 2. Occupational preference dimensions regressed on gender, region and father's education (n = 746)<sup>a</sup>

	Altruism				Career orientation				Safety/comfort				Self-realization			
	Model 1 $\beta$	Model 2 $\beta$	Model 3 $\beta$	Model 4 $\beta$	Model 1 $\beta$	Model 2 $\beta$	Model 3 $\beta$	Model 4 $\beta$	Model 1 $\beta$	Model 2 $\beta$	Model 3 $\beta$	Model 4 $\beta$	Model 1 $\beta$	Model 2 $\beta$	Model 3 $\beta$	Model 4 $\beta$
(Constant)	1.26***	1.34***	1.44***	1.58**	-0.25*	-0.20	-0.12	1.24*	-0.049***	-0.27	0.02	0.16	0.029	0.04		
Gender <sup>b</sup>	-0.92***	-0.93***	-0.92***	-0.85**	0.18*	0.17*	0.14	-0.55	0.36***	0.32***	0.34***	-0.12	-0.13	-0.19*		
Region <sup>c</sup>		-0.03	-0.03	0.16	-0.03	-0.03	-0.04	-0.76**		-0.11	-0.15		-0.07	-0.03		
Father's education			-0.05	-0.35*			-0.00	-0.25			-0.11**			0.13**		
INTERACTION TERMS																
Gender*father's education				0.14*				0.05								
Region*father's education				0.06				0.10								
Region*gender				-0.25				0.35*								
R <sup>2</sup>	0.20	0.20	0.20	0.21	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.03	0.03	0.04	0.00	0.01	0.02		
F	169.22***	85.86***	54.86***	28.88***	5.29*	2.55	1.08	1.63	21.33***	9.62***	8.59***	2.26	1.61	4.59**		

\* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001

<sup>a</sup> All coefficients are unstandardized.

<sup>b</sup> Girls = 0 and boys = 1.

<sup>c</sup> Urban = 0 and rural = 1.

Table 3. Distribution (per cent) of academic groups according to the educational level of the father. Percentages ( $n = 746$ ).

Father's education	Academic groups					Total
	Humanities	Care-related <sup>a</sup>	Vocational <sup>b</sup>	Other academic subjects <sup>c</sup>	Music/athletics <sup>d</sup>	
<b>Girls*</b>						
Primary/lower secondary	36.8	30.3	2.6	21.7	8.6	152
Upper secondary	45.8	20.9	2.0	24.2	7.2	153
Univ./college 1	60.0	8.6		23.8	7.6	105
Univ./college 2	83.8	5.4		2.7	8.1	37
Total <i>n</i>	220	89	7	96	35	447
<b>Boys**</b>						
Primary/lower secondary	47.5	1.6	18.0	19.7	13.1	61
Upper secondary	36.7	5.6	15.6	20.0	22.2	90
Univ./college 1	65.3	2.8	6.9	12.5	12.5	72
Univ./college 2	78.9		5.3	2.6	13.2	38
Total <i>n</i>	139	8	32	40	42	261

\*  $\chi^2 = 46.049$ ;  $df = 12$ ;  $p = 0.000$ .

\*\*  $\chi^2 = 30.354$ ;  $df = 12$ ;  $p = 0.002$ .

<sup>a</sup> Includes the following subjects: pharmacy assistant, decorator, gardener, medical secretary, assistant nurse (SEN), aesthetic subjects.

<sup>b</sup> Includes the following subjects: electronics/sound/picture, aerotechnical subjects, maps and surveying, nautical subjects, radar systems.

<sup>c</sup> Includes the following subjects: supplementary humanities subjects, economy and administration.

<sup>d</sup> Includes the following subjects: physical education subjects, music, skiing.

areas obtain higher scores on career orientation than girls from rural areas.

Table 2 further shows that gender is an important predictor of emphasis on safety and comfort values. Boys are more likely to emphasize safety and comfort values than girls. This model accounts for approximately 3 per cent of the explained variance. The regional variable was added in Model 2. While gender remains a significant predictor after controlling for this variable, the urban-rural dimension does not have a net effect on emphasis on safety values when controlling for gender. Finally, in Model 3 I added the father's level of education. Gender remains a significant predictor after controlling for this variable. In addition, a higher educational background of the father predicts less emphasis on safety and comfort. The inclusion of this measure increases the explained variance by 1 per cent. It also reduces the effect of gender.

Considering emphasis on self-realization, Model 1 demonstrates that gender is not a significant predictor. In Model 2 I added the regional variable, which has no effect on emphasis on self-realization after controlling for gender. Finally, in Model 3 I added the

educational level of the father. Gender now becomes a significant predictor, with boys putting less emphasis on self-realization. In addition, when the educational background of the father is higher, emphasis is higher on self-realization. The inclusion of this structural variable increases the variance explained by nearly 2 per cent beyond gender alone. The education of the father therefore proves to be the most important predictor of emphasis on self-realization.

In view of the above results, it is of interest to look at how pupils are distributed academically according to gender and educational background (Table 3). Research repeatedly reveals that the choice of education and occupation differs according to gender. In spite of campaigns and other efforts, girls and boys still largely make traditional gender-specific choices. This is also reflected in the upper secondary school, where we can clearly distinguish between the subjects chosen by girls and boys. In addition to the humanities, girls are mostly found in care-related subjects, whereas boys are strongly over-represented in traditional vocational subjects. Table 3 shows that boys

make up only about 8 per cent of the pupils in care-related subjects, and girls only about 18 per cent of the pupils in vocational subjects. The numbers are even more dramatic if we look at single subjects. For example, according to figures taken from Statistics Norway (1999), 92 per cent of pupils in healthcare subjects are girls, and 98 per cent of pupils in construction and building are boys.

Table 3 also illustrates that there are considerable differences in choice of subjects between pupils from different educational backgrounds. Pupils whose fathers have a higher education chose the humanities more frequently than those whose fathers have a lower educational background, and this difference is greater among girls. In my sample, only 36.8 per cent of girls whose fathers have only the most elementary education chose the humanities, compared with as many as 83.8 per cent of girls whose fathers belong in the highest educational level. Pupils whose fathers have a high educational background rarely chose care-related or vocational subjects. For boys, 18 per cent of those whose fathers belong in the lowest educational level chose vocational subjects, whereas only 5.3 per cent of those whose fathers belong in the highest educational level did so. Whereas more than 30 per cent of girls whose fathers belong in the lowest educational level chose care-related subjects, this was also true for only 5.4 per cent of girls whose fathers belong in the highest educational level.

#### 4. Discussion

The aim of this article was to study patterns of occupational preferences among upper secondary school pupils and investigate whether these are the results of gender, geographical background or parental education. In the first part of the analysis I constructed four preference dimensions (using factor analysis), each describing different approaches to the choice of future occupation. These factors were then used in a series of linear regression models, where I analysed how they related to gender, geographical background and father's education.

In the empirical section we saw that many pupils in the survey considered interesting work to be the most important factor for their choice of occupation. Hence, choice of occupation seems to be closely linked to the desire to be able to express personal interests through work.

Empirical work has enabled several social scientists to detect similar trends, for example Helena Helve (1993) in Finland and Martin Baethge (1988, 1992) in Germany. Helve claims that the values connected with earning a living and material security seem to have given way to values that have to do with human relationships, self-development and the quality of life. As we recall from part 2, Baethge calls this a normative orientation towards work. A Protestant work ethic seems to have given way to more individualized orientations. The background for such a change lies, according to Baethge, in the restructuring of the field of experience of modern youth. Because they choose their occupation at a relatively late stage in life, they will have a longer mental separation from the working sphere compared to young people in earlier times. In a Norwegian upper secondary school setting, this is especially true for pupils studying the humanities. With the exception of a few decisions regarding specific courses, these pupils may very well delay their final decision on occupation until their late teens.

In the empirical section we saw that material preferences are by no means non-existent among the pupils. On the contrary, for a relatively large number of them, income and steady employment are fundamental values when choosing an occupation. Since a number of pupils, in addition, also consider altruistic values to be important, it is obvious that the group of pupils is far from homogeneous, and the education of the father and gender contribute to an explanation of some of the differences within this group.

Social inequalities are well known in the field of educational and occupational choices. As I pointed out in the empirical section, the choice of subject in the upper secondary school seems to be linked to the education of the father. Pupils from high educational backgrounds choose the humanities more frequently than those from lower backgrounds, and they seldom choose care-related or vocational subjects. This implies that upper secondary school pupils from high educational backgrounds are making the kind of choices that will offer them the most immediate and straightforward road to higher education. Studying mainly vocational subjects does not in any formal way exclude the possibility of higher education, but the strong emphasis on in-company training and apprenticeship programmes implies a more direct qualification for working life.

Social differences were also visible in other analyses in the empirical section. I found that pupils from low educational backgrounds put more emphasis on safety and comfort issues and less on self-realization than those from higher educational backgrounds. Safety-conscious, working-class pupils are less likely than others to willingly expose themselves to situations characterized by uncertainty and unpredictability. They will be reluctant to choose professions where such features must be expected. Many professional and managerial jobs will fall into this category (Hyman 1966), and individuals from low social backgrounds will therefore tend to avoid such positions. This also implies that they will avoid the kinds of occupations that normally bring status, money and prestige. A strong preference for safety and comfort issues may in this way function as a barrier for pursuing high-status jobs. This logic led Herbert Hyman (1966) to state that 'within the bounds of the freedom available to individuals, the value system of the lower classes creates a self-imposed barrier to an improved position'. Bourdieu's concept of habitus relates to a similar logic. Attitudes in regard to the educational system are part of the habitus of a person. Children from low social backgrounds are more likely to 'know' that they do not have the possibility to succeed within the educational system, and will therefore more readily desist from developing preferences that are attached to it.

Even though parental education is still an important and interesting factor for understanding individual actions among youth, gender proves to be the most significant factor explaining differences in work preferences. Despite decades of increasing public consciousness about decision-making regarding occupation and education, many girls still choose to aim for low-paid, strenuous work in the caring professions. This is especially true for girls from lower educational backgrounds. The results of the analyses presented in this article, as well as those from several other studies, indicate that the values of girls and boys differ (see, for example, Dahlgren 1979; Sørensen 1982; Helve 1993; Roalsø 1994). I found, for example, that while many girls stress humane values and cherish close contact with other people, many boys tend to emphasize safety and comfort issues and career-related issues. Helena Helve (1993) finds in her studies from Finland that girls and boys seem to request different things from their future professional lives. While girls

find emotional security important, boys value financial and economic security. These values are reflected in their choices and actions.

The differences in occupational preferences that I have uncovered between girls and boys can be understood as a result of differences in habitus. According to Bourdieu, sexual identity is the most important element of social identity (Bourdieu 1990b). Sexual identity is constructed at the same time as the image of the division of labour between the sexes, and it is constructed on the basis of the same socially defined set of biological and social indices. 'In other words,' Bourdieu (1990b:78) says, 'the growth of awareness of sexual identity and the incorporation of the dispositions associated with a particular social definition of the social functions assigned to men and women come hand in hand with the adoption of a socially defined vision of the sexual division of labour.' Thus, in Bourdieu's perspective, the difference between men and women is based on a social imposition, which is founded on the sexual division of labour.

Finally, to sum up the most general conclusions to be drawn from this article: consistent with theories that claim that value systems in contemporary society are largely post-material, I found that non-material preferences are important for many young people. However, whereas geographical background seems to be unimportant, the education of the father and gender appear to have an influence on such preferences, with gender clearly as the more powerful explanatory variable. It is important to bear in mind that these results do not refute notions that background effects have diminished over time. It is evident from my empirical analyses that differences between preferences among pupils from different educational backgrounds are – although statistically significant – relatively small. Gender differences are greater, but even here tendencies toward equalization have been documented historically (Drotner 1993).

In a society where popular opinion moves in the direction of embracing concepts of detachment, freedom and individuality, it is nevertheless crucial to remind ourselves once in a while that the image of modern society has at least two sides. It is equally important to be aware that differences which may disappear in one place, may exist or reappear in another. This is the case when there is no longer any gender difference in who takes part in the educational system, but when there are never-

theless considerable differences in how and where men and women, and students from different educational backgrounds, move and behave within it.

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**Appendix**

*Summary of items and factor loadings for principal component analysis using Varimax rotation with Kaiser Normalization for the question 'How important are the following for your choice of future occupation?' (n = 746).*

Item	Factors				Communality
	Altruism	Career orientation	Safety/comfort	Self-realization	
Income	-0.26	<b>0.76</b>	0.16	0.06	0.67
Steady employment	0.24	<b>0.78</b>	0.01	-0.01	0.66
Good future prospects/opportunities for advancement	0.06	<b>0.77</b>	0.13	0.17	0.65
Able to get work where I live now	0.22	-0.01	<b>0.57</b>	0.06	0.38
Free and independent work situation	-0.13	-0.01	0.22	<b>0.79</b>	0.69
Possible to combine with family life	0.35	0.22	0.20	0.42	0.38
Knows people with the same occupation	0.04	0.07	<b>0.75</b>	0.14	0.58
Interesting work	0.28	0.16	-0.22	<b>0.70</b>	0.65
Popular occupation	-0.00	0.19	<b>0.68</b>	-0.09	0.51
Enjoy dealing with people	<b>0.85</b>	0.01	0.08	0.09	0.73
Enjoy technical work	-0.40	0.31	0.37	0.10	0.40
Enjoy practical work	0.42	0.11	0.31	0.15	0.30
Desire to help other people	<b>0.88</b>	0.00	0.07	0.03	0.78

Boldface indicates highest factor loadings.