

Article

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

Melanie Fischer-Browne

School of Business, Economics and Society, University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, Germany; melanie.m.fischer@fau.de

Submitted: 3 November 2021 | Accepted: 27 April 2022 | Published: 9 June 2022

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

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).

© 2022 by the author(s); licensee Cogitatio (Lisbon, Portugal). This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY).

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 typicality, 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	Chi ²	
Parent's expectation (ref.: congruent with aspiration)	<i>Ref.</i>	0.426	<i>Ref.</i>	0.406	<i>Ref.</i>	
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	Chi ²	
Parent's expectation (ref.: congruent with aspiration)	<i>Ref.</i>	0.308	<i>Ref.</i>	0.255	<i>Ref.</i>	
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	Chi ²	
Parent's expectation (ref.: congruent with aspiration)	<i>Ref.</i>	0.097	<i>Ref.</i>	0.207	<i>Ref.</i>	
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 ($\chi^2 = 2.44$ resp. $\chi^2 = 0.19$).

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 ($\chi^2 = 0.29$). 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 ($\chi^2 = 1.20$).

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 ($\chi^2 = 0.80$ resp. $\chi^2 = 0.85$).

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 aspira-

tions 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.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the two editors Brigitte Schels and Veronika Wöhrer as well as the three anonymous reviewers for their valuable and helpful comments. Earlier versions of this article were presented at the 2020 joint spring conference of the DGS sections "Social Inequality and Social Structure Analysis Section" and "Education and Upbringing" (Bamberg), and at internal seminars at the LfBi (Bamberg) and the Institute for Labor Market and Social Economics at the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg (FAU). I am grateful to all participants for their helpful comments. Lea Ahrens and Jan Gniza deserve special mention. The study is part of the research project Finding Compromises and Its Consequences—Path Dependencies Between Occupational Choices, Educational Decisions and Training Pathways funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG, project number no. 381212222). This is a cooperative project of the FAU and the LfBi.

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).

References

- Ahrens, L., Kleinert, C., Fischer, M., & Schels, B. (2021). Not all wishes come true: The occupational compromises youths accept when entering vocational training. *IAB Forum*. <https://www.iab-forum.de/en/not-all-wishes-come-true-the-occupational-compromises-youths-accept-when-entering-vocational-training>
- Beck, U., Brater, M., & Wegener, B. (1979). Soziale Grenzen beruflicher Flexibilität: Ergebnisse einer empirischen Untersuchung über Probleme der Berufswahl unter Bedingungen knapper Lehrstellen [Social limits to occupational flexibility: Results from an empirical study of occupational choice problems under conditions of scarce apprenticeships]. *Mitteilungen aus der Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung*, 12(4), 584–593.
- Becker, R., & Blossfeld, H.-P. (2017). Entry of men into the labour market in West Germany and their career mobility (1945–2008). *Journal for Labour Market Research*, 50(1), 113–130. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12651-017-0224-6>
- Becker, R., & Blossfeld, H.-P. (2022). Changes in the returns to education at entry into the labour market in West Germany. *Longitudinal and Life Course Studies*, 13(1), 61–86. <https://doi.org/10.1332/175795921X16197756998006>
- Blossfeld, H.-P., Roßbach, H.-G., & von Maurice, J. (Eds.). (2011). Education as a lifelong process—The German National Educational Panel Study (NEPS) [Special issue]. *Zeitschrift Für Erziehungswissenschaft*, 14(2).
- Bryant, B. K., Zvonkovic, A. M., & Reynolds, P. (2006). Parenting in relation to child and adolescent vocational development. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 69(1), 149–175. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2006.02.004>
- Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung. (2019). *Datenreport zum Berufsbildungsbericht 2019: Informationen und Analysen zur Entwicklung der beruflichen Bildung* [Data report on the vocational education and training report 2019: Information and analyses on the development of vocational education and training].
- Creed, P. A., & Blume, K. (2013). Compromise, well-being, and action behaviors in young adults in career transition. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 21(1), 3–19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1069072712453830>
- Dietrich, J., & Kracke, B. (2009). Career-specific parental behaviors in adolescents' development. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 75(2), 109–119. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2009.03.005>
- Dimbath, O. (2003). *Entscheidungen in der individualisierten Gesellschaft: Eine empirische Untersuchung zur Berufswahl in der fortgeschrittenen Moderne* [Decisions in an individualized society: An empirical investigation of occupational choice in advanced modernity]. Westdeutscher Verlag.
- Dombrowski, R. (2015). *Berufswünsche benachteiligter Jugendlicher: Die Konkretisierung der Berufsorientierung gegen Ende der Vollzeitschulpflicht* [Occupational aspirations of disadvantaged adolescents: The concretization of occupational orientation towards the end of full-time compulsory education]. W. Bertelsmann Verlag.
- Eccles, J., & Hoffman, L. W. (1984). Sex roles, socialization, and occupational behavior. In H. W. Stevenson & A. E. Siegel (Eds.), *Child development research and social policy* (pp. 367–420). University of Chicago Press.
- Ernst, V., & Spevacek, G. (2012). *Verbleib von Auszubildenden nach vorzeitiger Vertragslösung: Ergebnisse der IHK-Ausbildungsumfrage 2012* [Retention of trainees after early contract termination: Results of the 2012 IHK training survey]. Hannover. Industrie- und Handelskammer.
- Fobe, K., & Minx, B. (1996). *Berufswahlprozesse im persönlichen Lebenszusammenhang: Jugendliche in Ost und West an der Schwelle von der schulischen in die berufliche Ausbildung* [Occupational choice processes in the personal life context: Adolescents in East and West Germany on the threshold from school to vocational training] (Contribution to Labor Mar-

- ket and Occupational Research No. 196). Institut für Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung.
- Gjerustad, C. (2016). Predicting unemployment: Occupational aspiration-achievement discrepancy as a risk factor in Norwegian young adults. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 25(4), 361–372. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijsw.12211>
- Gottfredson, L. S. (2002). Gottfredson's theory of circumscription, compromise, and self-creation. In D. Brown (Ed.), *The Jossey-Bass business & management series. Career choice and development* (4th ed., pp. 85–148). Jossey-Bass.
- Haller, A. O. (1968). *On the concept of aspiration*. *Rural Sociology*, 33(4), 483–487.
- Hardie, J. H. (2014). The consequences of unrealized occupational goals in the transition to adulthood. *Social Science Research*, 48, 196–211. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2014.06.006>
- Heckhausen, J., & Tomasik, M. J. (2002). Get an apprenticeship before school is out: How German adolescents adjust vocational aspirations when getting close to a developmental deadline. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 60(2), 199–219. <https://doi.org/10.1006/jvbe.2001.1864>
- Kracke, B., & Noack, P. (2005). Die Rolle der Eltern für die Berufsorientierung von Jugendlichen [The role of parents in career guidance for adolescents]. In B. H. Schuster, H. P. Kuhn, & H. Uhlendorff (Eds.), *Entwicklung in sozialen Beziehungen: Heranwachsende in ihrer Auseinandersetzung mit Familie, Freunden und Gesellschaft* [Developments in social relationships: Adolescents in their engagement with family, friends, and society] (pp. 169–194). De Gruyter.
- Küllchen, H. (1997). *Zwischen Bildungserfolg und Karriereskepsis: Zur Berufsfindung junger Frauen mit mathematisch-naturwissenschaftlichen Interessen* [Between educational success and career skepticism: On the occupational choices of young women with interests in math and science]. Kleine Verlag.
- Makarova, E., & Herzog, W. (2014). Geschlechtsuntypische Berufswahlen bei jungen Frauen: Muss das Vorbild weiblich sein? [Gender-atypical occupational choices among young women: Does the role model have to be female?]. *Zeitschrift Für Soziologie der Erziehung und Sozialisation*, 34(1), 38–54.
- Maschetzke, C. (2009). Die Bedeutung der Eltern im Prozess der Berufsorientierung [The importance of parents in the process of career guidance]. In M. Oechsle, H. Knauf, C. Maschetzke, & E. Rosowski (Eds.), *Abitur und was dann?* [Abitur and then what?] (pp. 181–228). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-91750-4_6
- Müller, W., & Shavit, Y. (Eds.). (1998). *From school to work: A comparative study of educational qualifications and occupational destinations*. Clarendon Press.
- NEPS Network. (2019). *National Educational Panel Study: Scientific use file of starting cohort grade 9*. Leibniz Institute for Educational Trajectories (LIfBi). <https://doi.org/10.5157/NEPS:SC4:10.0>
- Paulus, W., & Matthes, B. (2013). *Klassifikation der Berufe. Struktur, Codierung und Umsteigeschlüssel* [Classification of occupations. Structure, coding, and changeover key] (FDZ Method Report No. 08). Forschungsdatenzentrum der Bundesagentur für Arbeit im Institut für Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung.
- Pruisken, H. (2018). Der Einfluss der Eltern auf die Realisierung beruflicher Ziele von Jugendlichen [Parents' influence on the realization of adolescents' career goals]. *Arbeit*, 27(1), 27–47. <https://doi.org/10.1515/arbeit-2018-0003>
- Pruisken, H., Golsch, K., & Diewald, M. (2016). Berufliche Aspirationen von Jugendlichen als Ergebnis geschlechtsspezifischer elterlicher Ungleichbehandlung [Adolescents' occupational aspirations as a result of gendered parental inequality]. *Zeitschrift für Familienforschung*, 28(1), 65–86. <https://doi.org/10.3224/zff.v28i1.22921>
- Sawitri, D. R. (2019). Career congruence with parents from the perspective of gender. In *Proceedings of the 1st annual international conference on social sciences and humanities (AICOSH 2019)*. Atlantis Press. <https://doi.org/10.2991/aicosh-19.2019.51>
- Sawitri, D. R., Creed, P. A., & Zimmer-Gembeck, M. J. (2013). The adolescent–parent career congruence scale. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 21(2), 210–226. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1069072712466723>
- Sawitri, D. R., Creed, P. A., & Zimmer-Gembeck, M. J. (2014). Parental influences and adolescent career behaviours in a collectivist cultural setting. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance*, 14(2), 161–180. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10775-013-9247-x>
- Schels, B., & Abraham, M. (2021). Adaptation to the market? Status differences between target occupations in the application process and realized training occupation of German adolescents. *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13636820.2021.1955403>
- Schoon, I., & Parsons, S. (2002). Teenage aspirations for future careers and occupational outcomes. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 60(2), 262–288. <https://doi.org/10.1006/jvbe.2001.1867>
- Schulenberg, J. E., Vondracek, F. W., & Crouter, A. C. (1984). The influence of the family on vocational development. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 46(1). <https://doi.org/10.2307/351871>
- Sewell, W. H., Haller, A. O., & Portes, A. (1969). The educational and early occupational attainment process. *American Sociological Review*, 34(1). <https://doi.org/10.2307/2092789>
- Wang, L.-F., & Heppner, P. P. (2002). Assessing the impact of parental expectations and psychological distress on Taiwanese college students. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 30(4), 582–608. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00100002030004006>

Wegener, B. (1992). Concepts and measurement of prestige. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 18(1), 253–280. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.so.18.080192.001345>

Zinn, S., Würbach, A., Steinhauer, H. W., & Hammon,

A. (2020). Attrition and selectivity of the NEPS starting cohorts: An overview of the past 8 years. *AStA Wirtschafts- und Sozialstatistisches Archiv*, 14(2), 163–206. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11943-020-00268-7>

About the Author



Melanie Fischer-Browne (MA in sociology) was a research associate at the Assistant Professorship for Labor Market Sociology at the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg (FAU) from 2018 to 2022. Since 2022, she has been a research associate at the LfBi in Bamberg. Her research focuses on the role of social and regional inequalities in school-to-work transitions.