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# Drawn to work: what makes apprenticeship training an attractive choice for the working-class

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## ABSTRACT

The article investigates mechanisms of class reproduction by looking at school-to-work transitions of young blue-collar workers from Austria. The study adopts a Bourdieusian explanatory framework to show how working-class kids are guided towards picking up apprenticeship training instead of pursuing further education. Two classed dispositions are presented as a crucial influence: first, a preference for practical and manual labour. Second, the embodiment of wage labour not only as an economic necessity but as a foundation for recognition and appreciation. The results point to the importance of analysing educational decision-making not only in the context of the educational system but also with regard to the labour market and the different values and meanings attached to both spheres.

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School-to-work-transition; working-class youth; manual labour; habitus; social reproduction

## Introduction

The working class has been receiving much attention in the sociology of education but also in youth and transitions research. Whereas working-class kids have often been discussed in the context of educational failure and experiences of devaluation and disappointment (e.g. MacDonald and Marsh 2004) in recent years a considerable number of studies have explored the likelihood but also burden of social mobility and academic success (e.g. Reay, Crozier, and Clayton 2009; Kupfer 2015). In this debate, the constraints pushing working-class kids away from school have attracted widespread attention. The mechanisms pulling them towards picking up employment as early as possible and making it a desirable choice, however, remain underexplored since Paul Willis famous study 'Learning to Labour' (1977) or the 'Young Workers' (1975) study from David N. Ashton and David Field, as Atkins noted (2017). Yet, those mechanisms are crucial to understanding educational decision-making processes and how they are contributing to the reproduction of social inequalities in general and occupational positions more specifically (Roberts 2009).

Transitions from school to work mark a crucial phase in individuals' life and are a promising biographical-turning point to explore the influence of social class on trajectories and educational decision-making. The article draws on cases taken from a research project on young industrial blue-collar workers in Austria to show how dispositions developed in a working-class milieu pull respondents towards enrolling in apprenticeship training, which means entering the world of wage labour by the age of fourteen or fifteen. The analysis revealed two dispositions pivotal for making apprenticeship training an attractive but also seemingly necessary choice for the interviewees. First, a preference for manual labour and the deployment of the body which is accompanied by reservations towards mental labour.<sup>1</sup> Second, wage labour represents an economic necessity and a shared

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moral value contributing to the appeal of the adult world of work. The theories of Bourdieu provide a useful framework for understanding the mechanisms at work here as they emphasise the relationship between class position and individual aspirations.

The article starts with a brief overview of previous research on working-class kids transitions from a cultural perspective. It then turns to Bourdieu whose theoretical framework was employed in the study to grasp how respondents' dispositions contribute to the attraction of the adult world of work ensuring the reproduction of social positions. After that, details on the methods applied and some contextual information on the educational system of Austria are provided. The article proceeds by presenting four in-depth case studies. Taking the example of David, Julia, Patrick and Lukas the varying configurations of a preference for manual labour and the importance of employment regarding educational decision-making are discussed. The study sheds new light on the relevance of the appeal of the world of work for drawing working-class children towards entering wage labour rather quickly. Moreover, adding to current debates of cultural class analysis the findings extend our knowledge of the complexity of processes of social reproduction unfolding on the micro-level.

## **Working-class transitions into employment**

The transition from school to work is considered to be a central marker in the process of social reproduction. In this regard, numerous studies investigated the obstacles children from a working-class background are facing. While research focusing on the educational system<sup>2</sup> tends to narrow its analysis on the excluding and differentiation mechanisms of the educational system pushing children from disadvantaged backgrounds out of school, others have turned their focus on the interplay of working-class culture, educational system and individuals' practice and aspirations (Furlong, Woodman, and Wyn 2011). Famously, Paul Willis' study on working-class boys' counter school culture from the late 1970ies showed how the 'lads' apply and reproduce values of the working-class in a way which prepares them for applying their labour power to manual labour. In opposition to the schooling authority – but also in resistance to pupils perceived as conformist towards the system – they build up an aversion to 'mental work' while embracing manual work as part of the real, adult world. Willis' approach was criticised for suggesting that anti-school culture is inherently linked to being working class and failed to explain why not all working-class kids act in opposition to school. As Phillip Brown (1987) pointed out there are also those 'ordinary kids', who make an effort at school while still not having aspirations to pursue higher education. Moreover, early research on school-to-work transitions clearly lacked a gender perspective as the trajectories of the female working-class has not given much attention (e.g. McRobbie 1991; Chisholm 1997). Several studies published in the 1980s and 90s tried to fill this gap. Research by Inge Bates and others on female care assistants, for example, showed how working-class girls trajectories led to working-class but also 'gender stereotyped jobs' despite changing policies promoting gender equality (Bates 1990, 93). Data showed that specific elements of their socialisation – 'experience of domestic work, serving others, denying their own needs' but also physical aggression (ibid. 105) – equipped the girls with the necessary dispositions to succeed in training. A more recent study from Wolfgang Lehman sheds further light on working-class socialisation and its influence on transitioning into apprenticeship training (Lehmann and Taylor 2015). Comparing apprentices in Germany and Canada it found that involvement in crafts and familiarity in handling tools from early childhood on creates a predisposition towards applying the body, which makes picking up manual labour the 'natural' thing to do (2015, 613). The specific dispositions children acquire make them feel confident in dealing with essential aspects of manual labour, such as handling tools but also workplace culture which facilitated a successful transition into manual professions (2015, 619). In the light of individualisation theories (e.g. Beck 1992) research on transitions has turned its attention to individual agency during the last decade. Whereas this research is strong on insights into individual practices and struggles, it proved to be rather weak when it comes to social class (MacDonald et al. 2005). Contrary to this development, the study discussed in this paper adopted a Bourdieusian framework

as it provides a fruitful background for understanding the influence of class background on educational decision-making processes and agents' careers.

## The Bourdieusian understanding of social reproduction

Bourdieu pictures society as a relational structure of different positions where individuals are placed according to their overall capital stock and its specific composition (Bourdieu 1984, 1990). People can be distributed vertically depending on their overall possession of *economic* capital and *cultural* capital, as well as horizontally depending on whether they have more financial or cultural assets to their disposal. Additionally, connections and networks provide agents with *social* capital – potential resources that can be activated to strengthen one's position. Social position corresponds with specific practices, which is created by the habitus. As 'systems of durable, transposable dispositions' (Bourdieu 1990, 53) the habitus is embodied social structure. People occupying similar positions in social space and sharing similar dispositions and ways of living constitute a class. Class is therefore not only defined objectively given individuals' capital possession but also by their habitus.<sup>3</sup>

In his conception of social space, Bourdieu further includes *time* as a third axis. Individuals do not 'move about in social space in a random way', rather it can be observed that, '[t]o a given volume of inherited capital there corresponds a band of more or less equally probable trajectories leading to more or less equivalent positions', which Bourdieu calls the '*field of possibles* objectively offered to a given agent' (Bourdieu 1984, 110). This field of possibilities is not only shaped by what is objectively probable but more importantly by what individuals themselves deem to be possible and suitable. Because of the habitus, both are adjusted to each other. The circular relation between structure and practices produces ways of thinking, acting and perceiving the world that resonate with each other without deliberate intention. Depending on their class origins, individuals develop a 'practical sense' (ibid. Bourdieu 1990, 66) of e.g. the kind of work they can imagine for themselves or the future careers they picture as appropriate. The adjustment of class position and dispositions is enforced by institutional restrictions creating typical class trajectories which ensures the reproduction of class relations in society, whilst giving individuals a sense of achieving what they have always wanted or 'feel made' for (Bourdieu 1984, 110).

## Research data and methods

The analysis of the paper is built on cases taken from a research project on young blue-collar workers in Austria employed in the manufacturing industry (NACE C). Although the labour market has undergone severe changes during the last decades the industrial sector is still vital to Austria's economy (Ecker and Klaus 2016). While a decline of jobs in manufacturing can be observed, unlike in the UK where processes of deindustrialisation were especially pronounced during the Thatcher era, the secondary sector still holds one-quarter of all employees in Austria and more than half of all blue-collar workers (Statistik Austria 2016).

The research presented in this article is based on 20 semi-structured interviews (Witzel 2000) with (predominantly white) blue-collar workers aged between 20 and 34 years old. Data collection and analysis were organised in a circular way meaning that recruitment of interviewees was based on principles of minimal and maximal contrast. The final sample included male and female, skilled and unskilled blue-collar workers in different industrial sectors (see Table 1).<sup>4</sup> From the overall sample, 17 respondents come from a working-class background with parents' highest educational level being compulsory schooling or vocational training. In two cases parents have a dispersed educational background, in one case parents hold a university degree that was devalued in the course of migration.<sup>5</sup>

Except for one case all respondents have completed an apprenticeship training either in the manufacturing industry or in trades. In Austria, the chosen programmes typically feed into blue-collar jobs. As employees of large manufacturing enterprises (number employed > 250) and with all

Table 1. Sample.

Name	Apprenticeship Program	Occupational Position	
		Industrial sector	Occupational position
Christine	S: retail salesperson	Textile industry	Unskilled
David	T: Plumber	Metal processing	Unskilled
Doris	M: Machine operator	Metal processing	Skilled
Florian	M: Warehouse worker	Machine manufacturing	Skilled
Gerald	M: industrial electrician	Automotive industry	Skilled
Jakob	M: plant technician	Automotive industry	Skilled
Julia	M: process engineer	Chemical industry	Skilled
Klaus	M: electrician	Paper industry	Unskilled
Lukas	M: management assistant	Textile industry	Unskilled
Mario	M: process engineer	Chemical industry	Skilled
Martina	T: carpenter	Automotive industry	Skilled
Mirza	M: mechatronic and electrical engineer	Automotive industry	Skilled
Patrick	M: machine technician	Paper industry	Unskilled
Robert	T: locksmith	Paper industry	Unskilled
Semih	M: body construction technician	Automotive industry	Skilled
Simon	M: machine technician	Machine manufacturing	Unskilled
Stefanie	M: electrical engineer	Automotive industry	Skilled
Thomas	T: butcher	Machine manufacturing	Unskilled
Veronika	M: process engineer	Chemical industry	Skilled
Wolfgang	T: car mechanic	Paper industry	Unskilled

All names are pseudonyms. M = Manufacturing; T = Trades; S = Services.

of them having completed an education the respondents of the study certainly do not represent the lower-end of the working class, but are closer to what Roberts (2012) referred to as ‘middling youth’. They have a decent vocational education and later manage to transition into manual occupations in manufacturing, where wages, social benefits or political representation exceed blue-collar jobs in sectors such as tourism or retail (Dornmayer and Nowak 2017). Nevertheless, also within the sample of the study, there are significant differences regarding job security, income or working conditions.

Following the epistemological premises of Bourdieu’s theory of practice, a reconstructive and hermeneutic approach was applied in the interviews’ analysis to carve out the underlying class structures that shape respondents’ practices and meanings. Discovering the relationship between structures and practices requires to break with common sense knowledge, which also includes agents’ explanations and reasoning for their day-to-day actions (Bourdieu 2013 [1977], 21). The analysis, therefore, has to exceed a mere reconstruction of individuals’ subjective meanings and has to strive to uncover the habitual *modus operandi*. The interpretation was built on retrospective accounts of the decision-making process at the end of compulsory schooling. Interviewing techniques as suggested by Merton and Kendall were applied to promote ‘retrospective introspection’ (1946, 550) which aims to create conditions ‘in which subjects virtually re-experience the situation to aid their report of significant responses’ (ibid). Although we might not get a full account of the original situation, hermeneutical analysis nevertheless can carve out how class structures respondents’ conceptualisations of what a decent life is (as part of the *field of possibles*) as well as how they are making sense of their educational trajectories so far.

The results cannot claim to represent the diversity of the working class as a whole. However, the in-depth analysis of the cases offers valuable insights into how class background structures educational decision making amongst the younger generation of manufacturing blue-collar workers which enrich our understanding of processes of social reproduction on a micro level including the variations and ambiguities attached (Bertaux and Thompson 2009).

## Educational system and school to work transition in Austria

Austria has a highly stratified educational system, similar to Germany, with an early segregation of children and deeply institutionalised pathways from education to occupation (Heinz 2009). It is

amongst the countries with the lowest level of intergenerational educational mobility (Fessler, Mooslechner, and Martin 2012). There are two junctions during compulsory education that impact on children's further educational and vocational trajectories. First, pupils are separated after primary school at the age of ten into a general and an academic educational track at the lower secondary level. Second, at the age of fourteen decisions have to be made on picking up vocational education and training (VET) or following the academic track on the upper secondary level. Almost three out of four pupils planning to attend VET after lower secondary education – either in schools or apprenticeships – come from a lower educational background (Bruneforth et al. 2016).<sup>6</sup>

VET is either received as an apprenticeship – with a combination of on-the-job training in companies (80% of the time) and school-based training (20% of the time) – or in vocational schools (BMS) and colleges (BHS).<sup>7</sup> Apprenticeship training is accompanied by a labour contract and remuneration, with the school, in general, having a lower priority which is why apprenticeship training is commonly associated with 'leaving school'. The share of pupils enrolling in apprenticeship training – around 40% of all 15-year olds – has remained rather constant since the mid 1990ies (Statistik Austria 2017). Women roughly account for one-third of apprentices as they favour vocational education in schools over apprenticeship training. One reason for this is that VET also reflects the gendered division of labour: apprenticeship training tends to be strong in male-dominated professions (trades, technical occupations) whereas vocational schools have more to offer in typically female occupations (Schönherr, Zandonella, and Mayerl 2017).

Apprenticeship training, often referred to as 'dual system', has a longstanding tradition in Austria and still plays a significant role in the educational and economic system. Especially in the manufacturing industry and in trades an apprenticeship is held in high esteem, gaining more attention in the course of recent public debates on a shortage of skilled labour. Apprenticeship training still yields positive labour market returns, however, there are significant differences regarding income, labour market prospects but also social prestige depending on the training programmes and economic sector.

## Results

The overall analysis of the 20 interviews revealed two dispositions that were crucial for drawing respondents towards picking up apprenticeship training instead of staying in school by the time when they completed their compulsory education. Those, of course, interact with the known mechanisms pushing working-class kids out of school which will also be present in the analysis, yet not the main focus.

First, a preference for 'practical' or 'manual' work – often accompanied with reservations against (mere) 'mental labour' (studying, being in school, sitting in front of the computer etc.) – which makes enrolling in apprenticeship training attractive for respondents.<sup>8</sup> This inclination is typically developed during childhood were respondents are being involved in practical activities such as farm work or helping parents with repairing or mending. These practices structure respondents' perception of how they put their body to work. Second, a high appraisal of work and employment. This notion is not only about what is financially possible but more importantly limits respondents' aspirations as it creates boundaries for legitimate choices. This legitimacy, on the one hand, stems from a necessity of employment to provide for oneself (and the family) which is more apparent for the working class given the comparably low level of economic capital at their disposal. On the other hand, working hard and having a job ensures recognition and acknowledgement in this milieu which is considered to be a vital part of a decent life (Sennett and Cobb 1993, 267; Lamont 2000, 20). Recognition of others acts as a powerful tool in guiding our decisions because it is fundamental for building our identity and self-esteem (Honneth 2003; Sayer 2005).<sup>9</sup>

In the following four cases (Julia, David, Patrick, Lukas) are presented in detail to flesh out how these two dispositions come into play. The cases were selected because they represent different variations of the phenomena. Julia and David typify two different formations of the taste for manual

labour. Yet, in both cases, their dispositions make the decision to pick up apprenticeship training after compulsory school uncontested. Contrary to Julia and David, pursuing further education is in the perceived realm of possibilities for Patrick and Lukas. However, both cases demonstrate that subtle ways of approval for what is considered an appropriate way of making one's living increases the appeal of wage labour and guide respondents towards apprenticeship training.

### **Manual labour as the 'natural' thing to do**

David was a 34-year-old machine operator in the steel industry whose father was a trained plumber working in the metal industry and whose mother worked as a sewer until she retired due to illness years ago. He grew up with two older sisters. The family was not *'well-heeled'*, nevertheless, he remembered having had a *'happy childhood'*, and *'we always got, what we wanted'*. When asked about his experiences at school, David replied:

I was a complete dossier. Really, I mean, my dad always used to say: "You can do it". But I was never really interested. In secondary school, I only did what was necessary to bumble through, with Cs and Ds. Then my dad said at some point, "When you start your apprenticeship you cannot go on like that".

He enjoyed being with his dad – who took him along to work – more than school. From the age of thirteen, David was introduced to the adult world of employment, which he grew fond of. Apart from spending time with his father, the financial rewards David received from his dad in exchange for his effort provided a further incentive. He located his interest in practical and manual labour in his early childhood: *'Since I was a small boy, I always thought this was fun, screwing and stuff'*. Therefore, the decision to pick up his father's social inheritance and pursue a plumbing apprenticeship *'just came naturally'*, as David emphasised in the interview.

This seemingly uncontested decision points to the habitus that is imposing a 'horizon of action' (Hodkinson and Sparkes 1997) for what individuals apprehend as an appropriate path for them. Sure, his performance at school was one plausible reason for not pursuing further education. But more importantly, it was the world of manual labour promising to match his interests best. From early childhood on David developed a familiarity in handling tools structuring his perception of what work is and should be. It also acts as a bond between the father and his only son. Furthermore, David connected his taste for manual labour with being working class which also included a clear rejection of further education. *'I could not imagine doing upper secondary school, or studying, no, it would not work. No, I think I am too much a blue-collar for that.'* For him, being blue-collar was inherently linked to the deployment of the body. He said after work he always had to *'keep busy'* e.g. by repairing things at his house, *'else, it is not me'*. The resentment to mental labour is revealed in his dismissal of further education but also when he talks about white-collar employees. He refers to them as *'pate'* of the company, as he complains that *'it has grown much too big, no one wants to do real work anymore. Now we have 300 white-collar compared to 700 blue-collar workers. There is something wrong with this ratio.'* Contrary to the office, where *'no one wants to work'* and people just want to be *'a boss'* and *'give orders'*, manual labour represents meaningful and honest work. The conditions of his upbringing shape his body resulting in a formation of labour-power that is prepared to apply itself to manual labour. He depicts manual labour as something inscribed into his identity, concurrently assuring him that other choices or ways of living do not suit him. With his clear division of mental and manual labour, David reminds us of Willis' *'lads'*. Whereas mental labour is linked to control and authority, manual labour represents masculinity and autonomy. The importance of manual labour and physical power does not only represent a specific working-class masculinity (McDowell 2003) but can also be linked to the working class' position within the division of labour creating a higher dependency on *'sheer muscle power'* (Bourdieu 1984, 384).

Julia, a 25-year-old chemical process engineer, grew up on a farm in the countryside together with her two brothers and one sister. Julia's mother was not allowed to pursue further education after compulsory school. Coming from a poor peasant family, she had to take up employment under

a farmer and work in the woods. After getting married, she took over raising the children and managing the farm. Julia's father – a former carpenter and joiner – was working shifts as an unskilled worker in the steel industry and helped his wife at the farm whenever possible. Farm life was tough and *'my parents did not have the time to play with us all the time'*; however, this situation gave the children more leeway to do what they liked without being under constant supervision. She experiences what Anette Lareau describes as a characteristic form of childrearing among the working class and refers to as 'natural growth', contrary to the 'concerted cultivation' of middle-class children (Lareau 2003, 238 f.). The children spent most of their leisure time outside as there was *'no TV and no computer'* leading to an embodiment of a habitus prone to physical activity. Additionally, from early childhood on Julia became acquainted with manual labour playfully as she was required to take over different chores on the farm, *'I helped a lot at home'*, Julia emphasised, whether it was *'driving the tractor or working in the stable and in the woods'*.

In school, Julia found herself struggling most of the time: *'It was not easy for me, I always had to study very hard, but I pulled through'*. The only subject that caught her interest was chemistry: *'We had this teacher, and immediately I got straight A's. Experimenting was what I really liked, the teacher showed us a lot, it was great'*. Thinking about what she wanted to do in her later life came rather late for Julia.

I: Thinking back to the time when you started to think about what you wanted to do later on after school, could you tell me what it was like for you?

Julia: Yes, naturally it all started in pre-vocational school, it was said apprenticeship, and this and that, and then I was actually more interested in becoming a retail salesperson or office clerk. And I only wrote applications for that, but eventually, after a lot of applications and a pile of job interviews, I somehow started thinking that actually, chemistry would be nice too. Then I thought, alright, it does not matter, I just apply there.'

She was able to start an apprenticeship as a chemical process engineer after successfully passing the entrance test. Similar to David, Julia's habitus acts as a mental barrier which makes leaving school the 'natural' thing to do, while other options remain outside what is thinkable. During the interview reported struggles regarding the decision-making during the end of compulsory schooling therefore only circulate around what kind of profession to choose – a decision which has already been preceded by a subconscious decision between school and work. Again, poor achievements at school suggest turning towards employment at first glance, however, the decision is also driven by her predisposition to *'practical work'*. First, she followed a typical female trajectory by aiming for retail and office clerk. Interestingly, she also used here disposition for 'practical' work in the context of the service sector. Explain why she initially favoured retail over office clerk, she said: *'In retail, I did several internships, stocking shelves and so, you were on your feet a lot of the time and there was always something going on. I mean, I was more drawn to retail. [...] I always liked doing practical things more, because in retail you also do more practical stuff.'* Julia's bodily hexis (Bourdieu 2013 [1977], 87) makes her more comfortable with jobs involving physical activity and the body being in motion, whereas office work that requires sitting still was an unattractive option. Later, her disposition for practical work acted as a resource for entering a male-dominated profession in the chemical industry. Similar cases from this study showed that familiarity with manual labour and confidence in working with tools from an early age played a decisive role for women entering male-dominated professions.<sup>10</sup> It provided them with the necessary predisposition, but also technical and social skills to fit into the working environment while equipping them with a sense of legitimacy, which is often challenged by their male colleagues. In the case of Julia, the support from her family and especially a positive identification with her father and brother working in manufacturing facilitated these feelings of belonging.



### ***The importance and appeal of having a job***

Patrick, a 23-year-old trained mechanical engineer who worked as an unskilled worker in the lumber yard of a large paper manufacturer, grew up in the countryside with four brothers and sisters. *'It was not easy'*, Patrick responded when asked about his childhood. At the age of six, his parents got divorced. The two eldest children stayed with the father, a trained tiler, worked shifts as an unskilled worker at a window and door manufacturer. Patrick and his younger sister, however, moved in with their grandparents, as their father was not able to look after them. *'It would not have been possible otherwise. But yes, I grew up anyway.'* At the age of fourteen, Patrick resettled to his fathers' place, where he still lived at the time of the interview.

During the interview, Patrick was restrained regarding his experiences at school. He described himself as having been an *'average pupil'*, *'there haven't been any problems'*. At the end of lower secondary school, Patrick struggled to decide on his future career: *'I really thought a lot about what I wanted to do, going to school further or starting to work'*. He could not make up his mind and as he was still one year behind completing his compulsory education, he decided to attend a one-year pre-vocational school. During this year, he did several internships at companies as required by the curriculum. Eventually, Patrick chose to pick up an apprenticeship as a mechanical engineering technician, although all of his close friends attended an upper secondary technical college. How does he explain his decision?

Patrick: 'I could have done it. My friends all went there. But I was always lazy when it came to studying, that's why I then was drawn to that, to picking up a job. And I wanted to earn money right away. Yes, and with my friends it's like this now: five of them started this school and only one completed it. And, I mean, he surely will- but in the meantime, I have actually already made a lot of money, whereas he has nothing yet and, he is not earning massively now too, I mean, he will be an engineer, a friend of mine, for sure this is not bad. But everything has got its pros and cons, I guess.'

Patrick indicated that he would have met the necessary entry requirements for the school, but subsequently decided to do otherwise. Similar to David, he uses the attribute of *'laziness'* to explain why he does not fit in. As studies show (e.g. Reay 2004) these self-attributions reflect the normative standards of an educational system that values socially advantaged students and classifying those not conforming as lazy, lacking the right motivation etc. Having incorporated this ascribed attribute it assures Patrick that he did not belong to the school his friends were attending. Other than that, the appeal of the world of work is quite present in this quote. This urge becomes more apparent when considering his living circumstances. At the time when he was required to make a decision, he moved back in with his father and older brother which changed what was expected from him. From being a child who was taken care of to an adult from which is expected to be able to look after himself. Moreover, the appeal of attaining adult-status through earning one's own money is also fostered by an understandable desire to be equal to his brother and father who represent the adult world of work.

What also becomes explicit in the quote is the tacit knowledge amongst the working class of the likelihood of educational success. As Bourdieu notes, the *'propensity to subordinate present desires to future desires'* – in this case the urge to be part of the adult world, and earn money, compared to going to school – *'depends on the extent to which this sacrifice is "reasonable", that is, on the likelihood, in any case, of obtaining future satisfactions superior to those sacrificed'* (Bourdieu 1984, 180). Patrick's quote provides a notion of the inscribed anticipation of a future where academic success is highly unlikely, and therefore a risky investment. His friends' failure became living proof to him that the investment would not have paid off and that his decision to enter the workforce was the *'best'* one.

Lukas, a 26-year old unskilled worker in the twisting and twining department in the textile industry, was the child of two manufacturing workers. His father had completed apprenticeship training in retail but never worked in his profession but instead picked up a job as an unskilled worker in manufacturing. His mother did not receive further training after compulsory school. She

held several different jobs in retail, in a cosmetic studio and later joined her husband in working in the factory. Lukas grew up with his three-year older brother. During their childhood, their parents took turns in working shifts so one parent could always take care of the children. Lukas had pleasant memories of that time. His dad always brought *'fresh pastry'* for breakfast when he came back from his night shift. *'I had a wonderful childhood', 'it was really cool when you come home from school and your dad is well rested and is at home'*. Lukas remembered that since primary school he wanted to be a kindergarten teacher. Yet, he was facing quite a rough time at school, especially during lower secondary education. His achievements were not good and he often skipped school. He described himself as *'categorical school refusenik', 'I just did not want to go, it just was nicer being outside'*, he said laughingly. However, Lukas stuck with his initial wish of becoming a kindergarten teacher and after lower secondary education applied for the aptitude test required to enter the school. Unfortunately, Lukas did not pass. He decided to enter a one-year prevocational school instead and tried it again the following year, but failed again. On short-term, he had to come up with a different plan and applied for an apprenticeship as an industrial clerk.

From the empirical data, we cannot conclude as to why Lukas is drawn to this profession. Interestingly, during the interview Lukas showed a strive to escape his social inheritance of becoming a blue-collar worker in manufacturing which became apparent when he talked about the reasons for his decision on the apprenticeship programme, *'I never wanted to work on a shop floor. I never wanted to work in manufacturing.'* It seems with opting for a female-dominated profession in the service sector he chose a career for himself that would lead him farthest away not only from entering blue-collar work in manufacturing as done by his family but from a male working-class trajectory more generally.

To understand the mechanisms of social reproduction, it is important to see that picking up an apprenticeship was not the only choice Lukas had. Considering the objective possibilities, there were different options. First, he could have tried to go after his aspirations by changing to a different school. A second option would have been a phase of unemployment which would not be unusual for someone of this age to figure out what he wanted to do next. Although Lukas perceived himself as relatively autonomous in his decision, the next quote shows that tacit expectations and prevalent meanings of work amongst his family contributed to reverting to the typical class trajectory. Asked about what his parents' perspective was on all this, answered:

*'It was completely my decision. I should do what I want to do. My mum always accompanied me to the tests for kindergarten school. They always had my back. When I said, yes, I need something different, right, when they are not taking me, they always supported me. They said: "This is what you want to do", they never said: "you have to do this or that", never, the just said: "you need a job" but what kind of job it ultimately was, that was left for me to decide.'*

The quote gives us a glimpse of the implicit expectations present in his family, manifesting in the appeal *'you need a job'*. This appeal is something Lukas has incorporated and it structures his thinking and acting and influences the *'realm of possibilities'* as it positively encourages a decision towards picking up apprenticeship training. Needing to have a job means that a phase of an (unemployed) *'moratorium'* or other forms of *'provisional irresponsibility'* (Bourdieu 1993, 95f.) which would be not unusual for an adolescent is not conceivable given his class position. As the doors on the way up are closing Lukas activated embodied dispositions towards work which made a fast entrance into the labour market the obvious and legitimate choice. By going for an apprenticeship as industrial clerk Lukas is relying on something he is acquainted with (field of industry) and resources his class position and family offer (experiences in the industry but also retail and office work). Apart from the apparent non-involvement, which can also perpetuate social class forces by not actively encouraging children's expanded aspirations as we have seen in the case of Patrick, the less obvious involvement as represented in tacit expectations are additionally drawing respondents towards blue-collar trajectories as they anticipate them in the decisions they make.

## Discussion and conclusion

Looking at the level of individual narratives one could argue that social class has lost its explanatory power as respondents of the study perceive and present themselves as autonomous and independent in their decisions, following their preferences. These accounts surely reflect a changed discourse in neoliberal times that centres around the active self. However, a more detailed analysis reveals how class – objectified in capital but also in the form of dispositions – comes into effect drawing respondents away from school and into manual apprenticeship training programmes.

The study has identified two dispositions that substantially (albeit not exclusively) – structure respondents' transitions from school to work. First, a preference for physical activity and practical work, often combined with resentments towards school, making apprenticeship training in manual occupations the most attractive and often uncontested choice for the young workers. Manual labour is not depreciated but positively valued, though this disposition can be shaped quite differently depending on primary socialisation but also gender as we have seen with Julia and David. The study adds a second disposition which is linked to the respondents' position in social space and the *disposability* of economic capital among the working class. Wage labour acts both as an economic and moral necessity which sets the frame for what is financially feasible but also what kind of decisions are valued amongst friends and family. Whereas for Patrick and Lukas employment is less present in the sense of economic necessity, for other interviewees in the project like Martina – growing up in a foster home – or Christine – coming from a family with a stack of debts – the tacit pressure to be able to care for oneself as early as possible becomes more apparent. The interviews vary regarding how the two dispositions are intertwined and become relevant, yet both are necessary to fully grasp the appeal of the world of work and how the habitus draws respondents to enter employment as early as possible rather than pursuing further education even if they showed aspirations for upward social mobility at some point. The focus on the appeal of the world of work adds an important perspective to the current literature of school-to-work transitions and expands our understanding of educational and career decision making processes of today's working class.

Furthermore, the findings contribute in several ways to our understanding of today's reproduction of class relations. First, results shed light on the reproduction of what might be called the 'middling' (Roberts 2012) fractions of the working-class, where individuals flow into rather stable employment after leaving full-time education and which have been neglected in recent transitions research. Second, the study shows how class structures remain rather entrenched and play an active role in the reproduction of social and occupational positions. Apparently, the selection of respondents enforced the focus on reproduction as it does not include cases of upward mobility. Therefore, the research presented here cannot and did not set out to explain why and how working-class kids manage to escape class trajectories. However, the analysis provides valuable insight into a specific segment of the manual working class showing how despite social change class remains a powerful mechanism in the Austrian society drawing children from a working-class background to proceed into waged labour rather quickly after compulsory education. Thirdly, class-analysis on a micro-level as presented in the paper enables us to account for intra-class variations which allow grasping the heterogeneity of the working class. For instance, how the preference for practical work is developed and comes into play. Depending on socialisation but also gender we can distinguish varieties of a manual habitus, with e.g. a greater focus on physical power and virility or technical skills. Finally, adding to the current Bourdieu inspired cultural class analysis the findings indicate that the relationship between position and disposition, needs to be understood as a dynamic process in which correspondence is not given but has to be established in day-to-day practices continuously, as individuals are facing changing contexts or contradicting expectations (from school, their families, friends). Therefore, social reproduction can be interpreted as the result of a struggle structured by dispositions, objective conditions, institutional settings but also individual circumstances which might also include experiences of mal-adjustment between dispositions and objective chances that have to be processed by individuals. In recent research – as well as in the work of Bourdieu –

contradictions between the habitus and the field have been discussed predominantly in events of social mobility (Reay, Crozier, and Clayton 2009; Friedman 2016) or in situations of dramatic changes in society (McDowell 2003). The results of the study support the idea that also on a smaller scale rejection from jobs (Julia), failing school (Lukas), changes in living circumstances (Patrick) bear challenges to the matching of position and disposition that individuals need to deal with.

## Notes

1. The disposition for manual labour also enables respondents to relate positively to blue-collar jobs in manufacturing which has been discussed in a separate publication (Altreiter and Flecker 2020).
2. A large body of literature has investigated the role of the educational system in enforcing social reproduction which cannot be reported in full-depth here (e.g. Bourdieu and Passeron 1990; Roberts 2009).
3. Bourdieu emphasises that his conceptualisation of class is a theoretical construct which should not be mistaken for real classes in the sense of a shared class consciousness.
4. While the recruitment of interviewees strived for an adequate representation of gender, with only six respondents being female workers, their share is comparatively low. Yet, it reflects an overall low number of female blue-collar workers in manufacturing as they account for only 13% of all blue-collar workers in this age group (Statistik Austria 2016). A comparable balance of ethnicity could not be achieved.
5. Two interviews were excluded from the analysis: Mirza, who's habitus was shaped in an academic background and was not able to follow his parents' trajectory because his cultural capital was devaluated in the course of migration. Semih's interview did not provide sufficient data for the analysis of his dispositions.
6. Lower education means that parents' highest educational attainment is a vocational education at intermediate level (vocational school or apprenticeship).
7. Apprenticeships start after completing nine years of schooling. Traditionally, the gap between the last year of lower secondary education and completing compulsory education is filled by one-year pre-vocational schooling. Whereas apprenticeships and BMS take between two and four years and conclude with a final exam, BHS requires five years and concludes with an assessment qualifying pupils for university.
8. The distinction between manual and mental work can be seen as false dichotomy as both aspects are intertwined in any work activity, although with different weighting.
9. In the analysis these two dispositions proved to be crucial for understanding the appeal of the world of work but, apparently, are not the only dispositions characteristic for respondents' class position.
10. Here, the data reflect similar findings from Lehmann and Taylor (2015) or Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997).

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## Note

The research presented in the paper was conducted at the University of Vienna.

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