***Kristinn Hegna and Ingrid Smette (2017):* Parental influence in educational decisions: young people's perspectives. *British Journal of Sociology of Education* Vol. 0 , Iss. 0,0**

Corresponding author:
Kristinn Hegna
Associate Professor
Department of Education
University of Oslo
PO Box 1092 Blindern
0317 Oslo
Email: kristinn.hegna@iped.uio.no
Tel: +47 41 44 53 41

Co-author:
Ingrid Smette
Researcher
Section for youth research,
NOVA Norwegian Social Research
Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences
Postboks 4 St. Olavs plass
0130 Oslo
Email: ingrid.smette@nova.hioa.no
Tel: +47 922 11 671

Words: 7989

Parental Influence in Educational Decisions: Young People's Perspectives

Abstract

Studies of young people's experiences of parental influence on their educational choice in different family contexts are lacking. This study explores such experiences among youth in Norway, where educational choice is normatively construed as an autonomous decision. The article draws on data from a survey of 2,029 youths that includes open-ended qualitative descriptions of experiences of difficult decisions. The analyses show no differences in experiences of parental influences related to class. Minority students experience their parents as positive/supportive to the same degree as majority students but as more strongly influencing the decision-making process. Nevertheless, minority and majority youth express having made their own choice to the same extent. Negative and strong parental opinions sometimes complicate the choosing process and threaten young people's sense of autonomy. In the case of youths' indecision and need for guidance, parental involvement may be a precondition for a young person's ability to make an autonomous decision.

Keywords: Educational choice; youth; parents; autonomy; social background; minority youth; Norway

Parental influence in educational decisions: young people's perspectives

Young people's educational decision-making at the end of compulsory school is shaped by national education systems and institutional settings (Verdier 2008), parents' involvement, their strategies and social position (Ball, Maguire, and Macrae 2000), as well as by the young people's own growing demand for autonomy and individualised choice (Edwards and Alldred 2000). In the British context, educational choice has often been described in terms of families' strategies to reproduce their class position (Power et al. 2003, Ball 2003), describing young people's educational choices as quazi-'individualised'; seemingly autonomous but still structured and constrained by institutional settings and the lack of relevant resources. This research has shown that while families in the professional middle class can be described as strategic and skilled choosers (Power et al. 2003), working class families more often adhere to their children's wishes (Ball 2003). Immigrant families, on the other hand, have been described as ambitious on behalf of their children, activating 'ethnic capital' to spur higher education aspirations (Shah, Dwyer, and Modood 2010). Therefore, both professional middle class and immigrant parents could be described as strategically and consciously promoting their educational ideals in their offspring's educational choices in Britain.

However, in Norway, as in the other Nordic countries, a stronger normative value of young people's autonomy (Gullestad 1996) is embedded in the educational system and choice of upper secondary education. An example of this normative value may be found in a concern often voiced in Norwegian public discourse (media and research) regarding educational decisions in some immigrant families. Young people from such families—in the following defined as minority youth—more often choose academic secondary education and higher education studies than their Norwegian background peers (Støren 2009). This fact is often accompanied by the concern that immigrant parents put too much pressure on their children, favouring social mobility of the family at the expense of the young person's possibilities for autonomous educational decisions (Smette 2015). The immigrant families' apparent violation of this cultural norm of children's autonomy and the attention this has received in the Norwegian context points to the illegitimacy of

Norwegian parents promoting their educational ideals too strongly in youths' educational decision-making.

At the age of 15–16, young Norwegians make a choice of upper secondary school and educational track. As educational choice even at the age of 15 is construed in Norway as a domain for young people's autonomy and individualisation (Smette 2015), young people are expected to choose education themselves. However, this is an age when young people's autonomy typically is negotiated and developed in the realm of familial negotiation (Foskett and Hemsley-Brown 2001). The educational choice can be seen as an important step in the process towards becoming autonomous, self-choosing and self-regulating adults (Fejes 2008, 656-7).

Against this background, young peoples' experiences of their parents' involvement in their choice of upper secondary education is of particular interest. In this paper, we seek to fill a gap in the research literature on educational decisions at the end of compulsory education, as young people's perspectives on their parents' involvement and engagement in their educational decisions are more seldom found in this research (Brooks (2003), Edwards and Alldred (2000) and Snee and Devine (2014) being noteworthy exceptions). Drawing on a quantitative dataset, which also includes qualitative data from open-ended survey questions, the aim of the present study is to investigate how young people in different family contexts experience parental influence on their educational decisions. Moreover, we seek to investigate how different parental approaches shape young people's sense of having made their own educational choice.

Autonomous choice as norm

The educational system in Norway has been described as 'universalistic' (Verdier 2008), encouraging students' motivation for personal development (Walther 2006) and putting particular weight on the autonomous educational choice of individual students (Smette 2015). The educational choice that students make at the end of compulsory school (10th grade) is their first educational choice and the first branching off of the students from comprehensive lower secondary school into different schools, educational tracks and subjects. The students choose between nine vocational (VET) tracks and three general

education (GE) tracks, and several schools in Oslo offer the same tracks. Therefore, there are in effect more than 60 alternatives to choose from[1].

The institutionalised decision-making process consists of information meetings, school visits, municipal educational information fairs, class projects and individualised counselling sessions. These are compulsory for students. Parents take part in the information meeting only as a passive audience and rarely join their children in meeting with the school counsellor (Smette 2015). In the Knowledge Promotion educational reform (2006), the main goal of the strengthening of educational counselling services in Norway's lower secondary schools was to contribute to a more 'rational and informed' choice of education among 10th graders (Lødding and Holen 2012). In public policy, the importance of aiding young people in making the '*right*' choice based on qualified counselling has been highlighted as a means to reduce non-completion of upper secondary school (Kunnskapsdepartementet 2006).

In the decision-making process, the significant weight put on students' interests, character, what they like and what is important for them constructs this educational choice as a process of personal introspection: What *are* my skills and my abilities? What am *I* good at? What are *my* interests? What do *I* believe to be important? (Smette 2015) This introspective foundation of the choice of upper secondary education in the Norwegian school system leads to an accentuation of individualised choice and emphasises the importance of identity for the choice of school and study programme (Buland et al. 2011). Therefore, the '*right*' choice is not construed as the most rational and factually informed choice but rather as the choice that is right for the individual (Smette 2015).

The parents' involvement is correspondingly not only downgraded but almost taboo. In an ethnographic study of 10th graders in two Oslo schools (Smette 2015), this understanding of direct parental influence on educational decisions came across very clearly. Immigrant parents' explicit articulation of aspirations for their children during counselling sessions was seen by school counsellors as being in conflict with the Norwegian norm of educational choice as the young person's own decision. The

---

[1] Students have an institutionalized *right* to upper secondary education in Norway. Study points alone define *which school* a student will be able to access, based on the school's popularity. However, all 12 *study programmes* are accessible for all achievement levels—even the general education study programme.

normative value of autonomy in educational decisions ties in with Marianne Gullestad's argument that autonomy in the context of Norwegian child-rearing practices is closely connected to the notion of 'being yourself' and that consequently, a main task of parents is to transmit the ability to find oneself and develop oneself (Gullestad 1996, 37). These examples from a Norwegian setting illustrate Reed-Danahay's (1996) argument that educational strategies of families 'operate within more particularistic meanings of childhood socialisation at the local level' (p. 2). In our study, the idea of adolescent *autonomy*—that is, the freedom to make their choice by themselves—is understood as part of the cultural and institutional context of this decision-making process in Norway as well as a characteristic of the adolescent–parent relationship. This is different from the construction of the 'free' choice of individualisation theory that is often described as underpinning the social reproduction of inequality in education.

Educational decision-making in different families

Understanding young people's experience of their parents' role in their choice of secondary education can contribute to a better understanding of 'choice' during adolescence when autonomy and parental control are contested and negotiated (Foskett and Hemsley-Brown 2001). Previous British studies on parents' and young people's interaction in educational choice show how young people often feel they have a degree of agency in their choice of upper secondary schools (Snee and Devine 2014) and higher education (HE) (Brooks 2003, 2004). However, both studies point to how parents shape the young people's pathways. Rachel Brooks' study of 16–18-year-olds' choice of HE focuses on the degree to which parents and offspring agree on the choice of institution or subjects (Brooks 2003, 2004). She notes that this concord, which is sometimes interpreted by the young as a lack of interest by their parents, rather points to what can be seen as successful socialisation on the parents' part; influence on educational choice does not have to be overt. Two of Brooks' young informants (2004) in her study of fathers' rare involvement in educational choice claim they were put off by their mother because of her over-involvement. In their study of parental involvement, David et al. (2003) mention how some boys in particular reacted against their parents because they wanted greater autonomy in the choosing process. In these studies, however, young people's reactions to parental involvement is only a subordinate finding, and little is said

about the characteristics of the families in which parental involvement is interpreted as 'too strong' or unwarranted—and why.

In previous studies of family strategies in educational choice, young people's perspectives and questions of agency and autonomy are rarely the focus. In their study of British working and middle class families, Reay and Ball (1998) found differing approaches to the choice of secondary school between families. While working class parents would defer to their child's judgment, they claimed that 'the veneer of democratic decision-making in a number of middle-class families masks tight parental control' (443). Although Reay and Ball's (1998) study was described as a study of the 'dynamics of choice making within families' (431), the study did not look at this covert familial pressure from the point of view of the youth. Brooks' (2003) study of older youths' views on parental involvement in their higher education decision-making process undoubtedly sees young people as social actors—making their choice informed by parents' knowledge of the educational market and their own position in a peer hierarchy of 'ability'—but does not question the autonomy of the young people.

In their study of educational choice among youth, Snee and Devine (2014) call for research on young people's educational choice at the end of compulsory schooling. Research on class and educational choice in particular tends to focus either on *parents* choosing secondary school for their children (year 5) or on young people deciding on their *higher education* pathway (Snee and Devine 2014, p 999). Rather, the choice of upper secondary school combines young people's need for independence and for marking out their own future with parents' continuous efforts to shape and steer their children. As such, this educational choice in particular makes an interesting case for understanding educational choice in different family contexts.

Previous quantitative studies of the educational pathways of minority youth in Norway have explained the overrepresentation of lower class minority youths in applications for general education study programmes and higher education as the result of a stronger drive often deriving from parental 'push' (Bakken and Sletten 2000, Lauglo 2000). Rather than pointing to 'pressure', qualitative studies of minority young adults in higher education in Norway and Sweden claim that their choice of education can be interpreted as an element of a collective family strategy and as a continuation of the family's migration history (Knocke and Hertzberg 2000, Leirvik 2010). However, there

is still a lack of knowledge about young people's experiences of parental influence on educational decisions at secondary school levels.

In this article, we investigate how young people experience the role of their parents in the educational decision-making process at the end of compulsory school (10th grade). More specifically, we explore whether systematic differences exist between the experiences of students from different class backgrounds and between minority and majority students. We ask: Do young people see their parents as important in their choice of education? Do they perceive their parents mainly as supportive or as exerting a certain form of pressure or even coercion in the decision-making process? In a context of individual choice and autonomy, do youth experience their parents' influence as complicating their choice of further education?

Data and method

Quantitative data

In this study, we draw on data collected from Oslo youth in their last compulsory year of schooling. The project *Educational Pathways* combined quantitative survey data of Oslo youth (Hegna 2014) with ethnographic fieldwork in two Oslo schools (Smette 2015). This article draws on the survey data alone. The quantitative data were collected starting on March 1, 2008, the day the 10th grade students in Oslo filed their applications for a particular school and a particular study programme. Adding to the richness of the quantitative data are open-ended questions in the electronic survey, where the informants were asked to elaborate on their thoughts about their choice and in particular on the challenges related to making the decision.

The Longitudinal Young in Oslo Study (LUNO) dataset follows half of Oslo's cohort of youth born in 1992 through three survey data collections[2]: during lower secondary school in 9th grade (2006), in 10th grade right after they filed their applications for upper secondary education (2008) and after the transition to upper secondary school (2009/2010). In this article, we specifically use the quantitative data from the second data collection wave (March–June) when the students were 15.3 years old (mean).

---

[2] See Hegna (2014) for a more detailed description of sampling and data collection.

All lower secondary schools in Oslo—including private schools and special education schools—and all students in 9th grade (2006/2007) in these schools comprise the theoretical population of the study (4700 youths) and were invited to participate in the study. Seven of the invited schools did not consent to participation. Half of the parents of 9th grade students in the remaining schools consented to their children's participation. The sample therefore consists of 2373 students. Non-consenting schools account for 700 respondents not included in the sample, while 1649 parents who did not return the confirmation of consent account for the rest. This lack of consent was mainly due to teachers failing to follow up on the process of obtaining written consent from the students.

The questionnaire was administered in class. Of the 2373 consenting students, the questionnaire was returned by 2328 students at T1 and by 2029 students at T2. Therefore, the response rate of the dataset used in the present study was 85.5% of the original sample of consenting students and about 43% of the total population. Attrition is slightly elevated among minority students with low compulsory school achievement scores, students without higher education aspirations, young people who have had contact with social services and young people reporting high levels of conduct problems (Frøyland and Gjerustad 2012). The overrepresentation is weak and will have only negligible effects on the results of the analyses. Compared with other representative Oslo data, the LUNO sample shows a small overweight of female students, youths of Norwegian descent and youths from privileged backgrounds (Frøyland and Gjerustad 2012).

Instruments
In this study, we define *minority youth* according to their parents' origin, as do the Norwegian Statistics. All students with two foreign-born parents from Turkey, the Middle East, Asia or Africa are defined as 'minority' regardless of their own birthplace. Four hundred and ninety-four youths—24%— are included in this category by this definition, 70% of which were born in Norway. Such a dichotomous categorisation of minority and majority youth is not without its problems, as it defines as minority a diverse group of people whose self-identifications differ. In this study, the categorisation serves to investigate whether there are differences between minority and majority youth's experience, reflecting differing parental approaches to education as an extension

of immigrant families' migration history (cf. Shah, Dwyer and Modood 2010) and the normative value of autonomous educational choices in the Norwegian context.

Information about *gender* is included as a dichotomous measure (male/female). *Family social background* was based primarily on the father's and secondarily on the mother's occupation, coded according to ISCO88 and categorised into three groups: managerial and upper service professions (i.e. "upper middle class", 28.1%), lower service and non-manual employees (i.e. "lower middle class", 38.5%) and skilled\unskilled manual labour (23.6%), splitting the middle class into two fractions (Savage et al. 2013). Students who did not remember (5.1%) or whose parents were unemployed or on welfare (4.6%) were not included in the social background variable. *Compulsory school grade points* is a composite score of all grade points received at the end of 10th grade, (scale 1 [poor]–60 [good])[3].

Sources of information and advice and their importance: Mother and father were included in a list of people or instances who had given students information and advice about study programmes and secondary schools, along with 'myself', friends, siblings, my teacher, the school educational counsellor, etc. In the next column, the respondents were asked to indicate the degree of impact (scale 1–4) these people had on the decision they made.

Respondents were also asked to rate 12 statements about their experiences of their parents' role in educational choice on a 4-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. A factor analysis with Varimax rotation suggested three factors, of which two were used for the present analysis. *Parental positive support* (scale 1–4) consisted of the mean score of 6 items with a Cronbach's alpha=0.79. *Parental strong influence* (scale 1–4) consisted of the mean score of 4 items with a Cronbach's alpha=0.74 (see Table 1 for sample items). *Experienced difficulty in educational choice* is based on the question 'All in all, how did you find the decision-making process of choosing a study programme and school in the 10th grade?' with four response alternatives ranging from 'Not at all difficult' to 'Very difficult'.

---

[3] The variable is based on self-reported compulsory school grade points at T3. Missing values are substituted by self-reported mean grades (mathematics/English/Norwegian) at T2.

Qualitative data

All students who had experienced the choice as somewhat or very difficult (41% of the sample) were administered an open-ended survey question that asked them to describe in their own words what had made it so difficult. Of the 727 students (88%) who gave an account of their difficulties, only 38 mentioned the words *mother/mom, father/dad, parents* or *family, pressure* or *conflict.* Five answers made little sense and were omitted, leaving 33 explanations (4% of the total number of explanations) for qualitative analysis.

Strategy of analysis

  Quantitative analyses: Following a descriptive analysis of sources of information and influence on the educational decision-making process, the 12 items on the role parents played in the educational choice were analysed using cross-tabulations for gender, social class and majority/minority differences. The relationship between the two indices on parental positive support and strong influence and social class/minority status were analysed using two multiple regression analyses, controlling for gender and compulsory school grade points. The impact of the two indices on the degree of experienced difficulty in educational choice was analysed using two separate regression analyses[4].

  Qualitative analyses: The 33 qualitative answers including the words *mom, mummy, mother/dad, daddy, father, parents, family* or *pressure/conflict* (and similar words) were coded according to their description of parental strategies and the respondent's description of the difficulty of choice. The small amount of material does not allow us to discern patterns in parental involvement and difficulties relating to class or majority/minority background. However, based on a content analysis, we identified variation in descriptions of parental roles in difficult decisions that could be placed along a continuum of forms of influence, ranging from attempts to deter a young person's decision to playing a supportive part in the young person's attempts to identify her/his own preferences.

---

[4] The regression includes interaction terms with gender and minority status respectively. In these interaction terms, the centred parental variable was used to avoid multicollinearity problems.

How do parents influence choices?

Our analyses started by mapping out the web of information channels—parents/family, friends and school/official channels—and the impact the young people attributed to these channels in the choices they have made. One channel stood out as most important for the outcome of the educational decision process: 'Myself and my wishes' had a 'very strong impact' on the decision for 84%. There were no class-based differences and only weak majority/minority differences in this response. Interestingly, while many youths had been advised by their mother and father (63% and 54% respectively), among majority youths who received information from their parents, few agreed that their parents' advice had a big impact on their decision (strongly agree, mother: 19%, father: 21%). The percentage among minority youth is more than double (strongly agree, mother: 45%, father: 47%). The equal importance of the two parents is also noteworthy compared to findings from previous British studies (David et al. 2003, Brooks 2004). There were no differences according to social class background.

By asking the students to evaluate 10 statements about parents' possible attitudes, ranging from positive and supportive to openly influencing and negative, we wanted to get a better understanding of young people's perception of their parents' role in the educational choice that the students made. Table 1 shows the percentage of youths who responded 'totally agree' to 6 of the original 14 statements to illustrate positive and negative items as well as social class and minority/majority differences.

(Table 1 about here)

As we see from the table, most young people have experienced their parents as positive and supportive and feel they have been allowed to put their own wishes at the forefront of their decision-making process. Again, there are no statistically significant social class differences in the way young people see their parents, although there might be a (non-significant) tendency for minority youth with parents in the managerial/professional occupations to see their parents as less willing to let them make their own decision compared to minority youths with parents in manual labour. It is also worth noting that there is no difference in the share of minority and majority youths who have experienced their parents as positive. However, slightly fewer minority youths strongly

agree that their parents think they should make their own decisions and that the student's interests and preferences are the most important factors in their school choice.

Rather few youths agree that their parents have tried to influence their choice or that their parents have strong opinions about what they should choose. Even smaller numbers report negative attitudes from their parents. Although the shares among minority youths are double those of majority youths, based on the quantitative data it is not reasonable to conclude that experiences of pressure, negative attitudes and conflicts are widespread either among minority or upper middle class youths.

Two mean score indices were constructed, covering *parental positive support* (6 items) and *parental strong influence* (4 items). High scores indicate an experience of strong positive support or a high degree of influence from their parents. There was a negative correlation between the two indices (Pearson's r=-0.30). Figure 1 shows the computed mean score for majority and minority students from different social backgrounds, controlled for gender and compulsory school grade points for the two indices respectively.

(Figure 1 about here)

We found there were only small minority/majority differences in *parental positive support* but that the minority/majority differences were stronger for the *parental strong influence* index. Minority youths reported more negative and stronger opinions from their parents than did majority youths. There were no significant differences across social background for either group.

We also wanted to investigate whether there was a relationship between the youths' experience of their parents' role in the decision-making process and whether they had experienced this educational choice as difficult. Table 2 shows two separate regression analyses for the relationship between the degree of difficulty of choice and the two parental attitude indices. We found that experiencing parents as positive and supportive was related to a lower degree of difficulty of choice, while experiencing parents as negative and strong-minded was related to more difficult decision-making. An interaction term between gender and the two parental indices was positive in both regressions due to the positive effect of supportive parents and the negative effect of influencing or negative parents being only significant for female students. A test of

13

interaction with minority background showed no difference. To summarise, minority students seem to experience their parents as positive and supportive to almost the same degree as majority students but as more strongly influencing the educational decision-making process. Still, this does not seem to be related to a higher degree of difficulty in the choice of school and study programme among the minority youths, compared with majority youth. Social class background is of little importance.

(Table 2 about here)

Parents' role in difficult choices: pressure or sparring partners?

There were 727 open-ended answers to the question about what had made the choice difficult. A careful reading of the full material showed that the main themes were difficulties related to confusion over alternatives and uncertainty as to future education and profession, often balancing different concerns, such as following friends or not, poor guidance and confusing information. Parents were mentioned specifically in 38 of these responses, 5 of which did not relate the parents to the choice or were hard to interpret. The low number of descriptions of difficulties that include parents is an important finding in its own right. Of the remaining 33 responses, 25 were from females and 8 were from males; 23 were from youths with majority backgrounds and 10 were from minority youths. Only one response was from a VET student. The respondents were equally divided between the three social class categories.

The answers in which parents were mentioned showed that parents could have highly different roles in a choice that was experienced as difficult.

One way that parents could be implicated in a difficult choice was through attempts to deter the young person from his or her decision. The following three examples illustrate cases where *both the parent and the child had clear ideas* about what would be a right choice:

> What made it so difficult was that neither of my parents agreed with me in the choice I was going to make! They tried to influence me and bribe me into choosing General Education [with natural science subjects]. They want me to have a glorious career as a doctor.
>
> Female, majority, upper middle class, GE & Music

> My parents want me to go to the best school. But I don't like that school. They'd like to brag of their daughter to their friends and to their relatives. I don't like the way they think. But I just had to apply for that school because they wanted it so bad.
>
> > Female, minority, upper middle class, GE

> What made it so difficult was that my mother told me to choose a study programme where I could go straight out of school and into a secure job after upper secondary school. It was quite messy, with a lot of confusion between what my mother wanted and what I wanted.
>
> > Male, majority, working class, GE & Sports

The first two examples allude to disagreement (*influence, bribe, want it so bad*) and an air of contempt for the parents (*glorious career, brag of their daughter*). The third quote has less of an atmosphere of open conflict but nevertheless illustrates how clearly voiced attitudes from parents can cause confusion and 'mess' in the choosing process. These examples also illustrate how parents' attempts to deter their child from a decision may have variable results, as the GE & Music programme will not give access to later medical studies, and the GE & Sports programme is a less probable route to steady employment.

Far more common was the situation where the young person did *not* have clear ideas. Some respondents describe how their parents stated their opinions strongly or openly in this situation and that this contributed to the difficult choice, as in the following examples:

> I think the decision was pretty hard because I wasn't quite sure about what I wanted, and I stressed a lot about this choice. Some pressure from my parents, friends and other family members also contributed to the difficulty. Still, I am satisfied with the choice I have made, and I have really made up my mind about what I want.
>
> > Male, majority, lower middle class, GE

> I had so many impressions from every direction. Everybody had an opinion about what I should choose. Parents, counsellor, friends, grandparents… In the end all the opinions became too much, one forgets what oneself would like to do. The choice I made, I regret it now, but you just have to make the best out of it :-)
>
> > Female, majority, upper middle class, GE

These students express that it is hard to balance their own shaky opinions with those of others. The main dynamic of these problematic decision-making processes is the

imbalance between an insecure student, who does not know what he or she wants, and the opinions offered by parents and other people around them. Parental certainty poses a problem given the construction of the choice as supposedly autonomous. Finding one's own voice in the cacophony of others' can be hard.

Finally, a third category of the answers indicated that parents had been involved in advising, that their support was important or even had been crucial in *helping* the young person through this situation of confusion and lack of clear ideas.

> I tend to mind a bit about what others think of me. And I'm not sure that I will manage three years in GE. I'm going to be fed up, I know, but I am very happy that my parents have helped me a lot. The last days before the closing date for applications, we sat down and decided. That was so nice and I managed to structure my thoughts and feelings. It has been so stressful over the last few weeks!
>
> Female, majority, lower middle class, GE

It is interesting to note that parents' involvement in the educational choice can be interpreted by the youths as both contributing to the difficulty or confusion and as resolving the problem. However, the last category of responses seems to presuppose either that the young person accepts that the decision can be taken in unison with the parents *or* that an autonomous choice can be made even with the involvement of others.

A few responses did relate how the student had changed his or her mind and had given in to parental pressure. Far more common, however, were responses describing their educational choice specifically as *their own*. One example is the young man above saying that he is '*satisfied with the choice I have made, and I have really made up my mind about what I want*' after describing pressure from his parents. Another example is a young woman who got '*a lot of support from my parents, which made it easier for me to make this choice*' (female, minority, working class, GE). In Brooks' (2004) study, one finding is that parents' socialisation of their children may be a covert influence on their offspring's educational choice. Given that our qualitative material only includes educational choices that were experienced as problematic, examples of indirect influence may not be included. However, there are glimpses into the indirect ways parents may influence their children's decision-making—their unspoken expectations still play a part in decision processes through adolescents' imagined dialogue with their parents (cf. Bell et al 2013). One respondent wrote '*I was also unsure of whether my*

parents would support my choice' (female, minority, lower middle class, GE). A young man stated that *'I was thinking about what I wanted, but then I realised that my parents' alternative was a better alternative for my future' (*male, majority, lower middle class, GE*).* This statement of ambiguity from another respondent who felt a high degree of pressure from her parents is telling: '*I don't know what I want to be. When you can't make up your mind, it is a bit complicated to fill in the answers to all the questions, and to feel good about the "choice" that "I" have made*' (female, majority, upper middle class, GE). These answers illustrate how young people may be reflecting deeply on what their parents think about their choice and on their parents' role in their decision, both when the parents do not voice their own opinion very clearly and when they do.

The analysis of the qualitative material therefore shows that parents may have very different roles in difficult decisions, ranging from pressure aimed at deterring a young person from the choice they want to make to, at the end of the spectrum, being crucial sparring partners in a young person's process towards making a decision. Along the whole spectrum, we find examples of youth who describe their choice as their own.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate how young people in different family contexts experience parental influence on their educational decisions and to show how different parental approaches may shape young people's sense of having made their own educational choice.

In accordance with previous studies, we found a difference between minority and majority youth's description of the parental role, with immigrant parents reported as being more explicit and direct in voicing their views on the young person's choice. Only 1 in 5 of the majority students said that the parents had made a clear impact on their choice, compared to almost half of the minority youths. The bulk of minority and majority youths alike saw their parents as positive and supportive of their educational choice. However, minority youths more often than majority youths describe their parents as negative regarding their choice and as outspoken in their opinions. It is important to note that this applies to only a small share of both minority and majority students and that the public concern may be overstated. The difference can be interpreted as parents of minority youths being more outspoken about their advice,

information and expectations for their children compared to majority families and at the same time that minority youths are more prone to accept parental influence.

The regression analysis showed that strong and negative parental opinion was related to a more difficult choosing process, while positive support was related to less difficulty. On the one hand, this may indicate that parental strategies have an impact on the students' degree of difficulty in the decision-making process. However, the analysis of the qualitative material suggests there are a number of reasons young people may experience choices as difficult and that, on the other hand, strong parental opinions and involvement may be experienced as a *result* of uncertainty and doubt on the part of the young person. The combination of parental assertiveness and youthful insecurity was one important theme in the qualitative descriptions of parents' role in making difficult decisions. Some of the difficulties young people experience in their decision-making may therefore result from the struggle to balance their insecurity and feelings with the rationality and reason of their parents. Young people are told to pursue their interests and dreams, but they may experience that parents question whether leisure interests should guide educational trajectories. In Pless and Katznelson's Danish study (2007), for instance, young people from immigrant backgrounds describe a double message in their communication with their parents. Their parents want them to follow their heart but at the same time express clear expectations for their choice between the alternatives; some alternatives are better than others (Pless and Katznelson 2007). A difficult choice may therefore be one where young people experience difficulties in balancing 'who I am' (their heart) with 'what I can become' (their parents' foresighted rationality).

In contrast, parents' attempts at deterring a young person from a decision may lead to conflict and very difficult decision-making. This distinction between difficulties relating to confusion and difficulties relating to others trying to make decisions on the young person's behalf came across very clearly in the qualitative material.

The distinction reflects the different meanings that the notion of young people's autonomy may have in the context of educational decisions. Based on a study of educational counselling sessions and guidance material, Smette (2015) found that autonomy in these settings referred both to young people's freedom to make a choice regardless of the opinions of others, including their parents, and to the capability of making a choice based primarily on knowledge of oneself (Smette 2015, 261). It is minority youths' freedom to make a choice regardless of others' opinions that is seen as

threatened by parents who have their own agenda. To be regarded as making an autonomous choice in the second meaning requires that a young person has developed knowledge about his or her interests and talents and that this is recognised as valid knowledge by others. Parents may be deeply involved in this process—as pointed out by Gullestad's (1996) notion of parents assisting children in finding themselves. This socialisation regime, with its the emphasis on a child's right to self-determination, is different from the 'veneer of democracy' described by Reay and Ball (1998). In the latter model, parents try to exert tacit influence over their child's educational choice through the advocacy of their own values and preferences.

Even if parents do not voice particular aspirations for their children and conceive of their role as assisting their children in 'finding themselves', this does not mean parents do not influence these decisions. It is obvious that the socialisation of youth may lead to the internalisation of values that will influence young people's choices later on (cf. Brooks 2003, Edwards and Alldred 2000) and as such may contribute to the social reproduction of educational trajectories. In contrast to previous studies, our study found no differences in parental involvement based on class background differences in majority families and only non-significant differences in minority (immigrant) families. This absence of class difference in majority families contrasts with the consistent finding in British research where middle class parents are defined as educational strategists and working class parents as deferring to children's preferences in their educational choice (cf. Reay and Ball 1998). The similarity of experiences across classes may as such be interpreted as evidence of a comprehensive cultural norm that sets limits on parents' explicit influence across social backgrounds. Our finding may find support in existing studies about the similarities in educational strategies across classes in Norway, particularly regarding the use of public schools (Aarseth 2015). However, it is important to remember that our data on parental involvement reflects young people's experiences of how the parents related to their educational decision. Their experience of parental influence is likely to be influenced by the degree of agreement between parents and children in the process. This agreement may also in itself be a product of socialisation in the family. In addition, the very different national class contexts in Norway and in the UK may also explain some of the differences in parental practices between the two countries.

Based on our analysis, however, we argue that parental influence on educational decisions may be a much more multifaceted phenomenon than suggested by the ideas of the contrasting approaches of parental pressure and autonomous decisions.

Conclusion

We started out with the public concern regarding immigrant parents' interference in the educational decisions of their children, a concern emerging, we argued, from the normative value of young people's autonomy in educational decisions in Norway. Our study has added nuance to the dichotomous construction of educational choices as either autonomous or controlled by parents. Negative and strong parental opinions can complicate the choosing process and threaten young people's sense of autonomy. However, while minority youth reported their parents to be slightly more outspoken about their educational choice, and more often agreed that their parents had influenced their choice, this did not lead to a more difficult choice for the minority youths compared to majority peers. Parental influence may also be the result of a child's insecurity and need for support, in which case parental involvement may be a precondition for a young person's ability to make an autonomous decision.

Bell et al. (2013) describe the multifaceted influence of parent–child relationships on educational decisions in the following manner: 'Just because parents or parental figures do not have explicit, verbal input in a given decision does not mean that they are not often very much present in adolescents' imagined dialoguing about the decision, and in turn, that adolescents are not very much present, and influential, in parents' "unilateral" decisions' (Bell et al. 2013, 1796). Our study has demonstrated how taking young people's perspective on the parental role in educational decisions is valuable and broadens our understanding of the complex relational dynamics that may be involved in this process, in which young people interact with their parents in both direct and indirect ways. However, further research on such dynamics is needed, taking young people's perspective into account.

Our study has also demonstrated that qualitative data generated through surveys, although limited as qualitative material in its own right, adds depth and nuance to analyses and categorisations.

References

Bakken, Anders, and Mira Sletten. 2000. 'Innvandrerungdoms Planer om Høyere Utdanning - Realistiske Forventninger eller Uoppnåelige Aspirasjoner?' [Minority Youths' Plans for Higher Education]. *Søkelys på arbeidsmarkedet* 17:27-36.

Ball, Stephen J, Meg Maguire, and Sheila Macrae. 2000. *Choice, Pathways and Transitions Post-16. New Youth, New Economies in the Global City*. London: Routledge.

Ball, Stephen J. 2003. *Class Strategies and the Education Market: The Middle Classes and Social Advantage*. New York: Routledge.

Bell, Nancy J, Emilia Baron, Kimberly Corson, Erin Kostina-Ritchey, and Helyne Frederick. 2013. 'Parent-Adolescent Decision Making: Embracing Dialogical Complexity.' *Journal of Family Issues* 35(13):780-1799.

Brooks, Rachel. 2003. 'Young People's Higher Education Choices: The Role of Family and Friends.' *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 24 (3):283-297.

Brooks, Rachel. 2004. ''My Mother Would Be Pleased as Puch If I Actually Went, but My Dad Seems a Bit More Particular About It': Paternal Involvement in Young People's Higher Education Choices.' *British Educational Research Journal* 30 (4):495-514.

Buland, Trond, Ida Holth Mathiesen, Bjørg Eva Aaslid, Halvdan Gaute Søvik Haugsbakken, Brita Bungum, and Siri Mordal. 2011. 'På Vei mot Framtida—men i Ulik Fart? [En Route towards the Future—but at Different Speeds?] S*INTEF report*. Trondheim: SINTEF.

David, Miriam E, Stephen J Ball, Jackie Davies, and Diane Reay. 2003. 'Gender Issues in Parental Involvement in Student Choices of Higher Education.' *Gender and Education* 15 (1):21-36.

Edwards, Rosalind, and Pam Alldred. 2000. 'A Typology of Parental Involvement in Education Centring on Children and Young People: Negotiating Familialisation, Institutionalisation and Individualisation.' *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 21 (3):435-455.

Fejes, Andreas. 2008. 'To Be One's Own Confessor: Educational Guidance and Governmentality.' *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 29 (6):653-664. doi: 10.1080/01425690802423320.

Foskett, Nicholas, and Jane Hemsley-Brown. 2001. *Choosing Futures: Young People's Decision-Making in Education, Training, and Careers Markets*: Psychology Press.

Frøyland, Lars Roar, and Cay Gjerustad. 2012. 'Vennskap, Utdanning og Framtidsplaner. Forskjeller og Likheter blant Ungdom med og uten Innvandrerbakgrunn i Oslo' [Friendship, education and plans for the future. Differences and similarities between young people with and without immigrant backgrounds in Oslo]. *NOVA repport* no 5/12, edited by NOVA. Oslo: NOVA.

Gullestad, Marianne. 1996. 'From Obedience to Negotiation: Dilemmas in the Transmission of Values between the Generations in Norway.' *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 2 (1):25-42.

Hegna, Kristinn.. 2014. 'Changing educational aspirations in the choice of and transition to post-compulsory schooling–a three-wave longitudinal study of Oslo youth'. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 17 (5):592-613.

Knocke, Woukko, and Fredrik Hertzberg. 2000. *Mångfaldens Barn Söker sin Plats. En Studie om Arbetsmarknadschanser för Ungdomar med Invandrarbakgrund* [Children of Diversity seek their Place]. Stockholm: Svartvitts förlag.

Kunnskapsdepartementet. 2006. *… Og Ingen Sto igjen. Tidlig Innsats for Livslang Læring. Stortingsmelding 16 (2006/2007)*. Oslo: Kunnskapsdepartementet.

Lauglo, Jon. 2000. 'Social Capital Trumping Class and Cultural Capital? Engagement with School among Immigrant Youth.' In *Social Capital : Critical Perspectives*, edited by John Field, Tom Schuller and Stephen Baron, 142-167. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Leirvik, Mariann Stærkebye. 2010. ''For Mors Skyld": Utdanning, Takknemlighet Og Status Blant Unge Med Pakistansk Og Indisk Bakgrunn.' [For my Mother's sake: Education, Gratitude and Status among Youth from Pakistani and Indian Backgrounds].*Tidsskrift for ungdomsforskning* 10 (1):23-47.

Lødding, Berit, and Solveig Holen. 2012. Utdanningsvalg som Fag og Utfordring på Ungdomstrinnet. [Educational Choice as Subject and Challenge in Lower Secondary School]. *NIFURapport*, edited by NIFU. Oslo: NIFU.

Pless, Mette, and Noemi Katznelson. 2007. *Unges Veje Mod Ungdomsuddannelserne*. [Young Peoples Pathways Towards Upper Secondary Education]. Copenhagen: CEFU, Danish School of Education.

Power, Sally, Tony Edwards, Geoff Whitty, and Valerie Wigfall. 2003. *Education and the Middle Class*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Reay, Diane, and Stephen J. Ball. 1998. '"Making Their Minds Up": Family Dynamics of School Choice.' *British Educational Research Journal* 24 (4):431-448. doi: 10.2307/1502012.

Savage, Mike, Fiona Devine, Niall Cunningham, Mark Taylor, Yaojun Li, Johs Hjellbrekke, Brigitte Le Roux, Sam Friedman, and Andrew Miles. 2013. 'A New Model of Social Class? Findings from the BBC's Great British Class Survey Experiment.' *Sociology* 47 (2):219-250.

Shah, Bindi, Claire Dwyer, and Tariq Modood. 2010. 'Explaining Educational Achievement and Career Aspirations Amon Young British Pakistanis: Mobilizing "Ethnic Capital"?' *Sociology* 44 (6):1109-1127.

Smette, Ingrid. 2015. *The Final Year: An Anthropological Study of Community in Two Secondary Schools in Oslo, Norway.* PhD diss., University of Oslo.

Snee, Helene, and Fiona Devine. 2014. 'Taking the Next Step: Class, Resources and Educational Choice across the Generations.' *Journal of Youth Studies* 17 (8):998-1013.

Støren, Liv Anne. 2009. 'Choice of Study and Persistence in Higher Education by Immigrant Background, Gender, and Social Background'. *NIFU STEP Report*. Oslo: NIFU STEP.

Verdier, Eric. 2008. 'L'éducation Et La Formation Tout Au Long De La Vie: Une Orientation Européenne, Des Régimes D'action Publique Et Des Modéles Nationaux En Évolution.' *Sociologie et sociétés* 40 (1):195-225.

Walther, Andreas. 2006. 'Regimes of Youth Transitions. Choice, Flexibility and Security in Young People's Experiences across Different European Contexts.' *YOUNG* 14 (2):119-139.

Tables

Table 1: Tenth grade students' evaluation of their parents' role in their choice of upper secondary education (sample items) according to immigrant and social background. Percentage "strongly agree". Oslo 2008. N=1939.

	All	**Majority youth**			**Minority youth**		
		Managerial, professionals	Employees	Manual labour	Managerial, professionals	Employees	Manual labour
They are positive about my decision.	70	72	69	76	67	65	70
They think I should make my own decision.	62	66	62	67	47	52	61
They think that my interests and my preferences are the most important in my school choice.	57	60	59	59	50	46	55
They are negative about my decision.	3	2*	2	2,5	2*	8	5
They have tried to influence my decision.	14	13	13	11	17	20	20
They have strong opinions about what alternative I should choose.	12	10	10	11	22	19	19

Note: Pairwise minority/majority differences p<.05 in bold. No significant social class differences.
* Among majority youth, 84% indicated they "strongly disagree" while 71% of minority youth did the same. This difference is significant (p<.01)
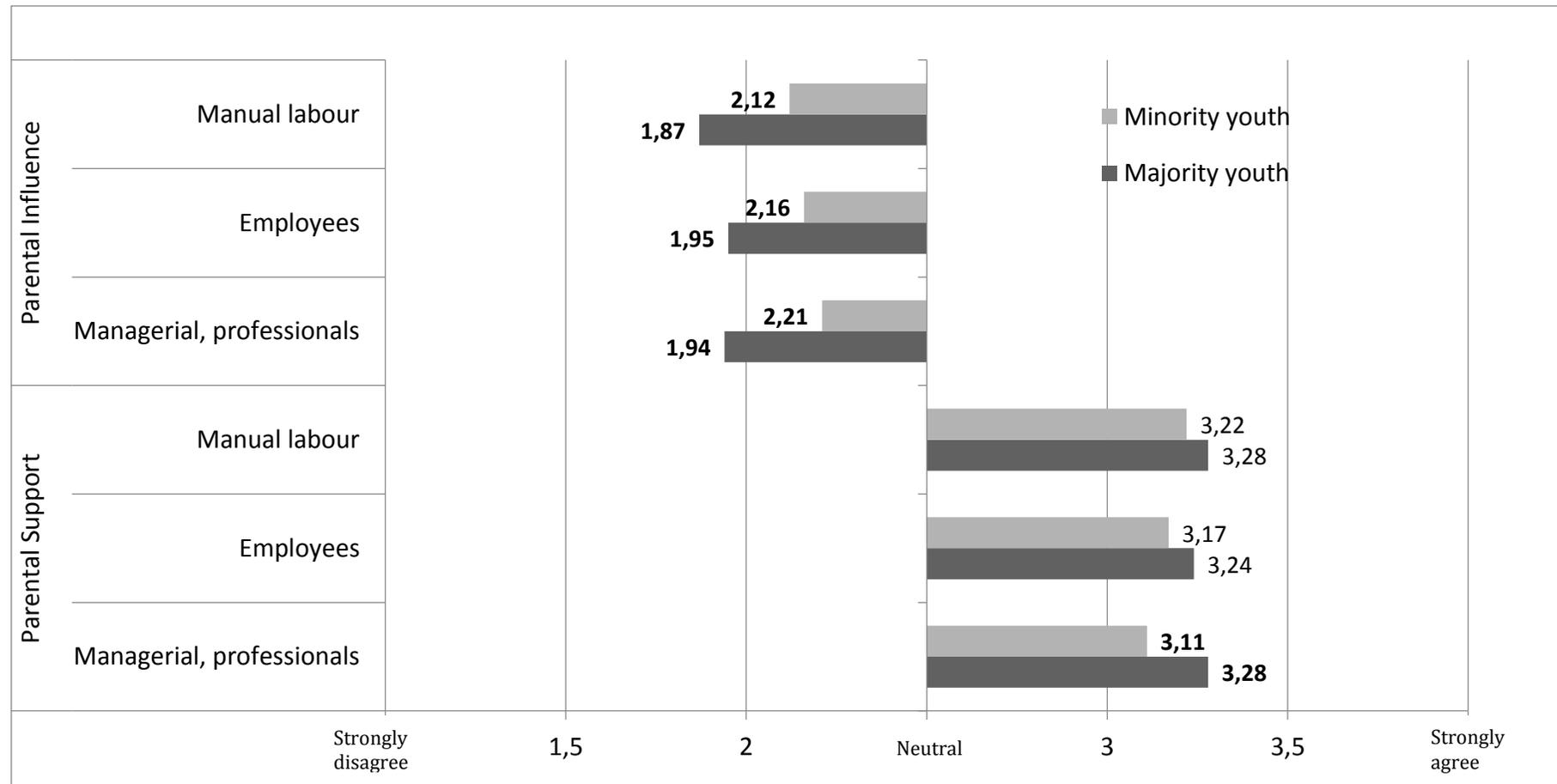
Figure 1: Computed mean of Parental Strong Influence and Parental Positive Support respectively, by immigrant and social backgrounds. Controlled for gender and compulsory school grade points. LUNO 2008. Significant majority\minority differences in bold. N=1941.

Table 2: Regression coefficient (b) for parental positive support and parental strong influence respectively on young people's experience of difficulty of educational choice. Controlled for social background, compulsory school grade points and study programme. LUNO 2008. N=1908

Dependent variable: Degree of difficulty of upper secondary education decision	b	SE (b)	β	
a. Parental positive support				
Constant	2.36	0.13		p<.001
Parental positive support	-0.26	0.05	-.15	p<.001
Gender (Male=1)	-0.23	0.04	-.12	p<.001
Interaction term support x gender	0.22	0.08	.09	p<.01
Minority youth (minority=1)	0.17	0.05	.08	p<.01
r²	0.05	0.9		
	b	SE (b)	β	
b. Parental strong influence				
Constant	2.35	0.13		p<.001
Parental strong influence	0.28	0.05	.19	p<.001
Gender (Male=1)	-0.24	0.04	-.13	p<.001
Interaction term influence x gender	-0.16	0.07	-.08	p<.05
Minority youth (minority=1)	0.14	0.05	.06	p<.01
r²	0.06	0.9		