

Mapping Parents' Educational Values

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Why do parents value education differently and how do values vary between and within social groups? Drawing on qualitative interviews with 162 Danish parents of children in 9th grade, we outline a typology of parents' educational values. We focus on parents' valuation of education because education is the prime transmitter of social positions in society, and because the value of education is a key signal of the attitudes of parents towards their children's future.

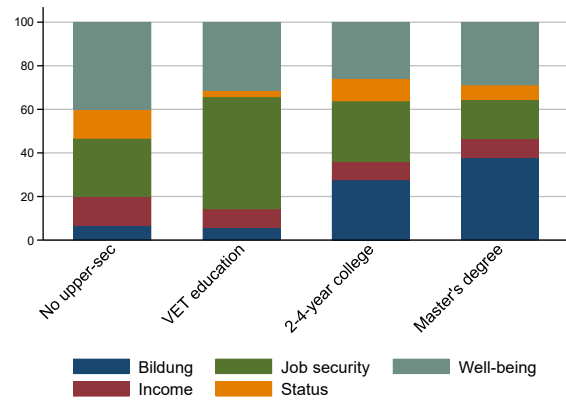
Our study is rooted in sociological stratification and mobility research. This field is primarily made up of quantitative studies using the relative risk aversion approach (Breen and Goldthorpe 1997). While the relative risk aversion theory has earned much merit, it relies – in its quest for parsimony – on a hierarchical class scheme and assumes a unidimensional approach to educational choice: that which most likely reproduce one's social class origin at the lowest cost. However, the educational expansion, the changing composition of the labor force, and the rise of women in education and in the labor market challenge a unidimensional cost-benefit

analysis of educational choice. For instance, studies show the importance of within-class variation when predicting educational attainment and future earnings (Jonsson et al. 2009; Kim, Tamborini, and Sakamoto 2015). To account for within-class variation in the shaping of educational values, we adopt the following approaches. First, we pay special attention to parents' specific education and occupation and their labor market and mobility experiences. Second, we allow for several qualitatively different types of values. Third, we draw on Keller and Zavalloni (1964), to understand how these values can be understood relative to one's social position.

Our analysis identifies five core educational values: (1) well-being and personal development, (2) the educated subject ('Bildung'), (3) prospects for future income, (4) job security (education as a safety net), and (5) status and recognition. The five core values are associated with parents' educational level (see Figure 1). For example, college educated parents more often place weight on Bildung than vocationally educated parents, who favor job security more. However, we also find

considerable variation within each educational level, which is also evident from Figure 1. The values are qualitatively diverse and do not only capture concerns about maintaining status. Arguably, some of the values may be given a straightforward interpretation in a relative risk-aversion perspective (e.g. job security), but some values speak to other dimensions. For example, a preference for offspring's well-being may in fact trump fear of social demotion. We argue that this within-class variation in values stems from (1) parents' specific education and occupation, and (2) labor market and mobility experiences of parents and their significant others.

Figure 1 – Educational values by parents' education



Note: N=162. Observe that we have sampled for range and not to achieve representativity. Value differences do not reflect a wider population, but differences within the families sampled.

References

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