

International Studies on Childhood and Adolescence 1

International Studies on Childhood and Adolescence (ISCA)

The aim of the ISCA series is to publish theoretical and methodological studies on the social, cultural, economic, and health situation of children and adolescents.

Almost all countries worldwide report increased risks and problems in the development of children and adolescents. Many pedagogic, psychosocial, and medical institutes as well as education and training centers are trying to help children and adolescents deal with problematic situations. They step in to help with existing difficulties (intervention) or to avoid problems in advance (prevention). However, not enough is known about the causes and backgrounds of the difficulties that arise in the life course of children and adolescents. There is still insufficient research on the effectiveness and consequences of prevention measures and intervention in families, pre-school institutions, schools, youth service, youth welfare, and the criminal justice system.

The ISCA series addresses these issues. An interdisciplinary team of editors and authors focusses on the publications on theoretical, methodological, and practical issues in the above mentioned fields. The whole spectrum of perspectives is considered: analyses rooted in the sociological as well as the psychological or medical and public health tradition, from an economical or a political science angle, mainstream as well as critical contributions.

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Childhood and Youth in Germany and The Netherlands

Transitions and Coping Strategies of
Adolescents

Edited by

Manuela du Bois-Reymond, René Diekstra,
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Walter de Gruyter · Berlin · New York 1995

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With 12 figures and 50 tables

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Childhood and youth in Germany and the Netherlands ; transitions and coping strategies of adolescents / edited by Manuela du Bois-Reymond ... [et al.].

p. cm. — (International studies on childhood and adolescence ; 1)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 3-11-014154-X (alk. paper)

1. Adolescence — Germany. 2. Adolescence — Netherlands. 3. Adolescent psychology — Germany. 4. Adolescent psychology — Netherlands. I. Bois-Reymond, Manuela du. II. Series.

HQ799.G5C44 1995

305.23'5'0943—dc20

95-8054

CIP

Die Deutsche Bibliothek — Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Childhood and youth in Germany and the Netherlands ; transitions and coping strategies of adolescents / ed. by Manuela DuBois-Reymond ... — Berlin ; New York : Mouton de Gruyter, 1995

(International studies on childhood and adolescence ; 1)

ISBN 3-11-014154-X

NE: DuBois-Reymond, Manuela [Hrsg.]; GT

⊗ Printed on acid-free paper which falls within the guidelines of the ANSI to ensure permanence and durability.

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Printing: WB-Druck GmbH, Rieden am Forggensee. Binding: Lüderitz & Bauer GmbH, Berlin. Cover Design: Johannes Rother, Berlin.

Introduction

'Adolescence is a new birth, for the higher and more completely human traits are now born.

Character and personality are taking form, but everything is plastic. Self-feeling and ambition are increased, and every trait and faculty is liable to exaggeration and excess. It is all a marvellous birth, and those who believe that nothing is so worthy of love, reverence and service as the body and soul of youth, and who hold that the best test of every human institution is how much it contributes to bring youth to the ever fullest possible development, may well review themselves and the civilization in which we live to see how it satisfies this supreme test.' (Stanley Hall, 1904, *Adolescence*)

'Today's adolescents are the children of the youth cult which dominated the last few decades, and that cult has led to a situation where not only children turn adolescent earlier and adolescents grow up later, it has also mystified the stretch of time between 13 and 30 to such an extent that it seems like the centre of life. Their philosophy of life is made up of the experiences their peers of earlier decades have made. The sixties provide scepticism, lack of illusions stems from the fifties, radicalism from the seventies, hedonism from the eighties - but the visions of those decades are over and done with.' (SPIEGEL special 1994: *Die Eigennigen. Selbstporträt einer Generation*)

Central topics in the study of adolescence are discussed in this reader: status transitions and coping strategies, or how young people grow into society and how they cope with the experiences and changes that go with growing-up. In the present day such changes are not all that self-evident. There is a much greater variation in forms and standards of behaviour than there are used to be. This is illustrated in this book by the results of studies on adolescence and adolescents from two West European countries, Germany and The Netherlands.

The contributions approach youth from different points of view and scientific traditions. This is bound up directly with the great variation in forms of expression of youth and the situation of young people. Putting it extremely, it is not so straightforward any more what we should mean by 'youth', or who belongs to this category. The lines of demarcation between the stages of life are shifting. Somewhere between the 'Hurried child' (Elkind 1981) and post-adolescence something comes about which replaces what we were used to call childhood, adolescence and early adulthood.

It looks as if youth has evolved from a self-evident category into a problem category, problematic in several respects. It is not only anything but obvious when a person is not a child any more or when a child becomes an adolescent, what is also coming

into discussion is what should be considered 'normal' and what 'deviant' behaviour. Norms and values that steer behaviour are becoming multi-interpretable, for the subjects just as much as for the scientists studying modern youth in social relations.

In this book we search for answers to complicated questions like what is youth? what are normal and abnormal development trajectories in adolescence? from the perspectives of psychology, pedagogy and cultural sociology. However, this does not automatically mean interdisciplinarity. The reader will see that the contributions owe much to their respective scientific traditions, traditions that do not combine, let alone merge automatically. It is easier to demand interdisciplinarity than to achieve it, but it is already progress when the different approaches are brought together and confronted within one and the same book. Despite gradually closer relations, the scientific approaches to adolescence still have a long way to go to appropriately and fully profit from each others' insights and findings. To a great extent these are still tasks for the future.

Something else characterises this book, and that is attention to both qualitative and quantitative approaches in the study of the multi-faceted phenomenon that is youth. Both approaches are concerned after all with the question, what current and future developments in society mean for children and young people.

Quantitative approaches look for the answer to this question by examining the frequency and trends in behavioral indicators of psycho-social development; whereas qualitative approaches direct their attention more to 'trendsetters' in modernisation processes. But luckily there is no longer a hostile controversy between both paths of knowledge - and this too we regard as progress in research on childhood and youth.

Finally, this book is the expression of a developing network of youth researchers in Europe. Only ten years ago projects like this one in which youth researchers cooperate and publish together across the borders, were the exception rather than the rule. These days we are seeing this happening more and more, partly due to the De Gruyter series. Publishing in English gives many European youth researchers the chance to make their work known to each other; English is becoming the *lingua franca* at European conferences, and in the cooperation between youth and childhood researchers.

The four sections of the book reflect all these different developments.

The *first section* presents research into a classic theme in adolescence sciences: status transitions. The three contributions from a Dutch project show the tension between traditional and modern forms of living of today's young people and their future perspectives. It is demonstrated that young people have more options in their lives than earlier generations. It is also made clear however that it would be wrong to

assume that a 'choice biography' is reserved for all young people. The researchers show that social class still plays a great role in the choice for (the level of) further education and profession. It is equally beyond dispute that increasingly longer education paths are leading to a prolongation of the phase of youth.

Young people live up to the picture of 'loose and wild' conjured up by the media much less than one is inclined to believe, despite increased informality and a tolerant social climate with respect to morals and sexuality. Where this discrepancy originates is less obvious and needs more research. Likewise it is surprising how little is known about the experience of physicality and sexuality in the 'new youth biography'.

While social class is still influential in the education paths of modern young people, gender is definitely an important factor with respect to the future expectations of young people. In the European discussions on youth (policy), gender and family building, the so-called profession-family dilemma plays an increasingly important role for the young generation with fewer fixed standard biographical notions. On the one hand, girls have caught up in education with regard to boys in the last two or three decades, but on the other hand there is still a clear discrepancy between the chances for boys and girls of ending up in certain female professions and at certain lower professional levels in most European countries. Likewise, in the relationship between the genders we see modernity beside tradition: It is self-evident for today's girls that they practise a profession, are economically independent and can choose to have children or not to have any children. Just as self-evident is however that most boys and girls want to have a family, and that for boys and girls alike it is still the mother who is mainly in charge of bringing up the children (cf. Peters; Ravesloot).

Both the first and second section contains a contribution about the parent-child relationship. Research in European (and Anglo-Saxon) countries proves that there is no question of a 'generation gap'. M. du Bois-Reymond's two contributions place the absence of such a gap in an inter-generational and inter-cultural perspective and link it with modernisation theories: Parents of today's youth give shape to the modernisation process with their upbringing behaviour. They do this by switching to more open and tolerant style of upbringing and communication than they experienced themselves during their own youth with their parents. But here too there is by no means question of an unambiguous trend: Social class today actually plays a greater role for the amount of openness in communication in family and between generations than earlier. In as much as parents become more tolerant and open minded, those who do not (mainly from the lower middle classes) deviate from 'the main stream'.

The contribution from the cross-cultural project about parent-child relationships shows a general trend in Western European countries, pointing to a negotiating

culture in most families. Yet there are intercultural differences, such as the warmer family climate in The Netherlands as compared to Germany.

The *second section* presents a cross-cultural project from three European regions (West and East Germany and The Netherlands). It is a qualitative, case-oriented study focusing in particular on the question to what extent children are affected by the same kind of processes of individualisation that have been determined for youth (cf. Krüger & Ecarius). Beside the parent-child relationship, new forms of child cultures receive attention (cf. Büchner). All together the contributions from this project offer co-researchers a chance to get to know a strand of thinking about childhood and modernity which is typical for a socio-cultural rather than a psychological approach.

The *third section* focuses on the nature and magnitude of emotional and behavioral problems and risk behaviours in adolescence as well as on interpersonal and social correlates of such problems and behaviours. Data from survey studies in Germany (cf. Kolip & Hurrelmann, Settertobulte) and The Netherlands (cf. Deković & Meeus, Garnefski & Diekstra) converge on the conclusion that adolescents clearly appear to be a healthy group if health is defined in the biomedical sense, but much less so if health is defined in terms of parameters of psychosocial and mental health. The prevalence of stress-related complaints, psychoactive substance (ab)use and (self)destructive behaviour both in German and Dutch young people suggests that a substantial part of the adolescent population, at least about 1 in 5, might be at risk for further development because of serious adjustment problems. Although there is evidence that certain problem behaviours, such as violent behaviour, might be self-limiting and decreasing in terms of frequency and intensity over the adolescent years (cf. Vollebergh), others such as emotional problems appear to increase from early to middle adolescence (cf. Deković & Meeus; Garnefski & Diekstra).

There is also agreement between the reports from Germany and the Netherlands on the relationship between gender and problem behaviours, in that girls show more often internal or emotional coping strategies and boys more often external or behavioral forms of coping. But more remarkable is the agreement between the studies on the fact that the prevalence of emotional problems among girls is generally higher than the prevalence of behavioral problems among boys. One explanation for this finding could be that girls more readily express or articulate problems and also are more inclined to ask for informal or professional help (cf. Settertobulte; cf. Palentien & Hurrelmann). But it might also indicate that present-day adolescence is a more stressful developmental stage for girls than it is for boys.

An important finding reported in several chapters in this section is the fact that 'comorbidity' of co-occurrence of problems or problem behaviours is rather the rule than the exception (cf. Vollebergh, Kolip & Hurrelmann, Deković & Meeus, Garnefski & Diekstra). Researchers as well as clinicians and other 'interventionists' therefore have to discard the 'single problem' approach and conceive adolescent health problems predominantly in terms of 'sets of interrelated behaviours or problems'. Such 'sets' appear to be strongly related to the existence of multiple problems in the socio-ecological context in which the adolescent lives. It might very well be that the relatively low level of acceptance of professional psychosocial and medical services, as described in two of the contributions (cf. Settertobulte, Palentien & Hurrelmann) have to be attributed to the fact that such services usually have a high level of specialisation and are 'alien' to the adolescent context, not incorporated in the adolescent's everyday context (such as located within the school system). In addition, adolescents are often referred to such services under a specific personalistic and symptomatic label (such as 'being suicidal', 'depressed', 'drug dependent', 'anorexia patient'), that might affect their selfperception in a rather negative way. Such a reductionism reduces the chances that adolescents will accept and profit from help offered and therewith also reduces their chances for a healthy development (cf. Palentien & Hurrelmann).

The *fourth* and last *section* introduces a new concept that is gaining more and more meaning in the intervention and prevention discussion aimed at policy making, on a national as well as a European level. The contribution of F. van der Linden tries to place the concept 'youth information' in a theoretic framework in youth research by relating it to coping and socialization theories. The contribution of Guit and van der Linden presents research into the information needs of young people.

It seems that youth information - understood in the broadest sense of the term - is going to be a new field of attention in youth research, and build a bridge between the living world of children and young people on the one side, and a modern youth policy on the other side. That is why we included this theme as the last section in the book.

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René Diekstra
Klaus Hurrelmann
Els Peters

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Part I

Status Transitions of Dutch Adolescents and the Role of Parents

1.

The Modernization of the Youth Phase. Educational, Professional and Family Careers of Dutch Youth in the Nineties

Els Peters

Leiden University, The Netherlands

1. Introduction

How do young men and women feel about employment and how does it fit in with their life-course models? How do they intend to combine a job on the one hand and relationships and family life on the other? What role do gender and social class play in their anticipations on adulthood? These questions lie at the core of the Leiden research project 'Youth, Parents and Employment' (YPE).

Youth research in the Netherlands and other European countries (cf. e.g.: Hurrelmann & Engel, 1989; Meeus, de Goede, Kox, & Hurrelmann, 1992) has shown that, compared to earlier youth generations, young people attend school for a longer period of time and enter the labour market at a later stage. Such a prolonged institutionalized youth phase applies equally to boys and girls, irrespective of social class. Apart from an educational moratorium, which invites and indeed forces young people to choose from a vast supply of educational and professional options, a relational moratorium can also be detected (Meeus & 't Hart, 1993). Nowadays, young people progress towards sexual and relational independence much earlier than a few decades ago. At the same time, the decisive choices concerning marriage and notably parenthood are being postponed (Breakwell, 1992; Ravesloot, 1992; van der Vliet, 1992). The period of experimentation has increased, as have the options in the field of relational lifestyles. As a result, the transition to adulthood can hardly be called predictable or self-evident any more. This is generally taken as a sign of the destandardization of life-course patterns and the individualization of youth-biographies (Buchmann, 1989).

The debate on the individualization of youth-biography strongly emphasizes the possible drawbacks of the increased freedom to act and the options available. The freedom to choose is accompanied by an obligation to choose and a necessary reflection on choices made, in addition to a justification of these choices. This has made the transition from school to employment and the anticipation of adulthood

considerably more complex. Choices involving education or employment are now tied to the unpredictability of the labour market as a result of growing unemployment and the devaluation of qualifications. Girls are faced with the additional problem of combining their job and their role as a mother. Even though they have many more options with regard to planning their professional and family lives according to their 'own demands' than their mothers had, girls still have to deal with objective obstacles such as the limited availability of day nurseries and the poorly-balanced division of child-raising and professional tasks between men and women.

The significance of employment and the realization of a professional career are matters that cannot be considered or studied without referring to the general ideas of adolescents about their future lives as adult men and women, i.e. to the *life-course perspective*, and the socio-historical developments which have taken place in the Netherlands and other West European countries over the last decades regarding education, employment, relationships and family building, i.e. to *modernization processes*. Moreover, the way young people conceive of their future lives cannot be separated from the influence of 'significant others'. Although the influence of peers has increased for most young people, parents still play an important role in decision-making processes of their sons and daughters. At the same time, however, most contemporary fathers and mothers were themselves brought up in a completely different time, a time in which the life course was strongly influenced by gender-specific and class-related rules as well as by religious and local traditions (Peters, 1993). How do these parents translate their own past experiences vis-à-vis their children and how do young people react to this? In other words, what is the nature of the *intergenerational relationship* and how does it influence the transition to adulthood?

Before we go into the questions of the YPE-project (section 3) which are at the centre of the present and next two contributions, we shall first present an outline of the social context to which our questions relate and of the changes that affected being young and growing up in the Netherlands during the decades after World War II (section 2). In sections 4 and 5 we will describe the educational and professional choices of our respondents, and their anticipation of combining a job with family life. We will focus on gender- and class-specific differences. Finally, section 6 deals with the question of whether we are justified in assuming that a choice-biographical rather than a standard-biographical life-course model applies to contemporary youth.

2. Changes in the transition to adulthood and their social context

The youth phase can be regarded as a series of status passages in the course of which young people acquire a different social role and position. These transitions bear upon the changes from school to employment, from lack of sexual experience to being sexually experienced, from the parental home to a private household and building a

family of one's own. When we compare the ways in which these steps towards adulthood were taken in the 1950s as opposed to the 1980s, several structural changes become apparent. These changes, which have been established in many West European countries (Watts, Fischer, Fuchs, & Zinnecker, 1989; Poole, 1989), concern the duration and sequence of the transitions as well as their social significance and subjective meaning. A vast complex of developments - such as ongoing industrialization, urbanization, increasing social mobility, secularization, emancipatory

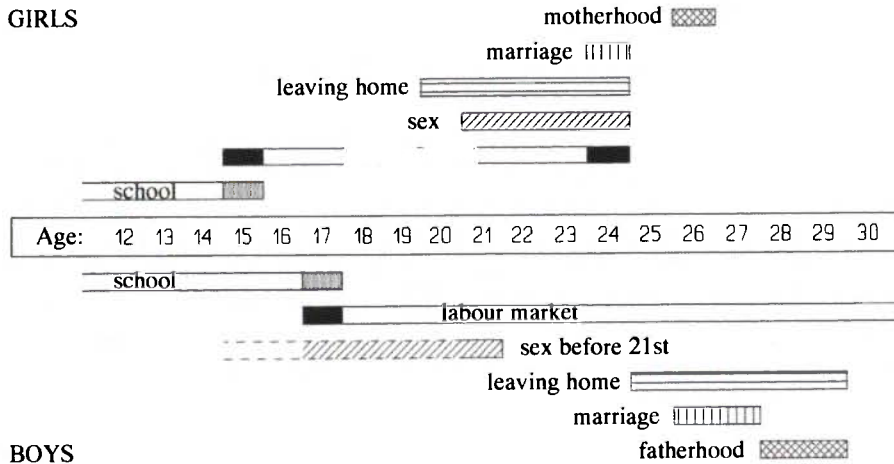


Figure 1. The average age or the age at which the majority of girls and boys in the 1950s has taken the passages to adulthood (source: Peters 1992: 53).

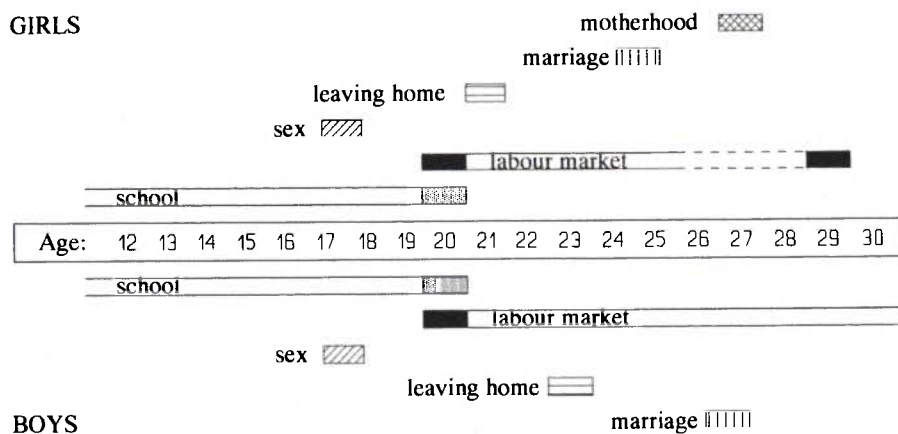


Figure 2. The average age or the age at which the majority of boys and girls in the 1980s has taken the passages to adulthood (source: Peters 1992: 72).

and democratization processes, the development of the welfare state and general changes in norms and values - has evidently left its mark on the daily lives of young people and adults alike. Figure 1 and 2, which outline the transition to adulthood of boys and girls in the 1950s and 1980s, clearly demonstrate this. What becomes especially apparent, is that the modernization of the youth phase has not led to the elimination of gender-specific differences, or of social differences for that matter, as we will further demonstrate in the course of our argument.

2.1 The prolonging of the educational career and the postponement of economic independence

One of the most significant changes has been the prolonging of the educational trajectory. During the 1950s and 1960s, when the Dutch economy was rapidly expanding, a properly qualified work force became more and more in demand. This prompted young people to spend more time taking higher educational levels; something which their parents encouraged and fully supported. This particular development was also promoted by the increased individual wealth, the democratization of the educational system - which transformed class-related educational structures into mass education - and the prolonging of compulsory education. Since the beginning of the 1970s compulsory education goes up to the age of sixteen and is followed by another two years of part-time education (one/two days per week).

In the 1980s, boys and girls leave full-time education at the age of 20. Quite a different situation from the 1950s, when education was considered of less importance to girls, who would enter the labour market some two years earlier than boys (or never at all, as they would go into house-keeping to help out their mothers). Boys would often take an extra couple of years of part-time (vocational) training. Girls, as it was then expected, would eventually marry and become a housewife and mother, whereas their husbands would take on the role of breadwinner. To be sure, many upper-class girls were already taking higher educational levels, but a professional career was generally deemed of less importance than general education and meeting the right partner.

For boys, the trend of increasing educational participation set off during the 1960s, whereas this only happened some ten years later for girls. Partly under the influence of the Women's Liberation Movement, the equal rights debate and active educational emancipation policies, the topics of proper education, jobs and economic independence for women gradually gained in importance. In 1970, 71% of the Dutch population no longer agreed with the assertion that higher education is more useful to boys than it is to girls. By 1991, this percentage has increased to 87% (SCP, 1992^b: 468). Another indication for the increased educational ambitions of girls is the fact that they appear to have practically caught up with boys with regard to their educational

levels since the 1970s. In university education for example, the number of female students by now surpasses 40% (Niphuis-Nell, 1992: 56).

With respect to the choice of subjects however, we still find certain gender-specific contrasts. During secondary education, girls more often choose languages - even though mathematics and science increasingly seem to appeal to them - and, likewise, during higher education (vocational and university) they more often choose social subjects.¹ These choices eventually affect their position on the labour market: Girls have a greater chance of becoming unemployed, they cover a smaller range of professions and get paid less (Brouns & Schokker, 1990). The concentration of girls within certain disciplines and professions clearly demonstrates that their freedom of choice is still limited. So, the extended educational participation, as such, does not imply that boys and girls share the same point of departure, nor does it imply equality between the sexes.

Class-specific differences appear to be even more persistent than gender-differences. Children whose parents have low educational levels tend to leave school at an early age and hardly ever make it through higher general/pre-university education or higher education (SCP, 1992^a: 35). Once they reach the age of 16 - and are no longer compelled to go to school full-time - they more often opt for a combination of training and employment than upper-class children. This affects their labour-market position in that low qualifications simply lead to unemployment more easily than higher ones (ter Bogt & van Praag, 1992). Considering the present and likely future developments on the labour market - i.e. an ongoing rationalization of production and a growing demand for qualifications - their future position does not look bright.

The higher educated are also confronted with such 'new' risks. Vocational and academic qualifications, for instance, no longer fully guarantee future employment; what is decisive, however, is the choice of subjects. As the intrinsic market value of diplomas is decreasing, the expansion of educational participation is being stimulated once again.² In general, this development has forced young people to aim as high as possible and, what is more, to make the 'right' choice initially. This is not an easy task, considering the vast supply and ongoing differentiation/accumulation of subjects and the unpredictability of labour-market developments (on both a national and a European scale). As a result, they postpone their choices of professional training and stay in school up to a later age. They believe that in doing so they will avoid unemployment and improve their chances. From the end of 1980s, it gradually became apparent that young people do not in fact always select the most efficient trajectory through the educational system; often they pile one subject on top of another or keep changing subjects (SCP, 1992^a: 55). By 1994, 1 out of 5 first-year university students will have already completed higher vocational education (Mare, 1994).³ The relatively late entering of the labour market and the extended economic dependence of young people are clearly indicated by the percentages of professional participation.⁴ In 1960, 58% and 55% of all 15- to 19-year-old boys and girls respectively participated in employment; whereas by 1986, a mere 22% and 26% remain (SER, 1986).

This does not mean that employment has vanished altogether as an aspect of being young. Apart from their 40 hour school week, many 14- to 18-year-olds have jobs during holidays or in the weekends: no less than 85% and 76% of boys and girls respectively. In addition, nearly half of this category appears to have one or even more than one job on the side during normal school weeks: 51% of the boys and 40% of the girls (SCP, 1992^a: 57). So, with regard to education, the prolonging of the youth phase does not altogether offer the uncomplicated joy of 'unattached youth'. By having a job next to school they satisfy their material needs and their need for participation in youth (sub)culture while at the same time gaining their first experience on the labour market.

For upper-class youth, the economic dependence on parents and/or grants now lasts until their twenties. Between 1960 and 1990, the professional participation of 20- to 24-year-old men dropped invariably, i.e. from 90% to 67% (SCP, 1992^a: 57). Analogous to, for instance, the situation in Germany, we get a different picture for women in the same age category. In the 1950s and 1960s, women usually retired from the labour market at the age of 20-24, the age at which most of them got married. In the 1970s, they maintain their job beside their marriage and we see an increase in the labour-market participation of 20- to 24-year old women (from 54% in 1971 up to 71% in 1981). By 1990, the gender-specific differences within this age category have disappeared (67% of the men and 66% of the women).

Compared to the 1950s, young women indeed not only become employed at a later age, they also maintain their economic independence for a longer period of time. At the same time, as becomes apparent from figure 2, they appear to give up their economic independence between 25 and 29 and temporarily withdraw from the labour market or start working part-time. Nowadays, marriage as such no longer causes the discontinuities in the professional biography of women. Instead, the birth of the first (or second) child does. At the end of the 1980s, the average age at which Dutch women have their first child is 27 (in the 1970s, the average age was 24.3). The withdrawal from the labour market is still mainly due to the uneven division of professional and caring tasks between men and women.

Nevertheless, much has changed in the general conception of the division of tasks between the sexes in terms of relational and familial patterns; something which is also expressed in youth-biography. When we look at age and order of status transitions, major changes appear to have taken place with regard to sexual independence, living on one's own and marriage. This applies to girls and boys alike, as we will show below before going into the changes that have taken place in the general ideas about the combination of parenthood and employment.

2.2 Advanced relational independence and the prolonged experimental phase

In the 1950s, the bourgeois morality of marriage and family still prevailed in Dutch society. During the 1960s and 1970s, certain changes emerge towards growing liberalization, tolerance and pluriformity (cf. also the contribution of Ravesloot in this volume). Due to the waning influence of the Church, the debate on women's rights and their unequal position in society and within the family, the sexual revolution, the introduction of the pill, and the increasing percentage of divorces, the standard biographical life-course model - courting, engagement, marriage, parenthood - has become strained (van Leeuwen & Ploegmakers, 1990). Since the 1960s, the percentage of married couples with children has decreased, whereas the number of single-parent families and unmarried couples with/without children has increased.

Although marriage remains the most common form of relationship, ideas about it have changed drastically. In 1965, 60% of the population believed that married people generally experience greater happiness than unmarried people do, whereas by 1991, only 14% held this view (SCP, 1992^b: 460). In large sections of the population alternative ways of life and forms of relationship gained in popularity and legitimacy. In 1980, living together as a form of test-marriage was denounced by 20% and, as a permanent form of relationship by 33% of the population (the remaining category either approved or did not care, which clearly indicates a growing respect for individual choices), but by 1991 these percentages had dropped to 8% and 18% respectively. Similarly, the living together of lesbian or gay couples and l.a.t.-relationships were only rejected by a small percentage (17% and 14% in 1980 respectively, and 13% and 8% respectively in 1991, SCP, 1992^b: 462, 463). Having children is no longer considered to be a matter of course or an obligation which has to be met: In 1965, 68% deemed voluntary childlessness to be unacceptable, whereas in the 1990s a mere 5% did so (SCP, 1992^b: 460).

The advance of liberalization and the increased freedom of the individual to make decisions about his or her life has not only affected adults, but adolescents as well. As to what they are allowed or not and what parents can and cannot demand of them, opinions have changed. Ever since the 1950s, parent-child relationships have continuously shifted towards a situation of consultation and negotiation between the generations (cf. also the contribution of du Bois-Reymond in this volume). This shift in the balance of power between the generations is clearly characterized by the altered form of address, which after all expresses the desired distance between parents and children. In the mid-1960s, for children to be on first-name terms with their parents was still unacceptable (52% in 1965), whereas by the beginning of the 1990s, a majority of the population appears to be in favour of this (62% in 1991, SCP, 1992^b: 463). Generally, parents aim for more equality, intimacy and mutual approach. Similarly, the balance of power between the sexes has become more even; women have demanded and indeed gained more rights. This development has resulted in more liberal, less gender-specific ideas on the education of girls. As we

will see later on, however, these changes (in terms of modernity) are accompanied by continuity (in terms of tradition).

If we look at figure 1 and 2 again, we can see that, compared to the 1950s, boys as well as girls nowadays gain sexual experience at a much earlier age (the average age having advanced some 5 years, from 22.5 in 1950 to 17.5 in 1989; cf. van der Vliet, 1990). Furthermore, we can observe that gender-related differences in age have diminished, and that young people nowadays gain sexual experience when they are still at school and living at home. Parents seem to have accepted that sexuality is an integral part of being young, for boys and girls alike. In 1968, when the sexual revolution reached its peak and women's lib demanded the right to choose abortion, no less than 97% (fully) disagreed with the proposition "A girl should be allowed full sexual intercourse with a boy, even if she does not love him". By 1991, only two fifths of the persons questioned held this view (SCP, 1992^b; 461).

With regard to relationships becoming independent not only begins at an earlier age, it also involves a process of longer duration. We can observe a considerable extension of the phase in which sexual and relational experimenting is allowed between 1950 and 1990. As girls generally marry some two years earlier than boys, the period of experimenting is somewhat shorter for girls. The average age at which women married in the 1950s was 24 as opposed to 24.6 in the 1980s. Despite this particular continuity much has changed in the trajectory of becoming independent over the years.

Until the mid-1970s, people married at an increasingly early age. Growing prosperity, the increased supply of housing and especially the determination to detach oneself from the parental home and its prevailing norms and values all largely contributed to this state of affairs. Then, for a majority of young men and women, the start of a household of one's own simply coincided with getting married. For girls, marrying from the parental home was the only decent way of becoming independent. Only girls with upper-class backgrounds lived on their own for a few years because of their studies, but usually they returned to the parental home before getting married (Peters, 1992). This changes from the end of the 1970s when young people marry at a later age and decide to live together for some time first. Living together as a form of test-marriage became so widespread in the 1980s that it in fact established a whole new standard trajectory which can be differentiated according to educational levels. Nowadays, higher-educated young people usually live on their own for some time first, whereas the lower educated tend to start living together immediately.

The fact that the average age at which young people leave home shows another increase at the end of the 1970s, can be taken as a sign of the changing position of young people within the family; most have a room of their own, have their own (pocket)-money and are allowed considerable freedom to lead a life of their own. Although it holds true that girls leave home at an earlier age than boys do - because they feel more restricted in their freedom than boys (van der Linden, 1990) - this gender-specific difference is expected to disappear in the future. That such a

'scenario of emancipation' is not unlikely, becomes clear when we see that in 1965 53% of the Dutch population considered it the job of parents to decide at what time their 20-year-old daughter should be in at night; in 1990 only 8% still do so. By now most parents either leave this completely up to their daughter (51%) or prefer to settle the matter by means of negotiation (41%, SCP, 1992^b: 463).

Young people enter into (sexual) relationships and leave home as singles (between 1950 and 1990 the percentage increases from 20% to 40%) or as cohabitants, while only few of them have attained economic independence yet. This synchronous (in)dependence in different areas of life, which may last for some young people until their thirtieth year, is interpreted as an indication of the emergence of a new life-phase: post-adolescence (Zinnecker, 1987). At the same time we have also seen that lower-class boys reach adulthood much earlier than boys from upper-class backgrounds. To some extent, the same goes for girls.

2.3 Combining employment and parenthood

In Dutch society a shift from the ideal of the housewife to the ideal of combining motherhood and working outside the home occurred between 1960 and 1990. Professional participation of women remained fairly constant from the beginning of the century up to the 1960s (approximately 25%). Since then, it has increased to 56% in 1991 (SCP, 1992^a: 59). In 1965, no less than 84% of the Dutch population objected to married women working while having schoolgoing children; in 1991 the percentage had dropped to 20% (SCP, 1992^b: 466). Accordingly, most of the women working outside the home in the 1950s and 1960s appear to be young single women. In the 1950s, the two-phase model - i.e. working up to the moment of marriage - could in part be enforced by legislation⁵, whereas by the end of the 1980s, a whole new situation had emerged: Now young people are expected to attain economic independence and are encouraged to do so by different governmental policies and campaigns.⁶ Considering the increased educational level of girls, it is conceivable that only few young women actually need to be encouraged in their aspirations regarding their professional career and economic independence. The same is suggested by the changes that have occurred in ideas about the division of tasks between the sexes: 83% of the Dutch population believe that housekeeping is a responsibility of men as well as women, and 89% feel the same about child-raising. Also, it is no longer maintained that women are more suited for child-raising than men are (the percentage decreases from 77% in 1970 to 36% in 1991, SCP, 1992^b: 467, 468). Everyday reality, however, does not match these liberal and egalitarian values. "... the combination of both caring tasks and employment can be so straining that a majority of women feel compelled to choose one of the two. The combination appears easier to deal with and/or more appealing as long as women can rely on proper day nursery, acceptable working conditions and a partner who is willing and

able to participate in child-raising and housekeeping." (SCP, 1992^a: 64). As it appears, these conditions are often lacking, especially in the case of lower-class women. As mentioned above, the labour-market position of women is not equal to that of men, and, what is more, women generally hold part-time jobs more often than men do: Of all working Dutch women and men, 62% and 16% respectively work part-time (SCP, 1992^a: 62).⁷

Although it holds true that more and more women remain employed after the birth of their first child (in the mid-1980s 23% did so, whereas in 1970 this was only 9%), studies show that 80% of the ones who remain employed, still quit after having their second child. This is not only caused by a lack of 'cooperative' men, but also by the fact that Dutch society has not yet fully adapted to the concept of day-nurseries. In the beginning of the 1990s, two fifth of the population object to employed women placing their children in a nursery. Whether the government should provide cheap day-nursery facilities for working mothers, remains a matter of dispute and is only acclaimed by a bare majority (52%, SCP, 1992^b: 466, 448). What is also influential here, apart from traditional values regarding motherhood, is the fact that the freedom to choose whether one wants to have children or not - in terms of 'when' and 'how many'⁸ - is accompanied by the notion that 'having them' implies being willing to look after them, or, in other words, by the notion of parenthood as a conscious choice of the individual instead of something to be taken for granted. But although the encouragement of men's readiness to care is gaining priority in governmental policy, care still remains the responsibility of women. Girls in neighbouring countries are being confronted with the issue of combining employment and motherhood as well (Chisholm, 1993; Krüger, 1993), but the Netherlands occupy an exceptional position because of their relatively low rate of professional participation of women and the substantial percentage of women working part-time.

3. Research context: Theoretical and methodological notions

We have already pointed out how the transition to adulthood has changed over the decades and in what way these changes are embedded in specific socio-economical and cultural developments in Dutch society. What has also become clear, is that changes in the field of education and employment, sexuality, relationships and marriage have each at their own pace and to their own extent affected the lives of boys and girls from different social classes. Despite the continuities that are manifest in gender- and class-specific stage transition-trajectories, we can safely state that, as in Germany, the U.K. and the U.S. (Buchmann, 1989; Cohen, 1987; Leisering, Geissler, Mergner, & Rabe-Kleberg, 1993; Peters & Chisholm, 1991), firstly, structural changes have occurred in the transition to adulthood; secondly, the youth phase has been increasingly institutionalized and, thirdly, life-course patterns have become destandardized (Peters, 1993; Peters, Guit, & van Rooijen, 1992). On the

other hand we also found the emergence of new standard patterns that cause a restandardization of the life course (du Bois-Reymond & de Jong-Gierveld, 1993). These structural changes are bound to have repercussions on the subjective experience of being young and becoming an adult, as well as on the educational goals and the child-raising approach of parents. How do young people - and their parents - experience and interpret these changes? The discussions about the individualization of youth-biography frequently stresses the fact that the effects of the modernization processes we sketched earlier have not only made life easier for young people but also more difficult. For our present purposes we have narrowed down the various aspects of the discussion to the functional contrasts between standard- and choice-biographies, between freedom of choice and restriction of choice, and finally, between hierarchic or formal intergenerational relationships on the one hand and informality and negotiation on the other.

The transition from socially-accepted options to increasingly individualized life-course models has adequately been termed as the *transition from a standard-biography to a choice-biography*. On the objective as well as on the subjective level, life's trajectories are less determined by gender- and class-specific rules, and as a result are becoming increasingly unpredictable. Today's parents still used to interpret their own lives in standard-biographical terms predominantly when they were young themselves. The future of young women then, their purpose in life, was not only aimed at being a housewife and mother at a normative social level, but it was also given meaning and significance by women themselves at a subjective level. *Mutatis mutandis*, the same holds true for men. But how *do* boys and girls in the 1990s experience the transition to adulthood? Do they believe that they are in a position to shape their future lives according to their own priorities, irrespective of gender and social background? Furthermore, do they try to keep their options open as long as possible, and, if so, do they anticipate some sort of open-ended situation? And finally, are we justified in assuming the presence of a *choice-biography*, or do boys and girls lead their lives according to both 'old' and 'new' certainties and should we therefore rather assume a modernized standard youth-biography?

Both pluriformity and *freedom of choice* in different areas of life presuppose the presence of multiple legitimate options according to which boys and girls can shape their adolescent and (future) adult lives. But any multiplication of options somehow also produces the *obligation to benefit* from all options available as well as the responsibility of the individual to make his or her choices adequately, as social background and gender no longer provide sufficient justifications for choices to be made. At the same time, freedom of choice is restricted by the individual's (growing), dependence on the educational and professional systems, i.e. by objective limitations which cannot be ignored. What is important here, is how the tensions between freedom of choice and obligation to choose is expressed in youth-biography. What are the various educational, professional and relational trajectories of young people

like? What strategies do young people adopt to make sure they reach their goals in various areas of life? And what is more, how do they experience the process of making choices? Is it true, for instance, that young people feel increasingly under pressure and consequently are inclined to postpone important choices in order to avoid that pressure?

Both individualization and pluriformity of available options demand a certain respect for alternative choices. Once a directive parental approach is absent, generations (and sexes) will have to negotiate. Furthermore, once human relationships become more individualized, they are likely to become more informal as well - codes of behaviour relax as hierarchical relationships weaken. The fact that *negotiation* and *informalization* have become characteristic aspects of contemporary child-parent relationships can be interpreted as a positive development in as far as young people are allowed more freedom by their parents, but there is another side to this. When 'everything' is negotiable, interpretation and orientation become more difficult for parents and children. The question is how this affects parent-child relationships. Do young people still look upon their parents as educators or counsellors, and, what is perhaps even more important, do parents still view themselves as such? If today's parents are faced with *uncertainties in child-raising*, are we right in assuming that young people are confronted with an extra handicap in the field of 'biographical options' (Fuchs, 1983) in as far as the standard-biography has ceased to function as a guiding principle?

Despite the fact that (youth) research in the Netherlands is concentrating more on the shifts in stage transitions and life-course models,⁹ longitudinal studies of the various transitions to adulthood and their interrelations as interpreted by young people as well as parents still remain scarce.¹⁰

3.1 *The Youth, Parents & Employment project*¹¹

In order to study the various ways in which adolescents pass through transitions to adulthood, the choices they make, the ways in which they adapt and motivate their choices, and the support they get from their parents in this process, but also to determine the significance of gender and social background in transitions to adulthood, we opted for a longitudinal, qualitative and intergenerational-comparative research design in which both young people and their parents are involved.

Over a three-year period (1988, 1989, 1990) we interviewed boys and girls on a yearly basis and surveyed their - changing - options and choices regarding education, employment, sexuality and relationships as well as their ideas about the combination of employment and parenthood. Our point of departure was set at the final year of secondary school. At that point in their lives - and in the years to come - boys and girls are expected to make a vast amount of choices and to develop the strategies

necessary to make the transition to adulthood. In the second and third round, the questionnaires were adapted to the altered conditions of their everyday lives and contained questions about their choices (made or postponed) regarding areas of life such as education, employment and (sexual) relationships, and about conceivable changes in the child-parent relationship. Our instrument was the semi-structured biographical interview.

The 120 young people who participated in the YPE-project were recruited from schools for secondary education in the town of Leiden.¹² At the time of the first interview (1988) the 54 boys and 66 girls were in the final class of secondary education (ranging from lower-vocational to pre-university). At that time they were 15 to 19 years of age (birth-cohort 1968-1972). They came from different social classes, measured by the educational and professional levels of the father and mother, and were all living in the town of Leiden or in one of its suburbs.¹³ At the time of the last interview (1990) 51 boys and 65 girls were still involved in the project.¹⁴

During the period of 1989 to 1991, both the fathers and the mothers were questioned to gain further insight in the child-raising approach and child-parent relationship from the perspective of the parents, the parents' own youth and correspondences or contrasts between their youth and that of their children.¹⁵ The parents were recruited through those boys and girls who had indicated that their father and mother would be willing to participate. We selected 60 mothers depending on educational level, employment position, marital state and birth-cohort. These women were interviewed in 1989 and 1990 and the idea was put to them to involve their husbands in the interviewing process as well; 48 partners decided to cooperate. To make up for the remainder, we recruited 12 interviewees from the rest of the target group.¹⁶ The fathers were interviewed in 1990 and 1991.

In the first interview, the mothers and fathers were questioned separately. The emphasis was on their life history and on their own youth phase; they were specifically asked to look back on their own youth in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. The topics were quite similar to the ones treated in the youth interviews: education, employment, sexuality, relationships, anticipations of future adult life and the relationship with their parents. In the second interview the parents were interviewed as couples. Now their role as parents and their views on parenthood and educational aims were the central issues. In the second round we interviewed 40 couples and an additional number of individual fathers (3) and mothers (7).¹⁷

All interviews were recorded on tape. The youth interviews were fully transcribed, whereas in case of the parent interviews we had to resort to abstracts with additional quotes per topic of discussion.¹⁸ The research material was encoded and entered into the computer in order to facilitate a quantitative interpretation of essentially qualitative data.¹⁹ The interpretation itself and the analysis of interrelations between variables relied first and foremost on the use of frequency rates. For further exploration we went back to the original interview material. Specific case-studies and direct

quoting were applied to back up our interpretations and to illustrate subjective experiences on the part of the respondents.

In the following sections we will go into the ideas of boys and girls about employment and the choices they have made with regard to further education or jobs. We will discuss the actual transition from training/education to the labour market as well as the combination of employment and parenthood as anticipated by the youth respondents.

4. The transition from school to the labour market

When we spoke to our youth respondents for the last time, in 1990, the majority was still in training and was facing a long educational career. Most of them were between 18 and 23 years of age. By then, one third had taken a job and, in accordance with the general picture we constructed in section 2, this category particularly consisted of lower-class youth. 54% of them were no longer in full-time training as opposed to 34% and 16% of middle- and upper-class youth respectively. More girls than boys had left full-time education (43% against 25%).

In other words, to most of the respondents employment still was a distant notion. What was their conception of employment at that stage of their lives? Did entering the labour market still mean a significant step towards adulthood or did they feel mature already because certain transitions had been made (long) before then? Or rather: How exactly did they experience the changes in the transition to adulthood we mentioned earlier, and how do gender and social class differentiate our findings?

4.1 Employment as a step towards adulthood?

Our respondents seem to agree on one thing: Employment as such does not establish *the* major transition to adulthood, for there appear to be various conceptions of (reaching) adulthood. This certainly renders the transition less standardized and more individualized. However, we do detect gender- and class-specific differences.

When we asked *lower-class respondents*: 'When do you expect to become an adult?', most of them responded: 'How should I know ... that's a tough one!'. This does not necessarily mean that they consciously delay the process of maturing, but rather that they feel that adulthood can not be planned. This especially holds true for lower-class respondents who associate adulthood with 'being married, having a family and settling down'. When exactly they will take these decisive steps depends on when they meet a partner with whom they fall in love; something which cannot be controlled. As lower-class girls have boyfriends at a relatively early age, they generally have a clearer idea about the timing. They expect to have made the

transition within a period of five years. To lower-class youth being young represents a phase in which 'you just act foolishly and do as you please'. In adulthood they see - very much in accordance with the classical image of the life course - a foundation for the security and unity of family life and employment.

When we look at the *upper-class respondents*, we discover a very different perspective on adulthood. Here adulthood is seen a relative concept rather than a definitive stage in the life course. It is strongly associated with development of the self, for one does not stop maturing when one has become an 'adult'. Especially boys and girls who attend university take this view. Still, this is not the only perspective we encounter within the upper-class category. A considerable number of boys and girls do connect adulthood to employment and/or building a family, but, contrary to lower-class respondents, they consciously postpone these particular steps for as long as 6 to 12 years. What matters for them first is completing an education.

The *middle class respondents* again present us with another picture. Some of them, especially the girls who have a job and a stable relationship already, consider themselves to be adults, while others expect to reach adulthood reasonably soon - that is within a period of five years. These latter ones mainly appear to connect adulthood with living on one's own - by the time of the last interview 75% of these respondents were still living at home - and intend to take this step as soon as possible (within a year). The girls from this category especially appear to feel restricted in their freedom at home.

Thus, social class and gender can certainly be said to play a part in the anticipation of adulthood. At the same time, however, the prolonged educational-career not only affects the perspective of adulthood but also the more general experience of being young. Whereas most respondents in their final year at secondary school characterized themselves as 'youngster'; only two years later they consider themselves to be 'adult' in as far as they make their own decisions and have a more realistic and serious outlook on life on the one hand, and 'still just a youngster' on the other. What is striking, is that respondents who are in vocational training or who have already entered the labour market tend to think of themselves as 'young adults', whereas a majority of the respondents who are in university education characterize themselves simply as 'youngsters'. The latter most clearly represent the category of post-adolescents.

4.2 Employment as a means of self-development; life should be fun

The fact that entering the labour market is not considered to be the major and/or definite step towards adulthood, cannot be separated from general expectations regarding jobs. Ideas about employment have drastically changed since the 1950s: One no longer lives in order to work, but one works to live. 'Post-materialistic'

values such as developing oneself, having fun and gaining satisfaction from one's job, have become increasingly important (Halman, 1991); not in the least to our group of respondents. This is clearly demonstrated by table 1, which summarizes their responses to the question of what they valued most in having a job, at the time of the first and the last interview.

At the time of the first interview, when the respondents were in their final year of secondary education, 'being well paid' ranked first, followed by 'communication in the workplace' and 'professional involvement'. Two years later, 'being well paid' ranks third. Nearly all respondents say they value the immaterial aspects of employment and at some point start giving more and more priority to such aspects. Still, they agree that employment should primarily be 'fun and worthwhile *for oneself*'. Accordingly, hardly any respondents judge the social relevance of employment to be important. So, the notion of a 'socially conscious and committed youth generation' is not really adequate. This does not mean, however, that young people are not concerned with social issues at all, but simply that they do not establish the link between such issues and their jobs. They support organizations like Greenpeace or the World Wildlife Fund in their spare time. The respondents also admit being not particularly ambitious: Most of them profess to be hardly interested in executive functions or social status. This fits the general image of the Dutch as being less 'career-minded' than, for instance, Americans.

Table 1. What aspects of employment do young people value? 1988 (round I, N=120) and 1990 (round III, N=116)

Aspects	Communi- cation		Income		Involve- ment		Social relevance		Social status		Manage- ment
	I	III	I	III	I	III	I	III	I	III	
(Very) important	81	99	87	59	61	78	10	14	20	13	20 23
Of some importance	17	13	26	45	22	23	6	12	8	18	6 20
Not/hardly important	19	4	6	12	36	15	103	90	91	85	93 73
Missing	3	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1 -
Total	120	116	120	116	120	116	120	116	120	116	120 116

Behind these general findings there still lie certain gender- and social background differences. It is true that girls value professional involvement in their jobs just as much as boys do, but in accordance with the assumption that girls attach less importance to success in terms of a career because of their 'double-future perspective', they value the immaterial aspects of employment more than boys do. As for the boys, they tend to stress the aspect of payment more strongly. So, here again we find an indication of the fact that girls do not primarily expect the role of (main) breadwinner in the future to be theirs. Indeed, girls find it just as self-evident to become employed (later on) as boys do, but judging from their perspective on future mother-

hood and under the influence of examples from their daily environment, they already seem to reckon with future discontinuities in their professional careers. As will be shown later, boys do not. Such traditional, gender-specific distinctions are also operative in other aspects of employment. Boys focus more on status and managing when they imagine what their professional career will be like. And although over the years girls have begun to show more interest in these aspects of employment on average, this particular gender-specific difference remains manifest (cf. also de Goede & Hustinx, 1993: 96).

We also find some important distinctions according to social background. There seems to be a proportional relation between social background and certain preferences: The higher the social origin, the more communication, involvement, management, status and success become significant. Middle-class boys attach even more importance to professional success than upper-class boys do, and expect to achieve this through promotion; lower-class boys focus more on the materialistic aspects and so put income at the head of their list.

We can conclude that our respondents have clear views on what a job should offer them. Considering their demands and expectations with regard to employment, the next question has to be whether they feel insecure about their professional career and also whether they hesitate to make 'definite' choices in the educational field.

4.3 Uncertainties in future employment?

The ideas respondents have of employment (when still in the educational system) are full of optimism and continuity. Most respondents appear to have maintained their original professional wishes through the years and to be quite optimistic about their chances on the labour market. They do not worry too much about unemployment and most of them expect to find a job within the employment sector they prefer. They assume that their (future) qualifications will guarantee as much and the ones who are less certain, admit to be ready to take advantage of any given opportunity. This being the case, are we right in assuming that the youth phase as a phase of anticipation of and transition to - economic - independence is far less problematic than is often suggested in the discussion about the individualized youth-biography? In other words, does making sound decisions in fact come easy to young people and do they generally not worry about the unpredictability of developments in the labour market? The answer to these questions cannot be completely affirmative as a considerable number of respondents (57%) indicate having had quite a few problems in making the transition from secondary education to further professional training or the labour market. To determine the nature or extent of these problems and the respondents involved, we shall now go into the educational and professional careers of our respondents in more detail.

4.4 Educational and professional trajectories; 'stayers' vs. 'switchers'

If we compare the respondents' educational and professional situations in the first and last interview rounds at an aggregated group level, we are seemingly led to the conclusion that the school-job trajectories show a firm continuity and that our respondents generally keep to the standard curriculum of the Dutch educational system; from pre-vocational education to vocational training in the apprentice system to the labour market, from lower-general secondary education to senior-secondary vocational education, from higher-general secondary education to higher-vocational education, or from pre-university to scientific education. If we categorize, however, all the choices each individual respondent has made regarding education and employment and make an inventory of all the steps they have taken within the educational/professional system over the three-year period, we find that the reality is far more complex.

The types of educational and professional trajectories we were able to categorize, are either characterized by continuity or by discontinuity and change.²⁰ The trajectories of the 'stayers' are characterized by continuity. These respondents have completed their secondary education in one go and have subsequently entered further education or the labour market. 54% of our respondents fitted the 'stayers' profile. As for the 'switchers', their educational and professional trajectories are characterized by discontinuities: switching subjects repeatedly, switching between training and employment, leaving school prematurely, changing one's job every so often, and intermittently being employed or unemployed. No less than 46% of our respondents fitted the 'switcher' profile.

As table 2 clearly demonstrates, the difference between respondents who pass through the educational and professional systems easily and without delay on the one hand, and the ones who repeatedly depart from the set curriculum on the other, is closely connected to social background and gender. First we will examine the basic trends and then go into some interesting subcategories in more detail.

Class-specific trends

The category of 'switchers' particularly consists of middle- and upper-class respondents. Not every middle-class youth appears to act as 'instrumentally' and to be as goal-orientated as we expected (cf. also Zinnecker, 1986). Respondents from upper- and lower-class backgrounds do in fact match our expectations. The latter spend little time on experimenting within the educational system and enter the labour market 'on time'. For upper-class respondents, the educational phase tends to last relatively long. Still, we should take heed of the fact that although a majority show discontinuous educational trajectories, they also pass through the (full-time) educational system without delay more often (42% against 28% of middle- and lower-class respondents).

Table 2. Educational and professional trajectories of young people from 1988 up until 1990 (N=116), according to social class and gender

Educational/professional trajectories after secondary education:	Class			Gender		Total
	Lower	Middle	Upper	Boys	Girls	
'Stayers'						
Standard transferees	10	14	13	19	18	37
Employed youth	11	6	-	3	14	17
Job/training combination	5	3	1	8	1	9
'Switchers'						
Commuters	1	12	10	10	13	23
Interrupters	-	4	2	1	5	6
Drop-outs	3	6	5	5	9	14
'In & out' employment pattern	5	5	-	5	5	10
Total	35	50	31	51	65	116

Gender-specific trends

Girls are more often 'switchers' than boys (49% and 41% respectively). And although the number of girls passing through an educational trajectory equals the number of boys (69%) - which is a confirmation of the general assumption that the youth phase of girls is showing more and more resemblances to the youth phase of boys - girls more often accumulate qualifications, switch subjects, take time off to travel or quit their studies prematurely and leave without qualifications (42% against 31% of the boys). Girls apparently find it more difficult to make the 'right' choices. And of course, in making them, they are being confronted with numerous contradictory messages. Employment, for instance, is supposed to be self-evident, but, at the same time girls are well aware of the fact that women are still largely responsible for taking care of children. The professional trajectories of girls and boys also appear to be different: Many girls enter the labour market directly after passing their finals, whereas boys more often combine employment and further training. But, on average, class-specific contrasts are more substantial than gender-specific ones.

Educational differences

Although table 2 does not indicate as much, preparatory training does certainly influence the course of educational trajectories. Especially respondents who have completed higher-general secondary education appear to become 'switchers' at some point. The position of higher-general secondary education within the Dutch educational system is rather ambivalent. At first it was intended to serve as a preparation

for higher-vocational education, but it soon became clear that it did not work out as expected: Students dispersed in every possible direction and started 'commuting' up and down the educational system. Some take one more year of pre-university education in order to go to university, some finish higher-vocational education first, but others rather make a backward move and enter senior-secondary vocational education.

Of all respondents who finish pre-vocational education, which is rather ill-reputed in the Netherlands, three fifths successfully follow an educational trajectory, enter the labour market or combine a job with training. However, once problems on the labour market occur, they tend to be especially serious in the case of pre-vocational students. Of one fifth, the professional trajectory can be characterized as an 'in and out' pattern.

For many respondents, we can safely conclude that the 'educational moratorium' constitutes a period in which available options are more or less successfully probed. Why, we may ask, do so many respondents opt for trajectories that are ultimately 'inefficient' in terms of the educational system, and what is more, how do they experience and justify their choices? Do they consciously choose to make use of all options available? Or do they merely react to the immense variety of options, their limited insight into the organization of the professional system, the unpredictability of supply and demand on the labour market and the pressure to improve their chances because of the continuous devaluation of diplomas? Or, to put it differently, exactly who are the 'switchers' and who are the 'stayers' in the educational system?

Standard transferees

'At some point you just take your pick' is how the process of choice-making is characterized by respondents that pass through the educational system without delay. They admit having had no particular problems facing the vast supply of educational options. They arrived at their final choices through discussions with others such as their fathers, their best friends and professional counsellors. Although some have not made up their minds as to what they would like to do most, this does not seem to cause any insecurity since they prefer to keep their options open within entire sectors of employment. Like Edward, who wants to 'go into business' at some point and is therefore going to study law, which will allow him some room in which to manoeuvre. Respondents like Edward - girls included - usually attach great importance to a high salary, professional involvement and a career. Such ambitions generally match expectations connected to social background and we often find that the educational level and aspirations of the other family members are equally high. Standard transferees appear to be independent young people who succeed in enjoying their youth and simultaneously concentrating on completing their education. They are full of optimism about getting their diplomas and finding the right job. Usually, the parents have promoted their optimism by already making great demands during secondary school. This changes once the children pass through their courses success-

fully. Then these parents tend to become less demanding; it is up to their son or daughter from then on. The boys and girls themselves think accordingly: Success or failure both depend on one's own efforts.

'Commuters'

When we set this group against the category of respondents whose educational trajectory is characterized by up- and downward fluctuations between and within secondary and higher education, we find a different picture altogether. 'Commuters' are respondents who are mainly confronted with the recurrent problem of too many options. They partly blame themselves for any 'failure', but they also blame the institution of school, which after all has compelled them to commit themselves to a certain field of study at an early stage. 'How should I know what to choose, being the age I am?', as these 21- to 23-year-olds put it. They generally experienced the transition from secondary to higher education as a problematic one, because at that point they simply did not know what further education they preferred - not even after an additional year of secondary education. With some, further education - often selected by striking off options - did not meet the expectations, others were not selected for the education they had chosen, and others failed their first year exams and found themselves back to square one: What to do next? In many cases, tension arose between the responsibility and concentration necessary for higher education on the one hand and the urge to enjoy the newly acquired freedom to live on one's own and meeting new friends on the other. Initially, the parents largely overlooked the apparent urge to experiment, but once it dawned on them that their son or daughter was not up to his or her freedom, they still tried to tighten the reins. They often succeeded in that their children did not quit their studies and remained well aware of the importance of proper qualifications.

What is striking, is that these young people only expect the regular educational system to lead to the kind of employment they aspire to; they hardly ever consider working their way up through evening classes, courses or job training. The considerable pressure they experience is partly caused by the prerequisite of proper qualifications to stand a chance on the labour market and the urge to take the highest possible levels because of the general devaluation of diplomas, and partly by their own problems with the actual content of higher education. As such, this has not as yet deprived these respondents of their ambitions, but it has certainly made their ideas regarding employment much more vague. However demanding the parents of these respondents may have become - which is indeed a contrary approach to the one we came across in the case of the standard transferees - they ultimately believe that coercion will simply not do. A completely different picture is offered by the next group, consisting of young people who have prematurely broken off their studies and have entered the labour market.

Drop-outs

These respondents cannot look back on a particularly successful educational career. Their 'failure' is largely due to the fact that, on hindsight, they let their ambitions outrun their abilities from the start - also at their parents' instigation. Contrary to the category of 'commuters', these respondents subsequently drew their conclusions and dropped out. Partly because they realistically evaluated their own abilities and motivation to finish their study without further delay and partly because their parents would not allow endless experimenting: 'Either you study or you will take a job!' Take Nanette, who has completed higher-general secondary school with great difficulty and effort. Because of her parents' expectations she entered teacher training college '... but I wasn't exactly convinced of it ... at home, they would not once say to me: well then, let's try to find you a nice job! It was education all over again.' Despite her efforts she did not make it and dropped out halfway through the first year. She found this a great relief: 'I simply *loved* it. No regrets, none at all.' She became unemployed for some time and took several unskilled jobs. Today she is working as a cashier in a bank.

During the first round of interviews most of these respondents were still optimistic about their chances of ultimately realizing their professional ambitions, but the reality turned out differently. Nearly all have jobs by now, but not the jobs they had in mind when they still expected to finish their senior-secondary or higher-vocational education. By now they admit that they no longer aspire social status on the basis of a job and the girls in particular appear to have become more attached to making money. The professional orientation of drop-outs seems to have shifted from 'what I would like' to 'what is still possible' in terms of a 'nice' job. Besides, 'you can always work your way up through courses...' and with that perspective (and strategy) in mind these respondents keep their professional future open.

4.5 *Summary*

We may conclude that the institutionalization and prolonging of the youth (school) phase, certainly does not imply that the educational trajectories of young people have become more similar to one another. Within the institutionalized context of the educational system, many different paths are taken; that is why it is more adequate to use the term 'educational biographies' instead of 'educational careers', for the concept of career suggests continuity, conscious and goal-orientated planning, and progression. As we have seen, only the category of standard transferees fits this picture.

Family background and parental approach still influence the educational and professional trajectories of young people. Most upper-class parents allow a relatively long youth phase, but not all of them do. Especially young people who grow up in a more restrictive upper-class environment stand a chance of 'failure' and dropping out

of the school system because they fall short of the obligation to continue family traditions. The 'commuters' on the other hand appear to be troubled by the amount of freedom they are allowed by their parents, their own wish to experiment and at the same time to achieve and the obligation to choose. 'Commuters', mainly upper- and middle-class respondents, hate the idea of choosing, they prefer to keep their options open, keep developing themselves, and, what is more, they are afraid of making the wrong decision. This category most clearly represents the pattern of post-adolescent youth. They particularly fit the 'formal' criterium of lasting synchronous (in)dependence. At the subjective level, we see that they hesitate to commit themselves to fixed trajectories and as such, they have adapted themselves to the prolonged youth phase in terms of 'not yet having to act maturely'. Towards themselves and others, they justify their incapacity, fear and insecurity in making choices as 'having the right' to be young.

Although social background is of great influence on educational and professional trajectories, a number of lower-class respondents also become successful 'standard transferees' and conversely, middle- and upper-class respondents sometimes drop out and become employed or unemployed. To a certain extent, the institutionalization of the youth (school) phase is accompanied by destandardization, in other words, with the growing unpredictability of educational careers of contemporary youth.

If we consider the educational and professional trajectories of boys and girls, we can conclude that the educational moratorium is a period in which girls are confronted with more problems than boys. Girls not only have to cope with the 'normal' problem of the expansion of choices in the educational and professional system, but also with the 'extra' problem of the implications of their choices in the long run. The double expectations they have to deal with - becoming independent women and, if they choose to have children, good mothers - seem to lead to 'mixed' answers. Girl's educational trajectories are more often characterized by discontinuity, dropping-out and switching. Boys on the other hand can still rely on a more self-evident life-course perspective, full-time employment is still the dominant practice for males in Dutch society. This unambiguous perspective of the future seems to influence their decisions and strategies in the present.

These results clearly demonstrate that boys' and girls' actual choices for professional training must be studied in the context of a life-course perspective. To gain insight in the relationship between actual and anticipated transitions to adulthood, we will now describe how our respondents see their future lives as adult men and women and how they intend to shape their professional careers in the long run.

5. Views on employment as combined with parenthood

Over a three-year period we asked our respondents about their views on combining employment and child-raising. The results are intriguing, for it appears that their