

Forgetting influences and believing we develop our interests in a self-determined way

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Abstract

There is a widespread belief that we have control over what we are interested in. In this article, this assumption is subjected to an empirical analysis. The result shows that interests do appear to have been independently selected; however, the data also highlight the close link between social backgrounds and what we experience, ie. influence by outside sources. The fact that social influences are forgotten is a genuine characteristic of the ‘habitus’ as described by Bourdieu. The data are analysed as to the role habitual characteristics play in interest development.

Keywords

Self-determination, target group research, interest development, critical psychology, habitus

1. Foreword

We start with a definition of *self-determination*. We then look at *target group research* and its concepts of interest, explore *research into interest development*, and contrast the discourse with Pierre Bourdieu’s *habitus concept*. A glance at our quantitative and qualitative data follows. Finally, similarly to Krapp (2002) and Deci and Ryan (2002), we take a discriminating approach to self-determination based on habitus theory. We cautiously link two areas of research--into interest and into target groups--that tend to be treated separately.

2. Gradual and Apparent Self-Determination

While we cannot conduct an exhaustive philosophical discussion, we begin with a brief definition of self-determination. The key element of the term is a “self,” which is to be specified in more detail, and which decides on an issue, while in a relationship (also to be specified in more detail) with the world and others. Our understanding of the term echoes the discourse of “self-determined learning.” This term is different from “self-organised learning.” The decisive criterion is the question of whether learners can decide on course content. If not, learners merely have the freedom to make organisational decisions, in other words, their choice is only about self-organisation, not about self-determination (Faulstich 1999, 2002). Faulstich does not understand that the question of how decisions on content and interest is not dichotomous for teachers, institutions, or learners, but presents as an axis on which different “degrees of self-determination” are possible (Faulstich 1999, 2002). The empirical data show the efficacy of this differentiation to reveal a dichotomy of self-determination versus determination. The relationship between self and the world is described in a plausible manner through Pierre Bourdieu’s habitus concept (1987): social class has an impact on habitus and on personal decisions. However, we do not believe that the habitus cannot be changed; instead, we think it is merely inert. As a result, theoretical space is created for a subject to take action. We are presupposing subjects who have intentions and plans and acts in their overarching interest, but we do not assume that these intentions are rational or conscious (Holzkamp 1993: 27pp). We do not base these concepts solely on the theory behind research into interest; however, there are interesting connections (Krapp 2004).

The concept of self-determination, to which we refer based on Bourdieu and Holzkamp, is not to be confused with the concept of self-determination developed by Deci and Ryan, which is important for the Munich interest theory (see Grotlüschen/Krämer 2009). Deci and Ryan maintain that self-determination is a continuum that leads, with gradually increasing autonomy, from non-motivation, to four types of extrinsic motivation, to intrinsic motivation (2002: 17pp). The concept is contingent on the required differentiation of the dichotomy between self-determination and determination by others. Basic needs assumptions, which are based on requirements theory, do not, however, match the metatheoretical framework we prefer. Dewey, Holzkamp, and Bourdieu stress the reasoning structures and the intentional aspects of individuals in the interest process and the way they deal with the world, while Deci and Ryan observe how people pursue basic needs. When comparing the individual and the world, we need to consider another level: interest is a process, not merely a condition. Interests are not established gradually between self-determination and

determination by others. They have grown in a social process within a concrete historic and economic situation. Several theories suggest that something determined by others is successively internalised and becomes something that has been self-determined (e.g. Elias's civilisation process, Foucault's techniques of the self and Bourdieu's habitus concept). Therefore, we assume that the choice of interests is made by a gradual self-determination process, while the individual believes and internalises them as self-determined. Outside influences are overlooked, diminished, or forgotten. However, in terms of theory, we do not want to go too far and will restrict ourselves here to Bourdieu.

3. Asymmetrical Concepts of Interest in Target Group Research

Since the beginning of target group research in adult education, motives and interests, as the driving forces for learning, have been subject to widespread debate. At one time, studies specifically asked about the educational/training interests of various groups of the population (e.g. Hermes 1926, Engelhardt 1926, Grosse 1932, Buchwald 1934). Later, the concept of interest disappeared. It has only emerged again recently – narrowed down as interest in further education and training (Barz 2004). The key terms in these studies show that, when individuals take part in further education/training, researchers label it as interest, motivation, reasons, objectives or predisposition. These terms imply localisation within the self, rather than in the world. However, the opposite end of the spectrum is more striking: if individuals do not take part in further education/training, the researchers name specific barriers, hindrances or obstacles. It is implied that in that case localisation comes from the outside, from a world which is obstructive. In our opinion, this traditional terminology is asymmetrical and therefore inadequate (see Table 1).

Table 1: Literature review re: Interests in taking part in or avoiding further education/training (up to 2006)

Year	Author	Page	Terms explaining the appeal of a certain subject or further education/training course	Page	Terms explaining why a certain subject or further education/training course is rejected
1999	Bremer	58	Motives	58	Barriers (external and internal)
2002	Brüning/Kuwan	199	Motivation	158 122	Barriers (further education/training) Reasons (for not taking part)
2004	Baethge/Baethge-Kinsky	62 62	Inclination (further education/training) Predisposition	55 62	Barriers (further education/training) Obstacles
2004	Schröder, Schiel/Aust	93 98 74	Interest (further education/training) Interest (further education/training) Need (further education/training)	74 74 74	Reasons Obstacles Reasons (for not taking part)
2004	Barz/Tippelt I	117	Interest (further education/training)	118	Barriers (further education/training)
2004	Barz/Tippelt II	92	Motives	92 92 cf.	Refusal Barriers (further education/training)
2005	Wilkens	512 514	Goals Interest	514	Barriers
2005	SOEP	506 506 511 515 506	Interest Motivation Goals Benefit Motives	511 511	Barriers Reasons (for not taking part)
2006	Kuwan et al.	275 275	Motives (further education/training) Interest	261 265	Barriers (further education/training) Predispositions
2006	Schiersmann	45	Need (further education/training)	47 47 47	Barriers (further education/training) Motivation (insufficient) Interest (low)

In a positive scenario--where the individual does participate--the implicit reason is said to lie in the person (however that person is conceived); s/he clearly has a sustainable self-determined influence on interest. In a negative scenario—where the individual does not participate--the implicit reason is said to lie in the world around them. These localisations contradict the underlying theories: the symmetry of the terms must also be reflected in a stable concept of interest. The Munich theory of interest understands interest as a specific relationship between a person and an object and is a good approach here. One of its proponents, Andreas Krapp, references life-long learning and adult education, therefore we prefer to refer to him here¹. Action that follows an interest always takes place in the social arena and is not spontaneous. Rather, it is based on individual development and historical backgrounds. Furthermore, its purpose is to generate a sense of belonging or distinction (Bourdieu 1987).

4. Habitual axis of interest development

Discussion of more terms would exceed the scope of this article, so we will merely look at interest and suggest a definition that takes into account two discussion threads. Firstly, we are talking about a pragmatic approach, which started with John Dewey (1913) and which clearly inspired the Munich interest theory (e.g. Krapp 2006). We will put this one aside.

The second thread is habitus theory, which traces interest back to social backgrounds as well as the habitus gained and forgotten there (Bourdieu 1987). We accordingly define interest as a specific relationship between the person, who takes action, and the subject area of interest. However, we revise this perspective to include the procedural axis (Dewey 1913) and the habitual axis (Bourdieu 1987). We examine various assumptions based on habitus theory in order to take a closer look at the social integration of interests. These allow us to gauge the social arena in medium-sized units, which can be localised between levels that are individual and those that include society at large. We believe that interests are not generated only individually and in current situations, but have their roots in habits and socio-economic structures. Therefore, this approach is important in order to describe how interests are generated. Therefore, a brief characterisation of habitus as a term is vital. Habitus can be considered as a place where external

¹ Nota bene: We will not look at the link between interest theory and self-determination theory. We will be following Krapp and the Munich-based direction, which tends to be associated with action theory, but not Deci and Ryan and their needs-based theory.

aspirations are internalised and internal aspirations are externalised. It is expressed in lifestyles, the systematic products of habitus and displayed in “endlessly redundant” (Bourdieu 1981: 347), often only sub-consciously perceived, distinguishing features such as language, clothing, posture, gait, manner etc.

“The habitus is both the generative principle of objectively classifiable judgements and the system of classification [...] of these practices. It is in the relationship between the two capacities which define the habitus, the capacity to produce classifiable practices and works, and the capacity to differentiate and appreciate these practices and products (taste), that the represented social world, i.e., the space of life-styles, is constituted.” (Bourdieu 1987, 277, own translation).

The recipe for creating and operating is taste. This dynamic generates elective affinities that interconnect via the subconscious deciphering of outer characteristics. Bourdieu states that taste is both the link between things and people, which match each other and, at the same time, the strongest class barrier (see Bourdieu 1987: 347). Social classes and sections of society are reproduced via innate aversions to other lifestyles. Taste appears to impose a hierarchical structure (ibid: 381). Elsewhere Bourdieu explains in more detail how strongly he believes job choices are influenced by the habitus, as

“a long dialectical process, often described as ‘vocation,’ through which people choose to become something that has been imposed upon them, they choose what chooses them. At the end of the process, various areas meet precisely those actors who have the habitus required to ensure that these areas function perfectly.” (Bourdieu, 1998: 124, own translation).

However, this remark is not to be understood in a deterministic manner. Bourdieu’s theory system does allow for a chance to transcend class barriers; however, this process usually entails losses for people (e.g. previous social relationships, confidence in their own habitus).

The habitual axis of interest development is particularly evident when we look at the importance of potential contact with a topic. What areas of interest people can encounter at all is primarily influenced by their social background. The habitual axis is evident in the importance of the others surrounding it. Our narrative data on interest development show that interest is generated based on contact with subject areas, but that this point of contact is forgotten. We also demonstrate that others can exert significant influence, but that this influence can be reinterpreted to the point that it is no longer recognisable. The result is that, in

the final analysis--and against better judgement--an ostensibly self-determined individual is created, who has free will to decide. However, does self-determination with regard to interest—particularly interest in further education/training--play any role at all?

5. Quantitative findings on interest in further education/training

Many studies explore reasons why people are interested in further education/training and education in specific topics. For example, Schmidt (2006) analyses the interest in further education/training by older employees and its genesis. The categories presented by Schmidt are, “requirement by the company,” “suggestion by superiors,” and “my own idea” (own initiative). Schmidt’s results show that employees over 50 (46.9%) more frequently take part in additional education/training than younger ones (44.8%). However, superiors suggest less frequently that older employees participate in a training course (20.4% v. 24.2%). Schmidt emphasises that assertions about interests can only be made by performing a differentiated analysis that includes significant main variables, such as vocational training, gender and the year the data was captured. We also have to ask whether the development of interest in additional education/training is experienced as being gradually self-determined or gradually determined by others. Schmidt’s study suggests that the localisation of interest development needs to be clarified further.

We find the same problem in our own small empirical study (n = 92), which we are carrying out for the Deutsche Forschungsgesellschaft [DFG]. One of the questions we ask is, with what level of interest people start a course and what their interest level is afterwards. Key questions are the connection between interest and self-determination, how the interest developed, and whether participation is voluntary. We included three different types of courses in our small survey: an academic course on life-long learning (WWB), a course for long-term unemployed female immigrants (MWB), and two career development courses (HWB & FWB). Three of the courses are open to anyone; however, the MWB course is obligatory and arranged by the employment office (MWB). Our questionnaire on interest in additional training/education (FSI-W)² is based on the questionnaire on interest in a graduate course (FSI) (Schiefele et al. 1993). We only replaced the term “graduate course,” which occasionally emerges in

² We could have called the new version FWI (questionnaire on interest in further education/training). However, since the items and scales in the FSI had to be changed only slightly, we chose to highlight the close relationship with the FSI by keeping its title.

FSI-W, with “further education/training.” All courses were surveyed with the FSI-W at the beginning and at the end of the course. All differentials in average values between the initial and final survey are statistically insignificant. This finding had a rather sobering effect on us because we had expected interest to rise throughout the course. However, the data spread is very wide, making it possible that the change in average values cancels itself out. For the academic course, interest stays at a high level from beginning to end (WWB1: 2.07 > 2.03 and WWB2: 2.10 > 2.06). The commercial career development course reveals similar results at the beginning of the course³. The values at the beginning of the courses for female migrants are slightly lower, but the increase is higher (MWB: 1.82 > 1.93). One possible conclusion from these data is that people who start coursework in additional training/education are either already very interested (WWB, HWB, FWB), or were coerced to participate with the threat of negative consequences (MWB). However, based solely on these quantitative data, it is difficult to identify what role mandatory or voluntary participation may have played in the development of interest. Therefore, we also administered a survey that allows us to elicit retrospective reports of various types of interest development. With this, we can analyse the relationship between self and the world as described retrospectively by the subject. The data are based solely on successful progressions of interest.

6. Qualitative findings of retrospective accounts of interest development

The following excerpts are taken from a larger interest study with several theoretical and empirical approaches (Grotlüschen 2010). The categories presented here stem from a theory-generating analysis of the described interests. These were retrospectively compiled by over 80 students who reported on how their own interests developed. We followed a modified coding paradigm (Strauss 1996; Glaser 1998): Instead of “causes” that are easy to misunderstand and have causal-analytical connotations, we are assuming “reasons” for subjective logic in the action taken (similar to von Felden 2006). The theory system generated in this way includes several phases of interest development. These reflect the pragmatic axis of interest theory, which has been revised in this way, but does not take centre stage. There is still an intertwined structure of involvement and influences. In this article, we consider only how influences are considered by the subjects. These theoretical elements show the habitual axis of interest development and its progression. It becomes clear that there is a superficial perception of self-determined interest development, which is inconsistent with

³ These are two-year courses, so final surveys are not yet possible.

explicable influences. These are forgotten, which is the very type of incorporation that is a typical feature of the habitus. Forgetting the influences can be described, following Bourdieu, as a process of internalisation and naturalisation of the individual’s own social position (what Bourdieu calls *social background* or *taste*). But taste is by no means a natural characteristic of the individual; rather, it is gained within the individual’s social class. However, the acquisition of this taste has been denied for so long that its origin has been forgotten (see Bourdieu 1987, p. 123f.)⁴.

6.1 Lasting interest (attribution to continuity)

According to all the analyses we have been able to carry out to date, interest does not develop from within the individual, but requires initial--and usually several other incidences of--contact between active players and an interesting subject. This contact does however adopt a form of continuity, which probably develops to such an extent that the individual’s own points of contact with the subject are forgotten. This dynamic is called *attribution to continuity*. With hindsight, interviewees said that, ever since they had been capable of cognitive thought as children, they found interests or that they had been interested in a subject area from a very young age. Table 2 shows how similar the chosen wording is.

Table 2: Always had consistent interest (figures: person and paragraph of the interview)

Category	Quote (qualitative data)
As a child already	I’ve always liked travelling since my childhood (72-2).
	I’m interested in football. I’ve been curious about this sport since my childhood (31-2).
	My interest in music stems from my childhood. In my family it was always quite natural to switch on the radio at any opportunity (56-2).
	As a child I was always imagining I’d have a little town with real people in it (58-3).
	I’ve been interested in music for a long time. As a child I already loved listening to music and watching the Mini Playback Show (34-2).
	I’m studying to be a teacher of maths and biology/social studies. From a very young age, I was more interested in sciences (64-2).

⁴ “Similar to any ideological strategy generated by the everyday class struggle, the ideology of natural taste draws its ideological veil and its effectiveness from the neutralisation of real differences. The differences in the methods of acquiring education, in a reversal of nature, as a legitimate relationship to education (and similarly to language) only allow aspects to apply which show the weakest traces of its development.”

Since I can remember	Since I can remember, art has always been very important to me (7-2).
	I'm interested in veterinary science and psychology [...] Since I can remember, we've had dogs, horses and small animals (86-2).
	For as long as I can remember, my mum always played music in some form or other. So, back then, I had quite a lot of contact with music (56-3).
	I've been interested in music for as long as I can remember (63-2).
	For as long as I can remember, I always enjoyed interacting with children (57-3).
	I was just a few days old, when my mum took me into the stables. For as long as I can remember, I have always felt drawn to horses (73-2).
	For as long as I remember, I have always been interested in every aspect of sports (80-2).
Always	I've always been interested in photography (21-2)
	I have always enjoyed working with children (22-2).
At an early age	A career as a primary school teacher is, and always has been, the only thing that really interested me. However, this interest didn't just suddenly develop on its own. It was much more the result of years of positive experience with pedagogical work (26-2).
	As my parents always worked, I always spent a lot of time with my younger siblings (12-2).
	The reason is probably that I grew up with two younger siblings and, as the oldest child, had to take responsibility for my brother and my sister at a relatively early age. We spent a lot of time with one another and often played together.
	From an early age, I knew that I wanted a people-based career, particularly something to do with children (41-1).
	That's how it was with me, because there are a lot of teachers in my family. So, I was introduced to this career path at an early age (42-3).
	My interest in early childhood development and education started early on. When I was still a child myself, I already wanted to have children myself one day, look after and bring up children (59-2).
	At an early age, I realised that I was strongly drawn to children (47-2).
	I was interested in writing from a very early age [...]. I could hardly wait to learn to write at last and therefore express my opinions (76-3).
	Similar: 81-4, 18-4, 49-2

These key phrases show how much the subjects consider interest development to be a continuum; the starting point of this continuum is generated virtually before the person becomes conscious of it. It is interesting that of 85 interviews, some 24 do have this continuity aspect. It seems to be normal for individuals to use "always" when talking about their interests. There are also accounts that start with a continuity argument, with a process of reflection that occurs later, but

from which more precise starting points emerge. Therefore, each continuity aspect is not credible in itself: it is an initial approach to reflection and clearly a typical point of entry when individuals attempt to describe their own interest development. Interest development contains a moment of consolidation, which is reflected in the narration of continuity. Two aspects emerge here: On the one hand, interest occurs through contact, which becomes a continuum to perceiving an issue as a matter of course and is internalised in this way. At the same time, possible subject areas are co-determined by the individual's family of origin and its cultural horizon. Music, for example, is not defined by an instrument, but attributed to contact with the "Mini Playback Show" on TV (the radio is adequate as well). It would be interesting to see how people from different social backgrounds respond to music and what horizons are opened up to, or removed from, family members as a result.

6.2 Forgetting Influences and Attributing Them to Self

Another key category in our data analysis is fully defined as, "Labeling interest development a decision not subjected to influence." In the beginning, we coded the respective passages as "An illusion of self-determination." This illusion becomes clear when we asked authors if they "decided themselves" on their desired occupations. More than a quarter of the group said that their choice of interests had not been influenced, even though they had referenced external influences only a few paragraphs earlier. Similar to 'attribution to continuity,' we call this dynamic 'attribution to self.' This includes passages that portray interest development as a decision in which influence has played no part and which contradict passages in the same account in which special influences were illustrated. When defining the category more precisely, it becomes clear that a dualism of self-determination and determination by others has no place here. Any confrontation with influence, including the rejection of influence, is always carried out in relation to the society around the individual. Therefore, even the most independent of decisions is already related to the actual society the individual has experienced. Consequently, this phenomenon is a contemporary label given to adults as free, self-determined and individual. However, in the final analysis, interest development is linked to the family of origin, the type of society and many other aspects. It is therefore worthwhile to take a discriminating look at the dividing lines drawn by those interviewed. In some cases, the subject explains interest as an individual development, while, several paragraphs later, a reason is found in other areas:

“I developed an interest in disabled children all by myself. [...] I’m glad that I’ve done a year’s volunteering in this area which triggered a new interest in me that I’d like to pursue job-wise” (9-4).

In some cases, stimuli from the individuals’ environment and peers are mentioned; however, they are not considered influences, but rather a reason to stop and reflect:

“I became interested because of things I’d observed and by talking to my own friends. So, the choice of subjects is up to me” (87-12).

This contradictory way of describing events in which decisions are simultaneously attributed to the subject and a third party or event, are retrospective constructions. They say more about the person’s self-image than about interest development as such. It is plausible that interest development only proceeds if it is compatible with the individual’s self-image. As a result, there are some actors who believe it is “natural” to decide on areas of interest solely on their own:

“Of course, I decided what I was interested in. I’m convinced that if you’re forced to do something, you lose interest in it straight away“ (55-12).

“Of course, at the beginning of my degree I did pick this subject voluntarily” (75-7).

These statements show that explicit types of coercion are considered damaging to interest development. It appears not to matter *what* an individual is forced to do – the mere perception of coercion destroys any interest from the start. Regardless of what it is, if you are forced, interest wanes:

“My parents never forced me to play sports and they always let me decide on my own whether and what I wanted to do. Otherwise, I think sports would never have become my hobby” (29-4).

As a typical reasoning pattern, this phenomenon is also encountered in the theory of learning based on the standpoint of the subject. The core of what is known as the “key inversion of the argument” (Holzkamp 1993: 450pp) is, ‘If school bombards me, the student, with a whole host of mandatory requirements and penalties to force me to learn specified content, the content cannot be particularly exciting. Otherwise they would not have to put so much pressure on me.’ However, in our study data, sometimes mandatory requirements are made that do

not destroy the subjects' interests. Massive influence from third parties is interpreted in such a way that it appears non-compulsory:

“I should stress however that during this period I wasn't pressured by my parents to perform in any way. Quite the contrary, I was allowed to make up my own mind. The only condition placed by my parents was that I was to take riding lessons every week to learn riding properly and not simply just gallop about the countryside” (6-3).

This author stresses that no pressure was applied on her. The condition (!) imposed by her parents is not interpreted as pressure or a restriction of her right to make decisions. The core characteristic of interest, i.e. to be free of any form of coercion, is therefore a question of agreement between the actors and third parties. If the obligation concerns an interest that appeals to the subject, interest development is not impaired as a result. Other subjects also perceive the influence of third parties but conclude that ultimately interest development came from themselves. In the following case, the family does have specialty magazines on the table, but interest is attributed to the individual:

“All in all, I would say that it was my own decision to tackle this area because I don't have to do it and can stop if I no longer want to” (70-7).

In other words, this pattern – an option to opt-out – is the dividing line between self-determination and determination by others as far as interest development is concerned. Under these circumstances, influence by third parties is considered a cornerstone, providing stimulus or support or igniting interest:

“I think it was my own decision to pick this area, but the foundations were laid by the circumstances I was living in and by my parents” (86-2).

“I'm sure my mum influenced me in that direction [...] Nevertheless, I can't remember ever having been **PRESSURED** to emulate her” (73-4, also: 85-3).

The person cannot remember and thus subtly hints that a *process of forgetting* occurred here, which is so characteristic of the habitus that it has to be reflected for the theory creation. Again, it becomes clear that the person's “own decision” is only defined by an option to opt-out. As long as the person can opt out, the issue is judged to be their own decision. The subtle, or obvious influence by third parties or by history, by the media or by the person's living situation is not perceived, not being reflected on, or has been forgotten:

“It was usually my own decision to take a trip. Sometimes I was influenced by people around me. But, of course, it was still always my own decision to travel” (72-5, also: 11-7, 21-9).

A decision made freely is understood as an option to reject something. As long as there is an option to opt-out, the influence of social background (which the interviewees clearly state and reflect) is still not considered to be dominant. On a positive note, not taking the opportunity to opt-out means to start or continue a matter:

“I think it’s up to me, I just carried on. If you are open to trade union courses, then you often feel that some things just fall into your lap. It was my own decision to carry on in this area” (71-7).

Sometimes the answer oscillates between influence and autonomy. At the same time, it does not appear to be opportune to generate interests that individuals do not present and decide on themselves:

“My interest in social studies basically developed all by itself. However, influence from my family can’t be neglected and ruled out. The interest in scientific issues appears to be in the family, as well as the interest in teaching. Despite this, I developed my own interests and am also focusing on a different direction”. (74-9, also 36-9)

Clearly, any steering in a particular direction by others appears to be not beneficial for the individual’s identity and concept of self-determination or – in vivo – their independence. Another narrative indicates the illusion that interest has “come from within.” The person relates that they grew up close to a foundation for people with special needs and got to know them when taking school trips there. The account finishes by mentioning a university course in pedagogy for people with special needs. Despite the description of how interest developed, the process is expressed not very clearly and more as intuition:

“I think I did make this decision on my own. But I don’t know how it came about unfortunately as it was a gut feeling, nobody forced me into it – I just felt it was right” (10-8).

The empirical data again forces us to pose the question about forgetting: Why is an important decision such as a career choice declared to be a gut feeling, although processes of gathering information and weighing possible pros and cons clearly preceded it? Is it not the case that the individual was driven by the

opportunities and information that the environment provided – only to remember later that the decision was taken freely? We believe that the importance placed on emancipating oneself from one's parents should not be underestimated. This independence is characterised by the permission to make one's own decisions:

“From a certain age, I have decided myself what type of sport I want to play and what I am prepared to invest in this area. I make these decisions myself” (81-10).

One particular argument--the different interests of siblings to underscore individualism vis-à-vis the influences of the family—is prominent:

“I think my family had a strong influence on this interest. [...] Nevertheless, I don't think that this was the only factor that played a part. My sister, who was after all brought up in the same way as I was, is interested in completely different things [...]. I think that my own character also plays a role” (49-6).

It is not clear, of course, whether the parents encouraged these siblings to different extents. Nevertheless, this argument sums up how influence is processed individually. Denying any influence serves to maintain a self-image for which freedom, scope to act, and even autonomy appear to be vital. The option to opt-out, as long as it exists in theory, is sufficient to sustain this feeling of autonomy. The two attributes presented here (continuity and self-ascription) enable the localisation of an interest in an uninfluenced self. (Or, hyperbolically: interest development is presumed to be determined by the self). The ascriptions encourage people to forget and internalise – in other words habitualise – past contact with the world and influences from other people. Therefore, we believe interest development cannot only be gradually localised between self-determination and determination by others, in the sense of Faulstichs “degrees of self-determination.” Rather, since these ascriptions represent an internalisation of influences from other people, we describe them theoretically as a *habitual axis of interest development*.

Our empirical results have certain limitations, of course. On the one hand, we need to ask to what extent generalisation of the quantitative data is possible; with such a small sample (n=92) and a lack of significant differences, we can only draw cautious conclusions from the data. On the other hand, caution also applies to the qualitative data. While over 80 stories on interest development were collected, they are of limited breadth, since we included only young adults who had been educationally successful. Therefore, we consider these data to be a module, which could be used for further research.

7. Elements of apparent self-determination

Two qualitative elements emerged in our work and combined to produce ostensible self-determination. From a subjective standpoint, interest has “always” been there and “I” decided to pursue it. Conversely, we maintain that a long tradition of research into target groups and interest has formed asymmetrical concepts, which remain unconnected. In this article, we uncoupled the Munich School’s incisive concept of interest from the needs-driven self-determination theory and recombined them with arguments based on habitus theory. Our quantitative findings show that self-determination is an important issue in interest research. The qualitative findings, however, show two elements: a continual ascription (always) and a self-ascription (I) in the development of interest. Both allow subjects to believe that they decided what they were interested in. However, if we look more closely, various points of contact with the world emerge that run counter the ascription of continuity. In other words, interest does not arise from within, but is a result of contact with the world. The influences of third parties are also easy to see; interest does not develop in isolation, but as a result of encounters with other people. At this level, inter-subjectively recognisable, gradual self-determination (Faulstich 1999) is apparent. On a second, more abstract level however, subjectively perceived self-determination needs to be examined again. Only in retrospect are interests seen as self-determined; in the beginning, they were only gradually selected or even without any element of self-determination.

This mechanism can be explained with Bourdieu’s habitus concept. Subjects attribute the role of self or continuity to the development of interest and forget the role of contact with other people and the world. As a result, interest development is seen as a personal achievement and as separated from socio-cultural influences. It appears that anybody could be interested in anything and that we have freedom of choice. Bourdieu exposes this analysis and refers to the habitus, which is incorporated particularly via the process of forgetting. However, habitus is always tied to the situation in the social arena; in other words, it is not individual, but has a social, historical and economic background. In terms of interest development, our conclusion is that the opportunities for developing an interest in something are not equally accessible to everyone; rather, they are structurally unequal. This inequality of opportunity is a fact that is too easily forgotten.

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