Dynamics of Public Service Motivation: Attraction–Selection and Socialization in the Production and Regulation of Social Services

The literature on public service motivation (PSM) has traditionally focused on the relationship between motivation and public/private sector of employment, while the character of the work being performed has been neglected. Using panel surveys with pre- and postentry measures of PSM among certified Danish social workers, this article provides a unique design for investigating PSM-based attraction–selection and socialization effects with respect to the choice between work related to service production or service regulation (controlled for public/private sector of employment). The article shows that the PSM profiles of social work students predict their preference for one of the two types of work tasks but do not predict first employment in the preferred job. Conversely, postentry shifts in social workers’ PSM profiles result from a complex interplay between influences from both work task and sector.

The literature on public service motivation (PSM) has typically focused on the relationship between motivation and public/private sector of employment, while the character of the work being performed has been neglected. Using panel surveys with pre- and postentry measures of PSM among certified Danish social workers, this article provides a unique design for investigating PSM-based attraction–selection and socialization effects with respect to the choice between work related to service production or service regulation (controlled for public/private sector of employment). The article shows that the PSM profiles of social work students predict their preference for one of the two types of work tasks but do not predict first employment in the preferred job. Conversely, postentry shifts in social workers’ PSM profiles result from a complex interplay between influences from both work task and sector.

In order to answer this question, this article relies on panel data from certified Danish social workers who had the opportunity to undertake work related to service production and service regulation in both the public and private sectors and who were interviewed and surveyed both before and after they accepted their first professional job. This provides a very strong and unique design for approaching the dynamics of PSM in different work settings. More specifically, the article examines how an individual’s PSM affects attraction–selection to service-production or service-regulation work (controlled for public/private employment sector) and how this work, in turn, has a potentially socializing effect on the individual’s PSM. The next section outlines this distinction between service-production and service-regulation work tasks and its possible influence compared with the sector distinction. This is followed by a comprehensive discussion of the expected PSM-based attraction–selection and socialization effects concerning the work environments related to these two types of work. Third, the research design, data collection, study measures, and...
statistical methods are reviewed. Finally, the results are presented, and a concluding discussion with avenues for future research is outlined.

**Job Choice: Service Production or Regulation?**

Most previous studies of PSM dynamics have neglected the character of the different types of public service work being performed in the public and private sectors. When individuals choose their sector of employment, they also choose between work tasks, which are possibly more important for their daily motivation than sector. Inspired by Hasenfeld’s (1972) theoretical distinction between the “people-changing” and “people-processing” functions of public service, this article distinguishes between individuals who deliver public services by producing the services and those who primarily regulate the services. Service production means that the employee participates actively in the provision of a specific service directed toward an identified group of recipients or citizens (e.g., a teacher who teaches a classroom of students). Service regulation means that the employee makes decisions regarding the eligibility for who teaches a classroom of students). Service regulation means that the employee makes decisions regarding the eligibility for service production or regulation, individuals can thus express different combinations of the two tasks in a single job. The following section will argue how the characteristics of these two types of public service work are highly relevant when assessing dynamics involved in PSM-based attraction–selection and socialization effects.

**Attraction–Selection and Socialization in Service Production and Regulation**

Originally, PSM was described as a special type of altruistic work motivation with roots in public sector organizations (Perry and Wise 1990; Rainey 1982). Today, however, the concept is more often used in a broader context to describe the motivation of individuals to contribute to society and help others through the delivery of public services (i.e., services ordered and/or [partly] financed by government and provided to the public), regardless of whether this takes place in the public or the private sector (Perry and Hondeghem 2008). Using the dominant theoretical framework for understanding individual job choice, the theory of person–environment fit (Kristof-Brown 1996; Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, and Johnson 2005; Leisink and Steijn 2008), this article thus argues that the crucial point for establishing a relationship between PSM and the choice to work in public service is whether the work allows the individual to help others and contribute to society. In other words, individuals will seek to establish a “needs–supply” fit between their PSM and the work they perform. In the present context, this is analyzed with respect to finding a job that supports one’s interest in contributing to society and helping others through service production or service regulation.

A number of studies have successfully used the theory of person–environment fit to confirm a positive association between PSM and attraction to public sector employment (e.g., Bright 2008; Vandenabeele 2008b; Wright and Christensen 2010), but few have analyzed the role of work type in PSM-based job decision processes. As mentioned, a recent contribution by Christensen and Wright (2011) makes an exception. Those authors show that American law students with high degrees of PSM were more likely to accept jobs seen as being more “service oriented.” This result confirms the argument that individuals look for jobs in which the work allows them to help others and contribute to society. This article seeks to add to this study by (1) examining attraction to two types of service-oriented jobs—service production and service regulation—that describe a specific characteristic of the work that can be used across the different types of work tasks as poles at the two ends of an ordered scale (Kjeldsen 2012a). Conceptualizing public service work in terms of the degree of service production or regulation, individuals can thus express different combinations of the two tasks in a single job. The following section will argue how the characteristics of these two types of public service work are highly relevant when assessing dynamics involved in PSM-based attraction–selection and socialization effects.

**By differentiating between service production and regulation, the present study aims to investigate the role of job content directly instead of keeping it constant.**
different professions and sectors, and (2) by relating this distinction to individuals’ different PSM profiles.

Theoretically, PSM is expected to be expressed as (at least) commitments to the public interest, compassion, attraction to public policy making, and self-sacrifice, which are also called the different dimensions of PSM (Coursey and Pandey 2007; Kim et al. 2013; Perry 1996; Perry and Wise 1990 Vandenabeele 2008a). Building on distinct norm-based, affective, and rational motives psychological processes, Perry (1996) argues that these dimensions should be analyzed separately on the grounds that they may have different causes and consequences; that is, individuals can have different amounts of the various types of PSM, or one can simply speak of different individual PSM profiles. This article focuses on individuals’ public interest, compassion, and policy-making PSM and the relevance of these different motivational profiles to individuals’ attraction–selection into service-producing or service-regulating jobs.

Attraction–selection into service production or regulation is primarily expected to be a matter of differences in individuals’ varying levels of compassion and policy-making PSM. Regardless of service production or regulation, individuals who want to deliver public services in their future job (and therefore bear responsibility for the well-being of fellow citizens) will naturally be motivated by loyalty and duty to serve the public interest—otherwise, they may merely opt for a job that does not involve service to the public at all. Hence, there does not seem to be reason to expect that differences in individuals’ levels of the norm-based public interest PSM imply more or less attraction to work involving service regulation compared with service production. On the contrary, one could expect that individuals with higher levels of the affectively founded compassion PSM are more inclined to look for and accept work involving production of services compared with regulation. Compassion rests on human relatedness, and from this perspective, individuals will be motivated to contribute to society and help others because they identify with those in need and feel emotionally moved by the underprivileged societal groups they confront (Perry and Wise 1990, 368). This type of PSM is likely to be supported by a service-producing job, which both implies and requires daily and positive face-to-face contact with the recipients of the services in order for the service to be performed successfully. This is underlined in a study by Grant (2007), who shows that employees’ prosocial motivation increased when they were able to directly see the positive consequences of their work, such as meeting those who benefit from their services.

In service-regulation work, contact with clients/ recipients is often more negative, as this work implies that the employee will sometimes have to make negative evaluations of the eligibility for a service. This is less likely to coincide with the everyday realization of empathy. Instead, policy-making PSM appears to be more likely to lead to a job involving service regulation. This type of PSM implies that the individual is instrumentally motivated to contribute to society by participating in the (political) decision-making processes regarding the service in question, as this can be seen as a rational way of attempting to improve service delivery with the greatest possible positive consequences for the greatest number (Kim and Vandenabeele 2010, 703). If one wants to help others on a larger scale, and possibly on a more long-term basis, then a natural choice would be to look for a job in which it is possible to affect access to public services—which is the very core content of service regulation. In sum, the following is expected to hold with respect to how individuals attract and select into service-production or service-regulation jobs because of their PSM (controlled for individuals’ public/private employment sector preference):

**Hypotheses 1a:** Individuals’ higher levels of compassion PSM are positively associated with attraction–selection into service production rather than service regulation.

**Hypothesis 1b:** Individuals’ higher levels of policy-making PSM are positively associated with attraction–selection into service regulation rather than service production.

**Hypothesis 1c:** Based on individuals’ levels of public interest PSM, there are no differences in their attraction–selection into service production or service regulation.

This article thus associates different types of PSM with different types of public service work, but this does not mean that people who opt to work in service regulation as their main work task cannot be motivated by compassion—they probably just have lower levels of this type of PSM compared with those who prefer service production. This is what is meant by different PSM profiles as a trigger behind different attraction–selection mechanisms into different types of work. However, it can be questioned to what extent career behavior is the result of deliberate job choices or whether other internal or external factors also (or even more importantly) play a role. First, individuals’ education, qualifications, and experiences place natural limitations on the kinds of jobs they can apply for. Second, external factors such as macroeconomic fluctuations, the employer’s choice, and general arbitrary events can clearly also affect employee career behavior (Betsworth and Hansen 1996; Bright, Pryor and Harpham 2005; Rojewski 1999; Scott and Hatalla 1990). Especially for the newly educated, many have to take whatever job is first offered. Several studies have nevertheless found systematic differences in employee PSM between employees from different industries and professions (Andersen and Pedersen 2012; Steinhaus and Perry 1996) and different sectors (Houston 2000; Lewis and Frank 2002; Rainey 1982). A plausible explanation for these differences is that, despite some chance events, there is still an element of systematic attraction–selection into certain work environments involved in job choices.

However, previously detected differences in employee PSM, as mentioned earlier, could also be the result of organizational socialization processes after the commencement of employment in a certain sector or service. Because most studies of PSM have relied on cross-sectional data, this endogeneity problem—with widespread consequences for the ability to make valid recommendations to public managers regarding the recruitment and retention of motivated employees—remains largely unexplored.
Perry and Wise (1990) originally described PSM as a dynamic attribute that can change over time and play a role in both attraction—selection and attrition decisions. Brewer elaborates on this dynamic perspective by adding the socialization mechanism, pointing out that “[i]n all likelihood, organizational socialization is an important mechanism for transmitting a ‘public institutional logic’ and seeding public service motivation in the individual” (2008, 149). Studies within the fields of organizational behavior and personnel psychology generally define socialization as “the process by which an individual acquires the values, knowledge, and expected behavior needed to participate as an organizational member” (Cable and Parsons 2001, 2; see also Chatman 1991, 462; Feldman 1976; Van Maanen and Schein 1979), and Chatman’s (1991) empirical study supports the existence of this process of individual adaption to fit the organization (see also Cable and Parsons 2001; Cooper-Thomas, Van Vianen, and Anderson 2004). Tracking the careers of 171 auditors in eight U.S. public accounting firms, comparing their values at the entry stage with those of the organization and repeating the comparison after almost a year of organizational membership, she found that the degree of employee involvement in organizational socialization activities played a significant role in predicting their fit with the organization. Through interaction with other employees and significant peers, the values of newcomers in the public accounting firms (e.g., respect for individuals and being socially responsible) became more similar.

With this in mind, one could imagine that by discussing cases and clients with colleagues and managers and by being confronted with service recipients on a daily basis, compassion motivation will be reinforced and cultivated in service-producing jobs. Likewise, by being a part of an organization in which it is actually possible to participate in the policy processes concerning a given service, attraction to public policy making will likely be enhanced. Conversely, public interest PSM—resting on more general altruistic motives and values related to duty and loyalty toward the public—may be nurtured in both types of public service delivery jobs. The following is therefore expected with respect to possible postentry associations between individuals’ PSM profiles and the work environment of service production/regulation (controlled for entry to public/private sector employment):

**Hypothesis 2a:** Individuals’ compassion PSM develops positively after entering the labor market in service-producing jobs compared with service-regulating jobs.

**Hypothesis 2b:** Individuals’ policy-making PSM develops positively after entering the labor market in service-regulation jobs compared with service-producing jobs.

**Hypothesis 2c:** Individuals’ public interest PSM is not affected differently by entering the labor market in service-regulation jobs compared with service-producing jobs.

However, because individuals entering the labor market in public service jobs also become members of public or private sector organizations, regardless of whether this was part of the attraction—selection considerations, these postentry PSM dynamics may be more complicated. Following Brewer (2008), one might expect that those with a service delivery job in the public sector experience a general increase in PSM regardless of their PSM profile and the nature of the work. In line with March and Olson’s (1995) work on institutions and the “logic of appropriateness,” newcomers to public organizations are expected to demonstrate loyalty and duty to the public, as this represents a means of maintaining the organization’s legitimacy and survival. Public organizations therefore work to sow public values in the identity of public employees, which can cause them to develop PSM (March and Olsen 1995, 58; Moynihan and Pandey 2007, 41; Perry 2000; Perry and Vandebnabeele 2008; Kjeldsen and Jacobsen 2013). On the other hand, Moynihan and Pandey (2007) have shown that PSM is likely to decline with public sector tenure, an outcome that is ascribed to more red tape in the public sector (Boyne 2002, 101; Bozeman and Scott 1996) and might prevent socialization processes into higher levels of PSM, especially policy-making PSM. Employees may become frustrated with respect to achieving their goals to do good for others and contribute to society if they experience burdensome rules, and this may cause their PSM to drop (Buchanan 1975). Similarly, and with possible negative consequences for compassion PSM in particular, Blau (1960) finds that newly hired social service caseworkers in a large American welfare agency experienced a "reality shock" when they started working with clients. Their "strongly positive, if somewhat sentimental and idealistic" attitudes were severely tested by clients, resulting in disillusionment and lost interest in helping them (Blau 1960, 347). Similar effects have been detected for American police recruits (Van Maanen 1975), Flemish teachers (De Cooman et al. 2009), and Danish physiotherapists (Kjeldsen and Jacobsen 2013). However, as many of these studies only investigate service production and use limited measures of PSM (if they use the term public service motivation at all), the use of both pre- and postentry measures of different PSM profiles among Danish social workers, who can be compared on two different types of service delivery in the public and private sectors, is expected to add interesting knowledge to these PSM dynamics in the interplay between type of work and sector.

**Data, Measures, and Methods**

**Research Design and Data**

To test the stated hypotheses, this study uses panel data of certified Danish social workers surveyed before and after they made their first job choice regarding service production or regulation in the public or private sector. In addition, the study relies on a parallel and partly overlapping panel with 16 semistructured interviews to qualify the survey measures and provide further insights into the quantitative results.²

Danish social workers constitute a unique and very strong case for studying this job choice, as they have many opportunities to work with service production and regulation in both sectors, for example, by caring for juvenile delinquents at public or private institutions or evaluating eligibility for unemployment benefits at local municipal agencies or private firms (as a result of outsourcing of the service). Furthermore, because services are publicly funded and controlled in both sectors, this case renders it possible to isolate influences from the sector environment to the public/private ownership status of the organizations while, at the same time, ensuring compatible work tasks across sectors. Finally, a single profession study also implies that a number of factors that influence individual job choice decisions can be held constant (e.g., choice of profession, macroeconomic
fluctuations, educational background). Certified Danish social workers all complete a standard three-and-a-half-year program consisting of theoretical and practical training at special schools of social work (applied bachelor of arts degree). The social worker case therefore provides a more conservative test of the task-related differences in PSM than the comparisons in previous studies of different professions and industries (Andersen and Pedersen 2012; Steinhaeus and Perry 1996). Although the results may be less applicable to other public services, examining the research question among social workers prioritizes internal validity over generalizability, hence ensuring a valid separation of attraction–selection and socialization effects. This is one of the main critiques of existing studies of employee differences in PSM (Wright 2008; Wright and Grant 2010).

The survey panel consists of 79 social workers, all of whom were students in December 2010, when the first round of data collection was completed, after which they completed their education and entered the labor market before the second round of data collection in November and December 2011. In total, 782 social work students in the final year prior to graduation were invited to participate in the first round of data collection (the entire population); 189 students replied to the e-mail questionnaire (24 percent response rate). Those 189 respondents were invited to participate in the 2011 survey; 120 replied (65 percent response rate). However, some of these panel participants did not graduate or continued in other parts of the education system, and some did not find a job or found a nonpublic service job (e.g., human resource consultant in a private company). The final panel therefore consists of 79 social workers, all of whom were students in 2010 and all of whom had found a service-production or service-regulation job in the public or private sector in 2011. The same is true for the 16 social workers (originally 21 social worker students) constituting the parallel interview panel.

Measurement and Descriptive Statistics of the Panel Variables

Regarding the measurement of the central study variables, the operationalization of the three PSM dimensions—public interest, compassion, and policy-making PSM—is based on a number of Likert-scale questions that have commonly been used in the international literature on PSM measurement (Kim 2009; Kim and Vandenbergabe 2010; Perry 1996). Although the results may be less applicable to other public services, examining the research question among social workers prioritizes internal validity over generalizability, hence ensuring a valid separation of attraction–selection and socialization effects. This is one of the main critiques of existing studies of employee differences in PSM (Wright 2008; Wright and Grant 2010).

Table 1 Measurement of Public Service Motivation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Public interest PSM (Jöreskog’s rho: 2010 scale = 0.538, 2011 scale = 0.639)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Meaningful public service is very important to me.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. I consider public service my civic duty.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. I get energy from contributing to the common good.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Once a person has paid their taxes, there is no need to do more to contribute to society. (R)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Compassion PSM (Jöreskog’s rho: 2010 scale = 0.652, 2011 scale = 0.634)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. It’s difficult for me to contain my feeling when I see people in distress.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I am often reminded by daily events about how dependent we are on one another.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I empathize with other people who face difficulties.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Considering the welfare of others is very important.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy-making PSM (Jöreskog’s rho: 2010 scale = 0.607, 2011 scale = 0.555)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Politics reminds me of something positive.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I like to discuss topics regarding public programs and policies with others.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. It motivates me to help improve public services.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Items originally developed by Perry (1996); Giauque et al. (2009); Kim (2009); and Kim et al. (2013), with few adjustments.

Regarding the attraction–selection effects in jobs with service production or service regulation as the main work task, the social work students were asked in 2010 about their preferences for service-producing or service-regulation jobs using four dichotomous questions developed on the basis of the semistructured interviews with social work students (for more detail on this interplay between the interview and survey panels, see Kjeldsen 2012a). Each question asked them to choose between a job mainly involving service regulation (e.g., a case worker in an unemployment agency/center) or service production (e.g., an employee at an activation project “in the field”). For each of the four questions, the target groups (unemployed, socially disadvantaged children/families, mentally/physically challenged citizens, and drug/alcohol abusers) were held constant, and references to public or private organizations were avoided. The answers were then combined into a single variable, preference for type of work in 2010, ranging from 0 to 4, where 1 = students who picked service-regulation jobs four times and 0 = students who picked service-producing jobs four times (rescaled to range from 1 to 5, where 5 = purely attracted to service-regulation jobs).

In the 2011 survey, when the social workers had entered the labor market, their actual work, actual type of work in 2011, was likewise measured on a 1–5 scale, where 5 = mainly service regulation. This time, however, it was necessary to code the variable using two open-ended questions from the survey, which asked the social workers to (1) list their current employer and (2) provide a brief description of their main work tasks. Here, the semistructured interviews with employed social workers, who provided detailed descriptions of their daily work in relation to the two different types of work, served as a guideline for categorizing the respondents’ actual work as being mainly service production or service regulation (see examples of this coding process in Kjeldsen 2012a).

Regarding the PSM-based socialization resulting from being employed with either of the two work tasks, two independent variables are used as predictors of postentry changes in PSM. First, the panel data design allowed for the construction of a dummy variable called employment, where all respondents were assigned a value of 0 in 2010, when they were still students, and 1 in 2011, when they were all employed. This variable indicates the “pure” effect on PSM of entering the labor market. Second, this employment variable was multiplied with actual type of work in 2011 to form a variable measuring the effect of entering the labor market in a job with mainly service regulation on PSM (relative to entering a job with mainly service production and to being a student). This means that a positive and significant coefficient on this variable, called entrance in service-regulation job, regressed on policy-making PSM would
confirm the expectation in hypothesis 2b that social workers finding employment with service regulation will experience an increase in this type of PSM. Conversely, a negative and significant coefficient of this variable regressed on compassion PSM would confirm hypothesis 2a about the development in compassion PSM after entering a service-producing job, and a nonsignificant coefficient when using public interest PSM as a dependent variable would confirm hypothesis 2c about no socialization difference in loyalty and duty toward the public when entering the two types of jobs.

The analysis of both attraction–selection and socialization effects controlled for the social work students’ preferences for public or private sector employment and for their actual sector of employment in 2011, respectively (dummy variables, with 1 = public/non-profit sector and 0 = private sector/self-employed). Finally, the social workers’ gender (1 = female) and age (measured in years) are also included as controls, as previous studies have shown that there can be substantial differences in the PSM profiles of men and women and that older employees generally tend to have higher PSM levels (DeHart-Davis, Marlowe, and Pandey 2006; Pandey and Stażyk 2008; Perry 1997). Furthermore, it cannot be ruled out that there might be gender and/or age differences in attraction–selection into the examined public service jobs. Table 2 provides an overview of the descriptive statistics for all central variables in the 2010 sample and the 2011 sample making up the panel.

**Statistical Methods**

The panel structure implies that the PSM dimensions serve as independent variables in the attraction–selection analysis, whereas they are included as dependent variables in the socialization analysis. Because the two work task variables (*preferred type of work in 2010 and actual type of work in 2011*) are both measured on 1–5 ordered scales, ordered logistic regressions are used as the statistical method to test the proposed attraction–selection hypotheses. The coefficients in logistic regressions can be interpreted as the increase (or decrease, according to the sign) in the log odds for every unit increase of the independent variable (holding all other variables constant). The odds can be computed by means of the formula $e^{\beta}$ (Gujarati and Porter 2009, 554). The parallel regression assumption or the proportional odds assumption stating that the slope coefficients are similar within each regression for all values on the dependent variable has been tested (cf. the Wald test by Brant 1990; Long and Freese 2006). The test showed no violation of the assumption except with respect to gender and the undecided group of sector preference in 2010. Because these variables are only used as controls, this violation is considered minor. Furthermore, the assumptions of no influential outliers and lack of strong multicollinearity required for performing (ordered) logistic regression analysis were tested by calculating the standardized Pearson residuals (cf. Hosmer and Lemeshow 2000) and the variance inflation factors (all VIF < 2.6); no serious violations were detected.

Regarding the socialization hypotheses, a random-effects panel regression is the appropriate statistical method, as the PSM dimensions are continuous and measured in at least two points in time. Hausman tests have been performed for each of the analyses with the separate PSM dimensions in order to identify whether differences in the estimated coefficients are likely to be systematic or random (Cameron and Trivedi 2009). Hausman’s test for endogeneity—that differences in coefficients between a random- and a fixed-effects model are not likely to be systematic—yielded insignificant results for all three analyses (the three PSM dimensions); therefore, random-effects models are applied. Concerning the statistical assumptions for using panel regression analysis (linearity, normality of residuals, homoskedasticity, independence, and no multicollinearity or outliers), the tests showed that robust standard errors should be used to accommodate heteroskedasticity and that multicollinearity between employment, work type, and sector is present (VIF between 8.80 and 9.44). This is expected, however, given that it is only when one is employed that it is possible to have a value on the work and sector variables, and there are generally more service-regulation jobs available in the public sector. Multicollinearity is therefore unavoidable, but in case of significant results, the coefficients will remain significant no matter the degree of collinearity—only the estimates will likely be biased. Hence, it is debatable how serious a problem multicollinearity is (Gujarati and Porter 2009, 320).

**Results**

Regarding the proposed attraction–selection mechanisms, table 3 shows a series of ordered logistic regressions of the social workers’ preferred work tasks in 2010 and actual work in 2011. Upon controlling for gender and age, we see that students with higher compassion PSM levels are significantly more likely to be attracted to service-production work (model 3.2). Corresponding to the expectation in hypothesis 1a, model 3.3 shows that this result also holds after controlling for the preferred employment sector, indicating that this PSM-based attraction effect may be a matter of service task rather than sector.

Contrary to the expectations of hypotheses 1b and 1c, table 3 (model 3.3) shows that the policy-making PSM dimension does not
appear to have a significant relationship with preference for either of the two types of work; rather, it is the social work students with higher public interest PSM levels who are more attracted to working with service regulation. The attraction analysis thus clearly shows that individuals’ PSM profiles matter for their attraction to working with service production or regulation (regardless of sector preference), but the effects are different than expected.

Proceeding to the other half of table 3, which investigates the association between the social work students’ PSM and their actual employment with the preferred type of work in 2011, we see that the social work students who preferred working with service regulation (as opposed to service production) were also more likely to end up in such a job in 2011 (model 3.6), but, contrary to expectations, there are no direct associations between different PSM profiles and the actual employment chosen. Controlling for both preferences for individual work type and sector in model 3.7, we obtain an indication of whether employers possibly select on the basis of individuals’ PSM profiles. This does not seem to be the case, as there are no significant direct associations between PSM and actual employment. This suggests that explaining actual employment is a very complex affair in which both employer demands and individual work type preferences (formed by both PSM and other work preferences) play a role.

The primary advantage of the present study is the panel structure with both pre- and postentry measures of PSM. Table 4 provides an overview and a test of how the PSM of social workers develops in this transition according to whether they enter a job predominantly characterized by service production or service regulation. First, the table shows that whereas the public interest PSM of the social work students remains rather unchanged regardless of whether they enter a job predominantly characterized by service production or service regulation. Second and opposite, the social workers’ policy-making PSM increases quite substantially in both types of work, but more so for the social workers working with service production than for those working with service regulation. What is interesting, however, is whether these
preliminary findings also hold in multivariate analyses controlling for the social workers’ personal characteristics and their entrance into a public or private sector organization.

Table 5 presents the results of a series of multivariate random effects regressions of the pre-entry development in the social workers’ PSM. First, in line with the results from table 4 and as expected in hypothesis 2c, models 5.1 and 5.2 in table 5 show that the social workers do not experience significant changes in their public interest PSM as a consequence of entering the labor market, no matter which type of work they perform or within which sector. On the other hand, some interesting results emerge when considering models 5.3 and 5.4, which analyze the change in compassion PSM. After controlling for the social workers’ gender and age, we see that the transition from education to employment results in a general drop in compassion. But controlling simultaneously for work task and sector, this drop is offset by entrance into the public sector (model 5.4); that is, when we take into account that more public sector employees work with service regulation, this negative effect on the social workers’ compassion is mitigated. Conversely, there are no significant differences in the postentry developments of compassion between those producing or regulating services when sector of employment is controlled, which is contrary to the expectation expressed in hypothesis 2a.

Finally, regarding hypothesis 2b, table 5 (model 5.6) reveals that the same seems to be the case for the development of policy-making PSM. The social workers entering the public sector are primarily those experiencing a rise in “attraction to policy making,” but we also see that the results with respect to the differences between work tasks from the simple t-tests in table 4 still hold. In general, the policy-making PSM of the social workers increases significantly when entering the labor market, but this increase is significantly less pronounced among those entering a service-regulation job than those entering a service-production job.

The analyses show that the work task plays a significant role with respect to PSM-based attraction mechanisms.

So although it is confirmed that the work task matters for the postentry development of these social workers’ policy-making PSM, it matters differently than expected in hypothesis 2b. How these interesting results can be interpreted in the light of the theoretical framework and previous studies will be discussed in the following section.

### Discussion and Conclusion

This article set out to investigate the role of different public service work tasks—service production and service regulation—for PSM-based attraction—selection and socialization effects. Generally speaking, when individuals choose a job with public or private service delivery, they also choose a work task. A lack of awareness regarding different public service tasks in different sectors, together with the use of cross-sectional data (as in Bright 2008; Lewis and Frank 2002; Rainey 1982; Steijn 2008), may therefore have led scholars to paint an incomplete picture of the possible PSM dynamics in different work settings.

Using panel data with pre- and postentry measures of PSM among certified Danish social workers who found employment with service production or regulation in the public or private sector, this study has provided a very conservative test of the emergence and development of task-related differences in PSM. First, the analyses show that the work task plays a significant role with respect to PSM-based attraction mechanisms. Social work students with higher public interest PSM levels are more attracted to working with service regulation, and students with higher compassion PSM levels are more attracted to working with service production, whereas policy-making PSM has no significant associations with preference for either of the two types of work (controlled for public/private sector preferences).

In line with hypothesis 1a and studies by Grant (2007, 2008) and Andersen and Pedersen (2012), it comes as no surprise that those who are motivated by relatedness and emotional involvement/
identification with service recipients look for service-production work. Service producers have daily contact with the recipients, and the success of the service (e.g., a student learns from a teacher or a client stops abusing drugs because of conversations with a social worker) depends highly on their social interaction. Slightly more surprising and contrary to hypothesis 1b, the social work students’ policy-making PSM is unrelated to preferences for service regulation; this type of work appears to be more attached to public interest PSM. It may be that students have difficulty seeing how they can expect to contribute to the improvement of public services on rational-instrumental grounds in a service-regulation job because their practical experience as organization members is limited. Hence, they place more emphasis on their general duty toward the public, a motivation that is apparently perceived to fit better with a service-regulation job. This might be tied to the fact that service regulation is mostly about determining eligibility for services (or deciding welfare sanctions), and here, public values such as equality, fairness, and transparency are probably more at the forefront. This creates better opportunities to fulfill a larger public interest in these jobs compared with “merely” helping individual users of the services in service-producing jobs.

Conversely, none of the three PSM dimensions predicts the social workers’ actual employment with service production/regulation. As previously discussed, it is debatable whether it is possible for individuals to obtain the employment they prefer (based on their PSM profile and other preferences) (Betsworth and Hansen 1996; Gabris and Simo 1995; Scott and Hatalla 1990), and while this study has shown that social workers do find the work they prefer to some degree, this is not attributable to PSM-based employer selection. The interviews show that while many social workers prefer service production, some only apply for jobs as service regulators because they feel the need to learn more about the legal framework of the services to be able to (perhaps later) interact more closely with the clients Kjeldsen 2012a). However, the result that PSM does not predict individuals’ first jobs generally resembles those of previous studies of attraction–selection effects in the public and private sectors (Kjeldsen and Jacobsen 2013; Tschirhart et al. 2008; Wright and Christensen 2010). This points to the need for a revision of PSM theory concerning the actual sorting of individuals into different public service tasks and sectors based on their PSM.

With respect to postentry PSM shifts, the social workers’ compassion generally drops upon entering the labor market, whereas their policy-making PSM increases. However, these tendencies are moderated by task and sector in the sense that the drop in compassion is less pronounced among social workers entering the public sector, and policy-making PSM increases less for social workers working with service regulation. Once again, however, there is a positive effect of entering a public sector organization on this association. This indicates that both the environments of the task and the sector are crucial for examining postentry PSM dynamics and that organizations are indeed capable of having an impact on employee attitudes. The findings in previous cross-sectional studies of systematic differences in PSM between public and private sector employees (e.g., Lewis and Frank 2002; Rainey 1982) may therefore be caused as much by task and by sector, as there are substantial divisions of tasks across sectors. While the result with respect to the postentry development of the social workers’ compassion does not fit the positive prediction in hypothesis 2a, it is in line with the more pessimistic results of Blau’s (1960) study. Blau found that American case workers became disillusioned and lost interest in their clients when they started working because they found that the clients cheated and let them down. This may also be the story behind the declining compassion among Danish social workers. Then again, the analyses also show that this decline is partly offset by entering a public sector organization, which confirms the line of argument behind the expectation of PSM-based socialization in the public sector as advanced in the PSM literature (Brewer 2008; Kjeldsen 2012a; Perry and Vandenabeele 2008). The same may be the case with policy-making PSM, where the analyses showed that those entering the public sector experienced a greater increase in this type of motivation. The environment of public sector organizations fits well with a wish to contribute to society by participating in policy processes to improve the delivery of public services, as this can be done directly through the public sector organizational hierarchy; newly hired social workers in the public sector may experience more transparency in how they can work to affect the organization of the services compared to entering the private sector and when they were still students.

On the other hand, and contrary to the expectation in hypothesis 2b, the analyses also show that the social workers’ policy-making PSM increases less when they enter a service-regulation job compared with service production. This may reflect that performing administrative work tied to the legal framework of social services involves the risk of experiencing red tape, which has proven to be especially negatively related to policy-making PSM (Buchanan 1975; Moynihan and Pandey 2007). Working with service regulation in the public sector may therefore be experienced as a “double-edged sword” regarding the development of social workers’ PSM in pre-to-postentry transitions. Finally, regarding public interest, this type of motivation does not seem to change as a result of the transition from school to work. This was expected according to hypothesis 2c and confirms that public interest PSM is probably a more stable individual trait, closely connected to the individual’s appraisal of general public values (Andersen et al. 2013; Kim et al. 2013).

In sum, this study has shown that with respect to PSM-based attraction effects, the character of the work plays a predominant role compared to the public/private sector distinction. On the other hand, social workers’ postentry changes in PSM result from complex interplay between newcomers being affected by the environment of both the task and the organization (public or private). However, the lack of significant associations with respect to the role of the sector distinction in attraction processes should be treated carefully because of the relatively low number of respondents performing the two types of work across sectors. With larger samples, similar results are likely, as in Vandenabeele (2008b), who also uses samples with students and finds positive relationships between PSM and preference for public sector employment. Despite the low number of respondents, however, the balanced panel in the present research design strengthens the conclusions regarding the separation of detected attraction–selection effects from socialization.
The panel research design has primarily served to raise the internal validity, while the choice of a single profession study compromises the external validity. Still, other studies of Danish street-level bureaucrats have been evaluated to take place in very similar contexts as, for example, the United States (May and Winter 2009), and there is no reason to believe that the results could not be replicated among social workers in other Western countries. However, it would be interesting for future research to conduct similar studies with more than two rounds of data collection and more than one profession to see whether the patterns of postentry developments in PSM are persistent with more years of experience in the sectors and with the work tasks. Nevertheless, the results of this study indicate that scholars and managers alike should not neglect the importance of the work task when focusing on PSM-based attraction mechanisms, and individuals’ PSM profiles can be affected by the environments of both sector and work task once employed.

Notes
1. The fourth PSM dimension, self-sacrifice, is excluded from the present study for (primarily) empirical reasons. Confirmatory factor analyses showed that no measurement model that included the self-sacrifice dimension (using the original Perry [1996] items) could be formed with acceptable levels of discriminant validity and scale reliability. This is no surprise, as Perry’s original 1996 analyses also showed that self-sacrifice tends to have a very strong correlation with the public interest dimension. Hence, the self-sacrifice dimension has also been left out in some previous studies (e.g., Coursey and Pandey 2007), and scholars generally have had difficulty establishing a proper measure for self-sacrifice investigating Danish frontline welfare workers (Andersen, Pallesen, and Pedersen 2011).
2. The parallel interview panel also consists of Danish social workers, who were interviewed before and after they made their first job choice. Both times, the interviews were conducted just prior to the launch of the surveys. The interviews lasted approximately one hour each. The semistructured interview guide is available upon request (for further details on the research design and data collection of the qualitative study, see Kjeldsen 2012a).
3. This relatively low response rate is partly attributable to limited access to the students’ private e-mail addresses provided by the social worker schools and partly attributable to restrictions on sending out reminders about the survey.
4. The distribution of these 79 social workers in terms of gender and age resembles that of the population. The mean age of social work graduates was 30.29 years in 2010 (Statistics Denmark), whereas it is 30.47 years in this panel (cf. table 2). Regarding the distribution of gender, 90.7 percent of the social work graduates in the population are women, compared with 93.0 percent in this panel. A representativeness analysis of the 41 social workers who did not enter their first professional job between the 2010 and 2011 surveys showed that they do not differ significantly from the 79 social workers in the panel with respect to sociodemographic characteristics and job preferences.
5. For the 2010 three-factor measurement model with the proposed PSM dimensions, the fit statistics are RMSEA = 0.067, CFI = 0.913, SRMR = 0.081, and χ²(55) = 222.01 (p < .001). For the 2011 three-factor measurement model, the fit statistics are RMSEA = 0.068, CFI = 0.904, SRMR = 0.074, and χ²(55) = 212.35 (p < .001). These statistics all indicate an acceptable fit with the data (Browne and Cudeck 1993; Schumacker and Lomax 2010). Composite reliability of the PSM dimensions is evaluated with Jöreskog’s rho, which is considered an appropriate reliability measure when conducting confirmatory factor analyses with a relatively low number of items for each dimension (cf. Diamantopoulos and Siguaw 2000, 90; Fornell and Larcker 1981, 45). Accordingly, almost all of the PSM dimensions meet the conventional cutoff point of 0.6 (and the 0.5 cutoff point argued by Fornell and Larcker [1981] is met by all dimensions in 2010 and 2011).
6. All interviews were recorded, fully transcribed, and systematically analyzed with respect to the social worker students’ descriptions of their job preferences and attraction to various work tasks using the qualitative analysis software NVivo 10.
7. Usually income is also used as a control in studies examining PSM and job choice (e.g., Lewis and Frank 2002). However, in this case, there are almost no differences in the social workers income across the different job categories, as the wages of Danish social workers are centrally negotiated and regulated by the Ministry of Employment and the Danish Association of Social Workers based on yearly tenure. The social workers’ organizational tenure (mean = 6.45 months) has been included as a control variable in the analyses of the postentry socialization hypotheses, but it showed no significant effect on the developments in the social workers’ PSM, and therefore it is not included in the final version of table 5.

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