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AUTHOR Schwarzweller, Harry K.
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ABSTRACT

This conceptual educational framework considers: (1) the idiosyncracies of national educational structures in Germany, Norway, and the United States in regions which represent a wide range of rural socioeconomic circumstances,and (2) scholastic rank as a determinant of ambition and as a sorting-out mechanism. Social inequalities resulting from discriminatory patterns based upon sex, social class, and place of residence were explored. The U.S. case focused on high school seniors and their plans for college; the German phase dealt with "Volksschule" (elementary) students and their plans for further schooling, and secondary school students and their plans to attain the "Abitur" (university preparation). The Norwegian phase dealt with "ungdomsskole" (comprehensive intermediate) pupils and their plans to enter the gymnas (secondary), and gymnas students and their plans to go on to the university. Scholastic performance level, the independent variable, was measured by cumulative grade average. U.S. schools consistently and to a marked degree ranked girls over boys. In the Norwegian and German schools, although this sex discrimination pattern also existed, it was of far lesser magnitude. Social class origin manifested a strong effect in the U.S. and Norwegian cases, but was insignificant in Germany. It was concluded that sex biasing is more evident in the U.S. case, with girls being favored within the secondary school, and boys gaining a considerable advantage at the point of transition to higher education. (KM)

# SCHOLASTIC PERFORMANCE AND THE STRUCTURING OF AMBITION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY[1]

Harry K. Schwarzweller
Dept. of Sociology
Michigan State University

Licensed by society to make judgments about the relative potential of individuals vis-a-vis needs of the larger community, school systems function as instrumentalities that determine an individual's life chances. Albeit only one of the enormously important missions of the school, this sorting-out function is a particularly critical one for it represents a point at which social inequalities in modern societies become legitimated, institutionalized and, for the individual, irreversibly set.

The present paper is addressed directly to this issue, namely, the effectiveness of grades or scholastic ranking as a sorting-out mechanism. Unlike most earlier studies, however, the inquiry is posed within a comparative framework whereby the idiosyncracies of national educational structures can be taken into account. In order to assess the societal consequences of a given system, social inequalities resulting from discriminatory patterns based upon sex, social class, and place of residence are considered. Indirectly, then, the paper is oriented toward broader issues of educational reform.

## Conceptualization of the Problem

It is generally assumed, and there is considerable evidence supporting this assertion, that a student's intellectual capacity is reflected in his grades and record of scholastic performance.[2] It is



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also widely recognized that grades are determined to some extent as well by a youngster's desire and ability to cope with the expectations of teachers and the demands of classroom discipline. Many concerned educators, however, believe that this criterion of social conformity is frequently at odds with the criterion of scholarship and that, quite often, intellectual brilliance is smothered by classroom routine. Ratings and rankings, some insist, detract from the development of stable patterns of intensive learning.[3] Nevertheless, few would argue that such gradings are not a convenient way to sort-out young people for further educational opportunities. In a competition for college admission, for example, it would make little sense to favor those who rank at the bottom of their school class in terms of scholastic performance over those who have demonstrated superior capabilities. Whether used as a standard of comparison by admissions officers in deciding who should gain access to scarce educational resources, or as a basis for an individual's self-assessment of his own potential, the record of performance is a key factor affecting important career-molding decisions.

Indicative of achieved status or status mobility within the school system, grades serve as markers or stepping-stones on the path toward higher education, a career, and a niche in the world of work. Through grades, teachers communicate their judgment of a student's progress relative to certain standards. The standards are by no means "absolute" as might be argued for I.Q. and various standardized achievement tests. Indeed, they may be tailored specifically to a youngster's capabilities as inferred by the teacher, in which case motivational factors are

are emphasized ("Johnny is really trying and deserves an 'A'"). More often, however, and especially at the secondary school level, grades and scholastic rank are determined by the cumulative performance record on numerous "objective" examinations in an attempt to substitute "universalistic" procedures for the personalized judgments of teachers.

Regardless of the kind or quality of information utilized in establishing a student's scholastic rank, and regardless of the criteria emphasized (creative ability, motivation, aggressiveness, behavioral conformity, scores on tests), the end-product is the formation of a stratification system within the mini-society of a school class. As with any other stratification system in any other community, the rankings invariably become a basis for the differential allocation of rewards and facilities.[4] (For example, an "A" in a regular class may be a necessary condition to enroll in an advanced class; at least a "C" may be the necessary condition to maintain eligibility for varsity sports; then, of course, there are "fast" and "slow" reader groups in many elementary schools.) Ultimately, at the point of transition to the next higher level of education (or stage in career), the record of scholastic performance affects or is indicative of a developmental process that has affected a youngster's life chances, perception of attainable goals, and, consequently, his level of ambition. It is this aspect of the phenomenon of "grades and grading" that we are concerned with here, namely, scholastic rank as a determinant of ambition.

"Ambition" refers to a psychological attribute; i.e., an internalized characteristic of the individual. It applies to the desire for personal advancement, whether this be rank, fame, power or some other

preferment. In speaking about the "structuring of ambition," however, we imply a set of conditions external to the individual as, for example, the social constraints upon one's opportunity for advancement and the circumstances from which one's perception of attainable goals and level of ambition derives.[5] The structuring of ambition, of course, begins at a very early age within the intimate confines of family, kin and peer groups. Normally, as a result of differential patterns of socialization, we anticipate differences associated with sex and social class. In the school context, the structuring process becomes more formalized; interests and desires are screened, molded, redirected and/or reinforced through the varied experiences that constitute schooling. Teachers and peers are judge and jury in determining a youngster's progress and ability to master prescribed goals. In short, each stage in the developmental sequence leads to the further organization and specification of an individual's self-concept, his powers of cognition, and his level and direction of motivation or ambition.

Throughout this process, a youngster's personality attributes and the normative systems of the school and of the larger community interact to affect the outcome. The form that these interactions take and the relative influence of the various social dimensions that enter into a classroom situation are determined in no small part by the organizational character of the educational system itself.

## Comparative Perspectives

Although the educational systems of Norway, Germany and the United States can be said to have similar functional goals, there are marked differences in organization and in the manner by which young people are

sorted-out for higher education.[6] It was because of these differences that the three societies, structurally similar in many other respects, were selected as research sites (practical considerations, of course, also weighed heavy).

Before entering college or specialized vocational training, American children normally complete at least twelve years of schooling; this is usually arranged as six or eight years of primary plus six or four years of secondary school. In Norway, on the other hand, the basic educational track -- a result of recent reforms -- is nine years beginning at age 7; six years of elementary (barneskole) plus three years of comprehensive school (ungdomsskole). Initiated by the Primary Schools Act of 1959 which aimed to strengthen rural education and to form a basis for further equalization, Norway's new system of compulsory comprehensive school has gradually replaced two earlier types of secondary school for the 13 to 16 year age group -- the academically oriented realskole and the vocationally oriented continuation schools (framhaldsskole). Although the more remote rural areas were slower in adopting the "six plus three" system than were the urban centers, it is now the normal organization of compulsory education throughout most of Norway.[7]

The comprehensive school, then, is the basis for admission to all secondary schools in Norway -- whether the gymnas or any of the numerous kinds of vocational and technical schools. Some require only that the comprehensive school course be completed, while others have specific subject matter prerequisites. The combination of courses that leads towards the gymnas is the more demanding of the alternative syllabus

plans and requires pupils to study two foreign languages. Upon completion of the comprehensive school, pupils must take a general examination and those who do well, have followed the gymnas oriented plan in their ninth year, and have made good grades in other subjects not covered by the exam, may gain admission to the gymnas.

The gymnas curriculum, now generally a three year program, is organized along "lines" of emphasis, such as natural sciences, modern languages, biology, etc. At the conclusion of the program, students take a nationally administered matriculation examination (examin artium) which serves as a major qualifying hurdle for admission to the universities, teachers' training colleges and other institutions of higher education.

In the German education system, the "sorting-out" of youngsters for secondary schools occurs even earlier than in Norway -- at about age 10 or 11. At that branching-off, the level of future career alternatives is, for all practical purposes, established.[8] About one-fourth of the German youth population gains entree to the secondary school track (Gymnasium or Realschule). The "decision," however, is less a matter of merit than of parental interest and encouragement. Only those who successfully complete the ninth year of Gymnasium and pass the terminal exam (Abitur) are eligible to attend the university. An increasingly common path for upward mobility, however, is by way of the higher technical schools which require only 6 years of secondary schooling. For those who remain in the elementary school track, 2 or 3 years of additional vocational training or apprenticeship beyond the Volksschule

level is mandatory. At that point, since the option of an academic goal has virtually been by-passed, most youngsters are eager to begin a work career.

Hence, although achieved status is the organizing principle for the system of social mobility in all three societies (understandably so, for these societies share certain broad, political, ideological and cultural traditions -- they are industrialized, modernized and structurally similar in many respects), there are notable differences in how this principle is instituted via the educational selection process. The German system emphasizes very early selection, family sponsorship, and relatively rigid tracking. As a result, it is extremely sensitive to traditionalized social class norms at the crucial decision-making points. The Norwegian system, much like the British, can also be described as a sponsorship model. Although it too emphasizes fairly early selection and relatively rigid tracking, sponsorship is attained essentially on the basis of prior academic achievements (universalistically applied, through standardized testing) and, as a consequence, the system is seemingly less vulnerable to class biasing.[9] The American system resembles a contest model. "Dropping-out" is considered a "problem" and those who can not or will not compete tend to be stigmatized as failures. Structural barriers to upward mobility are not rigidly formalized and entry into elite status is an honor for those who are willing and able to take advantage of opportunities that, according to the American ideology, are open to all.[10] As a result, educational mobility is heavily dependent upon motivation to succeed.

It follows, then, that a student's record of scholastic performance probably plays a more important role in the Norwegian case than in the American. In the German case, where the critical sort is made at a very early age, we would expect that scholastic performance is of far lesser importance as a determinant of subsequent educational career decisions.

Research Procedures

The research data are from a cross-cultural project which was designed to achieve a reasonably high degree of comparability at all stages of the research process including selection of study populations, instrument construction, data collection techniques, measurement and coding procedures, and analysis strategies.[11]

Information was collected during four separate, but coordinated phases of field work: in three regions of Germany (1965); in three regions of Kentucky (1968); in three regions of Norway (1969); and in a West Virginia coal county (1970). The regions were chosen to represent, in so far as possible, a wide range of rural socioeconomic circumstances within each society; included are a rural low-income area, a mixed-commercial farming-industrialized area, and a more heavily industraalized rural area. Questionnaires were administered in classrooms either by a member of the research staff (in the American case) or by regular school personnel who had been instructed on the correct procedures through meetings with the research directors and school officials (in the German and Norwegian cases).

Plan for further education -- beyond the immediate level and leading to a higher academic track -- is the dependent variable and, in a general sense, the principle indicant of upward educational mobility (i.e., ambition). In the American case, the investigation deals with high school seniors and their plans to enter college. In Norway and Germany, however, in order to achieve some basis for comparability with American graduating seniors both primary and secondary school populations were surveyed at a critical point in the educational track. Hence, the German phase deals with pupils in the terminal class of Volksschule and their plans to acquire some additional full-time, formal schooling beyond that level, and also with students in the terminal class of Realschule or in the sixth year of Gymnasium and their plans to attain the Abitur (i.e., to be in a position to study at a university). ~~Similarly, the Norwegian phase deals with pupils in the terminal class of ungdomsskole and their plans to go on to the gymnas, and also with students in the terminal class of Realschule or in the sixth year of Gymnasium and their plans to attain the Abitur (i.e., to be in a position to study at a university).~~ Similarly, the Norwegian phase deals with pupils in the terminal class of ungdomsskole and their plans to go on to the gymnas, and also with students in the terminal class of gymnas and their plans to enter the university.

Thus, the study populations can be described as: (1) elementary or secondary school students at a stage in the educational career track immediately prior to a major decision-making point; (2) essentially "rural," since schools in large metropolitan areas were not included; and (3) more or less "total populations" of students at specified "terminal" grade levels.

Scholastic performance level, the independent variable, is measured by cumulative grade average attained in school. In the American case, grade point averages were taken directly from school records by the field worker whereas in Norway and Germany teachers were asked to rank each student on the basis of scholastic standing. (Although somewhat different procedures were employed to collect data, the resulting measures eventually reduced to simple, dichotomized, ordinal scales are basically equivalent. In Norway and Germany, grade averages were determined from class records by the principal teacher and the rankings were in gross terms: thirds or quartiles. In the United States, a field worker obtained the necessary information directly from class records in each of the 21 schools and the subsequent rankings were also in gross terms.) In all three cases, it should be noted, the rankings are vis-a-vis graduating peers in the particular school and not in terms of all other pupils in the study population. Hence, local standards of scholastic ability are emphasized.

For the purpose at hand, father's manual-nonmanual occupational status is used as an indicant of social class origin since it assures a high degree of cross-regional and cross-societal equivalency. This variable, place of residence (open-country or small village vs town or large village), region, and sex are introduced as controls or additional independent variables to elaborate the basic analysis.

# FINDINGS

## Patterns of scholastic performance

1. By Sex: Ratings and rankings derived from scholastic performance records (such as grades, grade-point-averages, and class standing) are not "pure" measures of intellectual ability. Consider, for example, that in American elementary schools especially and high schools generally girls on the average get far better grades than do boys. Table 1 shows the proportion of boys and girls located in each of the scholastic rank quartiles as determined locally by performance records in the 21 high school graduating classes included in the present study. Similar distributions have been observed in previous surveys elsewhere in the United States.[12/]

Unless we are willing to grant the innate intellectual superiority of girls over boys, such marked differences in scholastic performance are undoubtedly attributable to differences in the manner by which young male and female personalities "fit" or accommodate to the demands of the school system. Boys, for instance, may not be as socially "disciplined" or as sensitive to social nuances as are girls. Why not? Again, putting the genetic or constitutional argument aside, differences in capacity to cope with given structural conditions encountered in a school setting may be linked with differentials in socialization and in the patterns of expectations (norms) surrounding the child. The social system external to the school expects different things from boys than from girls. It may or may not be the case that the social system of

the school reinforces those behavioral distinctions. The fact remains, however, that American schools are more "effective" in relating to girls than to boys (or vice versa). Whether one views the school as a dual system serving the needs of girls on the one hand and boys on the other — a useful distinction for some purposes — or as a single system with universalistic standards and a genralized pedagogical strategy, the net result is the same: girls (as a category or subsystem) are collectively ranked above boys.

In order to explore this phenomenon further, both cross-culturally and cross-regionally, our data were reduced into dichotomized form. Table 2 reports the proportions of boys and girls ranked in the upper-third of their school classes; the breakdown is by region of residence and level of schooling for the three-nation study populations.

In the American case, sex differences are again shown to be rather dramatic and, moreover, consistent by region. Girls do markedly better than boys as indicated by their high school performance records (i.e., grade-point-averages). Supported also by information from other sources, I am inclined to believe that this pattern is characteristic of most American high schools. I would be surprised to find an American high school where the pattern is reversed.

At the elementary school level in Norway and Germany (Table 2), girls also manifest better performance records than boys. However, the differences are of far lesser magnitude than in the American case (Q=.43 in the American case and .14 in the Norwegian). Indeed, in some regions (Norway's Nordland-Narvik and Germany's Warendorf) the proportions

ranked in the upper-third of their school class are basically the same. In no case are boys categorically ranked above girls. At the secondary school level in Germany, ranking distinctions tend to be minor; in the Norwegian gymnas, boys tend to do better than girls.

In general, then, we conclude that European schools — whether organized in the classical style such as in Germany or along more modern, egalitarian lines such as in Norway — are less sex-distinctive (or discriminating) in their evaluation of (or power to stimulate) the scholastic ability of youngsters than are American schools. However, one should note that the sorting-out for secondary schools in Germany occurs at age 10 or 11 and a somewhat larger proportion of boys than of girls are tracked toward the Gymnasium or Realschule. The Norwegian ungdomsskole population, because it represents a total age-cohort immediately prior to a major sorting-out point, is in many respects more closely comparable with the American high school population.

These patterns of sex-differences were explored further by controlling on place of residence (Table 3). No major disturbance of the findings emerged, except in one instance. Among Norwegian gymnas students, rural boys do much better scholastically than rural girls (and they also do better than boys from urban backgrounds, Q=.45). Focussing only on the direction and magnitude of sex differences, the American case manifests a remarkably consistent pattern by region (with the smallest disparity among urban boys and girls in the Appalachian coal field county). At the Norwegian and German elementary school levels the patterns tend to vary considerably by region, with the greater, more consistent spread among youngsters from rural origins.

When social class is introduced as a control (Table 4), the pattern of sex differences also remains basically undisturbed.[13/] Girls tend to make better grades than boys and the magnitude of differences is far greater in the American than in the European cases. At the elementary school levels in Norway and Germany there is a tendency for differences to be more exaggerated among youngsters from white collar status families. Indeed, in the Norwegian case the original, modest differential between the sexes appears to be specified for the upper strata. Among Norwegian gymnas students, however, the sex-effect is mainly among manual worker children with boys doing better than girls. At the German secondary school level, sex differences are negligible regardless of social class origins.

In general, then, the original observations appear relatively stable when place of residence or social class are taken into account. Consistently and to a marked degree the American schools included in our sampling rank girls over boys. Although this pattern also exists in the Norwegian and German schools, it is far less consistent and of far lesser magnitude. Indeed, at the Norwegian and German secondary school levels where youngsters are about 16-17 years old and thus, at least age-wise, comparable with American high school students, categorical sex-differences in scholastic ranking are basically negligible (except among Norwegian students from rural or manual worker families, in which case boys do better than girls).

2: By Place of Residence: Table 3 suggests that it makes little difference in terms of scholastic performance (measured by achieved status within a particular school) whether a youngster stems from a rural

neighborhood or from a more urbanized center. In the American case, only among boys from the coal mining area of West Virginia is place of residence a discriminating factor; rural boys do less well than their urban counterparts (Q = -.39) although they are likely to be in different high schools. Rural-urban differences are negligible also in the Norwegian and German elementary schools except in the industrialized area of Giessen where rural girls do somewhat better than urban girls (Q = +.32). At the secondary school level, rural boys in the Norwegian gymnas stand-out as being exceptionally high achievers; in all other instances, however, differences by place of residence are negligible.[14/]

We are inclined to conclude, therefore, that within a given school context distinctions based upon place of residence are of relatively minor import. Evidences of discriminatory practices lack consistency. Note, however, that we are not referring to differences in levels of scholastic ability per se, but rather to the phenomenon of ranking within a given school context.

3. By Social Class Origin: Unlike the place of residence factor, consideration of social class background as a determinant of scholastic rank reveals a rather interesting pattern of findings (Table 4). This is not surprising, for the class variable cuts across community lines and thereby diffuses the effect of local school context whereas the residence factor, by specifying place, tends to concentrate it.

Generally, the influence of social class appears slightly stronger in the American than in the Norwegian ungdomsskole case. In the German case, sorting-out along class lines occurs earlier in a student's career;

our data reveal that the proportion of students from white collar or professional class backgrounds in the secondary school population is 69 percent compared with only 17 percent in the Volksschule. Hence, at this later stage among both the Volksschule and Gymnasium populations, the class effect is negligible (because the classes, to a large extent, have been structurally separated). Similarly among Norwegian gymnas students, the effect is negligible for girls and tends toward negative for boys.

Regional variations are especially noteworthy in the American case. The class effect is far less strong among boys in the more affluent areas of Kentucky than in the more impoverished counties of rural Appalachia. That pattern, however, is reversed for girls; social class is less important in Appalachia. This reversal phenomenon, to a considerable degree, is a function of the relatively larger proportion of boys from nonmanual worker families who rank in the "upper" scholastic category in Appalachian schools and, similarly, the relatively greater class spread among girls in the more industrialized rural areas. Although this pattern irregularity merits further research attention, present objectives do not permit an adequate treatment.

On the basis of these data, we conclude that social class origin is a factor that must be considered in assessing the impact of schooling experience upon level of ambition. In the German case, it undoubtedly enters into the earlier sorting-out for the secondary school track.

Patterns of career ambition

Although the pattern may now be changing, researchers have generally observed that girls are less likely than boys to pursue higher education and professional careers.[15/] Data from the present study (Table 5) tend to support this generalization (however, differences with respect to professional plans are greater than for educational plans).

American high school and Norwegian ungdomsskole students, it appears, manifest similar patterns of sex differentials with respect to upward mobility plans. The differences are low in magnitude, favor boys, and are basically consistent by region except for eastern Kentucky (which, as mentioned earlier, is an unusual and puzzling case). At the Norwegian gymnas level, the differences,of course,are amplified; about 20 percent more boys than girls plan on entering the university. I suspect that a comparable pattern would be evidenced in the American case if we focused on the career plans of college seniors. It is interesting to note, however, the somewhat lower levels of career ambition among Norwegian ungdomsskole students as compared with their American high school counterparts.

In the German case, because of structural idiosyncrocies, the pattern of sex differentials in upward mobility plans is more difficult to discern. We observe clear distinctions at the Gymnasium level, of course, and of a magnitude comparable with the Norwegian gymnas. The Volksschule level, however, is not organized as an integral rung on the academic and professional ladder. Only a few girls are among the small proportion of pupils who aspire to a professional career. Ambitious

Volksschule girls tend to be oriented toward lesser white collar jobs and, consequently, are more likely than boys to enroll in full-time trade (i.e., secretarial) schools after Volksschule termination. In Germany, the realm of professional careers and higher education is heavily dominated by males.

Essentially similar patterns of sex differentials are obtained when social class and place of residence are controlled. The impact of class and residence on career plans was noted and discussed in an earlier paper and need not be repeated here.[16/] Suffice to say that social class is an important determinant of career plans in all three countries and that the impact of residence place tends to vary by region. The key point for present purposes, however, is that the system of sponsorship for upward mobility tends to favor boys in all three cases despite structural differences in the sorting-out process.

## Scholastic performance and career plan

Our attention now focuses on scholastic rank as a determinant of career ambition. On the assumption that upward occupational mobility and the achievement of elite status in modern industrial societies is heavily dependent upon level of educational attainment, we shall deal only with that dimension in the remainder of this paper. Social class is introduced as a relevant factor, but consideration of residence place is omitted because of its weak effect upon the variables in question.

Table 6 reports the proportions of students planning further formal education by scholastic rank and sex among the various school populations. Table 7 reveals the patterns obtained when father's occupational status is introduced as a control.

In the American case, scholastic performance is more closely associated with the educational plans of boys than of girls even when social class is taken into account. Sex differentials generally favor boys (except among lower achievers in eastern Kentucky) and appear greater among those ranked high scholastically. (A relatively smaller proportion of boys, of course, are ranked in the upper strata of their graduating classes, but they are far more likely to be college-oriented than their female classmates who have achieved comparable grades.)

In the Norwegian ungdomsskole case, scholastic rank is as important for girls as for boys; a youngster's option to attend gymnas depends mainly upon his or her performance at the comprehensive school level. Sex differentials, nevertheless, also generally favor boys.

In the German Volksschule case the relationships between scholastic rank and educational plan, although considerably weaker, are similar for boys and girls. Sex differentials, of course, tend to favor girls. But in the German system, upper status career options are for all practical purposes restructed to Gymnasium students. At the Gymnasium level, the pattern is remarkably similar to that of the Norwegian gymnas; sex differentials clearly favor boys and scholastic rank is a far less powerful determinant of upward educational mobility for girls than for boys.

When social class is introduced as a control (Table 7), the complex interrelationships between these variables begin to unfold more clearly. The relationships between scholastic rank and educational plan, our primary focus of attention, remain essentially undisturbed. At the Norwegian and German secondary school level, however, there is a tendency for the performance effect to be specified for lower class youngsters (especially among German Gymnasium girls and Norwegian gymnas boys).

From these findings we conclude that past academic performance (i.e., the scholastic record) is a powerful determinant of future educational mobility; it undoubtedly functions (whether consciously or unconsciously from the student's standpoint) as a reference for critical decisions affecting career alternatives. Indeed, viewed from this perspective one notes the "leveling effect" of the schooling experience with respect to the stratification system in society; whether these data reflect a "circulation of elites" phenomenon is a question that merits more careful consideration. On the other hand, one also observes the persistent and, if structural differences are taken into account, consistent influence of social class origins over-and-above the scholastic performance criterion, as well as the effect of sex discrimination patterns that appear firmly built into the sorting-out mechanisms of modern contemporary societies.

## Summary and discussion

Our general concern in this comparative study was with the structuring of ambition among rural youth in three modern, industrial societies. The inquiry aimed primarily at exploring the effectiveness of scholastic rank (i.e., a youngster's performance record) as a sorting-out mechanism for career mobility. Scholastic rank, which is indicative of achieved status within the school system, and educational plan, which suggests level of ambition as well as future occupational alternatives, were conceptualized as integral components of the developmental sequence leading to career placement and a niche in the stratification hierarchy. The main research thrust was to specify linkages between these two variables. Social class origin and sex were introduced as additional explanatory variables. Some attention was focused on variations in community and regional contexts.

Although a variety of interesting facts about the structuring of educational opportunities in these three nations was noted, all of the intriguing ramifications or hypotheses cannot be pursued here. Rather, our summarizing comments are directed toward some of the more important and/or clearly distinguishable sets of findings relevant to the formulation of a comprehensive and systematic conceptualization of the interrelated effects of the main study variables within the general framework of the "sorting-out process".

A youngster's performance record, we have observed, is a very important factor in the structuring of ambition in all three nations. In the Norwegian case especially, demonstrated scholastic ability appears

to be a necessary condition for advancement to the secondary school level. It is also a very important factor among American boys, but of relatively lesser importance for American girls. Direct comparisons, of course, must be viewed with caution, for the meaning of "gymnas" in the Norwegian context is not quite the same as the meaning of "college" in the American context. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note the similar proportions of American high school and Norwegian ungdomsskole students from the upper scholastic strata who plan to pursue the next higher level of education and, on the other hand, the considerably smaller proportion of Norwegian ungdomsskole students from the lower scholastic strata as compared with their American counterparts. This difference, perhaps, suggests the nature of American society's inflationary tendencies with respect to higher education.

In the German system of education, the sorting-out of youngsters for secondary or elementary school tracks is the critical point in determining subsequent career patterns, and that branching-off occurs at age 10 or 11. A youngster's scholastic performance during the first four years of Grundschule enters into that decision, but for all practical purposes the sorting-out power is vested in the parental family. Hence, differences in value placed upon education by the various social classes, perpetuated within the family structure, tend to establish, as Max Weber observed, strong social or "caste" barriers to upward mobility. Nowadays, one might refer to this phenomenon as "de facto educational discrimination". In any event, the social class factor thereafter is diffused along with its reinforcement effect upon scholastic achievement.

Consequently, relationships between scholastic rank and educational plan are weaker in the German case than they are in the American or Norwegian ungdomsskole where the contest for careeer mobility is still open. For similar reasons, the patterning of these relationships at the Norwegian gymnas level is comparable to that of the German Gymnasium.

Although scholastic performance manifests a strong (as in Norway) or modestly strong (as in Germany) effect upon career ambition, it also tends to be reinforced in all three societies by the social class factor. This combined effect merits special attention, but time constraints do not permit a detailed discussion. Hence, I shall focus on selected aspects of the Norwegian and American cases. The structural differences of the German case make such an analysis less meaningful; note, however, that a social class effect is quite evident, particularly at the Volksschule level.

Scholastic performance, of course, is somewhat more important as a determinant of educational plan in Norway than in the United States (particularly for girls). Any Norwegian student displaying a strong academic potential is virtually assured of sponsorship for additional academic education beyond the comprehensive school level. Thus, one would expect a Norwegian youngster's educational plans to be somewhat insulated from the financial and practical restrictions imposed by social class origins. Our findings, however, reveal that class exerts considerable influence and, indeed, this influence may be greater than in the American case. (In both the Norwegian and American cases, only among boys does the performance criterion show any appreciable influence in reducing class bias,

and even here an exceptionally strong achievement record does not completely diminish the class effect.) One may conclude, therefore, that a formalized selection system such as instituted in Norway, although seeking to emphasis merit rather than family origins, is in fact also subject to strong class pressures. In both societies, the structuring of ambition is affected by the interrelated influences of family origins and the schooling experience.

An attempt was made to determine the relative importance of these variables and to establish the manner by which they affect the goal-setting process. Although the analyses are not incorporated into this paper, a few comments are pertinent. These data, we have found, do not lead to an orderly or clearly discernible model or set of models with a high degree of predictive power. We noted, nevertheless, that among American boys scholastic rank tends to function as an intervening variable whereas among American girls the social class effect upon college plans is more direct and considerably stronger. That is, the causal sequences involved do not take the same form. Among Norwegian ungdomsskole students, particularly boys, the direct effect of social class is also far more important than the indirect, but the linkage between the class and performance variable is rather tenuous; educational plan is more appropriately viewed as a consequent variable. Societal variations and their structural idiosyncracies must be taken into account, of course, in formulating any causal model. These cases are no exception. Indeed, the German case represents an even more extreme example of the complexities involved in establishing sturctural principles and influence patterns for comparative

purposes. One generalization, nevertheless, emerges rather clearly: scholastic performance (i.e., achieved status in the school system) is a less important, and social class origin is a more important determinant of career ambition for girls than for boys in all three societies.

Status mobility for boys appears to be a widely accepted norm reinforced by the various institutions of modern society and, in particular, the family. In some cases, as in Norway, the upper classes are more aggressive in taking advantage of existing opportunities. Nevertheless, boys generally seem to be "pressed" toward higher education and elite status. Status mobility for girls, on the other hand, seems to be a more gently enforced norm; they are "allowed" to strive for a place in the educational and occupational hierarchy. In short, the sex-role factor emerges as one of the more important elements in the structuring of ambition.

In the American case especially, this phenomenon is superimposed upon what appears to be an anomalous situation, namely, that consistently and to a marked degree girls tend to be ranked over boys in terms of scholastic performance. Although the pattern also exists in Norwegian and German schools, it is far less consistent and of far lesser magnitude. European schools, it seems, are not as sex-distinctive (or discriminating) in their evaluation of (or power to stimulate) the scholastic ability of youngsters as are American schools.

To the extent, then, that scholastic ranking has anything to do with the sorting-out of talent for further educational opportunities, the American system quite clearly favors girls. (I do not wish to imply

that the criteria for ranking are not "legitimized" for indeed they are — by all the logic and philosophical arguments that the high priests of education can muster.) In most cases, of course, individuals who possess a strong record of performance at the high school level stand a better chance of gaining admission to college. However, one might also ponder how scholastic evaluations (with their obvious sex-bias) affect self-images and intellectual motivations. (I suspect that the sex-biased scholastic evaluations so characteristic of American secondary school education, for example, play an important part in reinforcing sex-role stereotyping with respect to educational attitudes.)

Thus, in the American case especially, the two principal sets of observations derived from this research appear incongruous. Indeed, they suggest two potentially serious problems of social justice that come together in a rather awkward manner at the critical transitional point, namely, graduation from high school. The American system of scholastic evaluation, which, we must presume, reflects the character of the educational process, is organized in a discriminatory manner. This discrimination, I submit, is clearly damaging to the goals of that system if the goals are to stimulate learning and achievement behavior. If, however, one takes the position that the evaluational criteria and procedures employed by schools are inherently just and it "just happens" that girls perform markedly better than boys, then it is clearly a social injustice for girls to have a somewhat lesser chance of going on to higher education than boys and for the social class factor to play a more prominent part in determining their levels of opportunity and career achievement.

From a comparative perspective, the structuring of ambition in the American case suggests some rather unique and perplexing problems.

NOTES

1. Michigan Agricultural Experiment Station Journal Article . The data for this paper were collected through a series of field surveys organized by the author with the help, guidance, and collaboration of Herbert Koetter and Mathilda Buffen at the Institute fuer Agrarsoziologie, der Justus-Liebig Universitaet, Giessen, Germany; James S. Brown and Donald Bogie at the University of Kentucky; John Marra and Thomas Lyson at West Virginia University; and Helge Solli and Lynne Lackey at the Norges Landbrukshogskole in Vollebek, Norway. The author wishes to express his appreciation to these and the many other people and agencies that helped to facilitate this work.

2. For an introduction to and an excellent review of the literature on educational evaluation, see J. Stanley Ahmann, Marvin D. Glock, and Helen L. Wardeberg, Evaluating Elementary School Pupils, Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1960.

3. See the summary and discussion of findings from a national survey of schools in Grading and Reporting: Current Trends in School Policies and Programs, Arlington, Virginia: National School Public Relations Association, 1972. The authors note, for example, in a section entitled "Where Traditional Grades are Successful — and Where They Aren't" (Page 9), that "If the purpose is to motivate the student toward intensive learning — grading often doesn't work at all."

4. Parsons has made this point in Talcott Parsons, "The School Class as a Social System: Some of its Functions in American Society," Harvard Educational Review 29: 297-318, 1959, and in a number of other writings. It is also noted by Sarane S. Boocock, An Introduction to the Sociology of Learning, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972, p. 29 and pp. 164-168.

5. See Ralph H. Turner, The Social Context of Ambition, San Francisco: Chandler, 1964.

6. For a simplified diagram comparing American, Norwegian and German educational systems, see Harry K. Schwarzweller, "Regional Variations in the Educational Plans of Rural Youth: Norway, Germany and the United States," Rural Sociology 38, Summer 1973, p. 142.

7. See, Olav Hove, The System of Education in Norway, Oslo: Royal Norwegian Ministry of Church and Education, 1968; and Olav Nyhammer, Education in Norway; Oslo: Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1969.

8. See, Harry K. Schwarzweller, "Educational Aspirations and Life Chances of German Young People," Comparative Education 4, November, 1967, pp. 35-49. See also, Ralph Dahrendorf, Bildung ist Buergerrecht, Hamburg: Die Zeit Buecher, 1965.

9. Ralph H. Turner, "Sponsored and Contest Mobility and the School System," American Sociological Review 25, December 1960, pp. 855-867.

10. It should be noted, however, that "tracking" is becoming evident at an increasing number of American high schools. See J.L. Kitsuse and A.V. Cicourel, The Educational Decision Makers, Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963.

11. For further information, see: Donald W. Bogie, "Sociocultural differences among three areas in Kentucky as determinants of educational and occupational aspirations and expectations of rural youth," Lexington: University of Kentucky, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, 1970; Lynne G. Lackey, "Socioeconomic status and occupational-educational expectations: a cross-national comparative study of American and Norwegian youth," Lexington: University of Kentucky, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, 1972; Thomas A. Lyson, "Educational mobility and parental interest: a comparative study of rural youngsters in Norway and the United States," Morgantown: West Virginia University, unpublished M.A. thesis, 1972.

12. In a small rural high school in northern Michigan, for example, the 1974 graduating class numbered 53 students. Among the top 15 in terms of grade-point averages there were two boys; among the bottom 15 there were two girls.

13. Similar patterns are observed when father's educational level or family level of living are employed as indicants of social class in the American and Norwegian cases. Comparable data, however, are not available for Germany.

14. It should also be noted that in the Norwegian case there is no difference in the proportion of youngsters from rural backgrounds who are enrolled in either the ungdomsskole or gymnas (38 percent). In the German case, however, we find that 46 percent of the Volksschule pupils are rural compared with only 21 percent of the Gymnasium students. An urban youngster in Germany, it appears, is probably twice as likely to get into a secondary school as is a rural youngster.

15. See, for example, the comments by William H. Sewell, "Community of residence and college plans," American Sociological Review 29 (February) 1964, p. 25.

16. H.K. Schwarzweller, "Regional variations in the educational plans of rural youth," Rural Sociology 38 (Summer) 1973, pp. 139-158.

TABLE 1. Scholastic Performance Level, by Sex: American High School Seniors

| Scholastic Rank in school Class* | Percent Boys | Girls | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Upper quartile | 17.3 | 32.9 | 25.1 |
| Upper-middle | 21.8 | 28.1 | 25.0 |
| Lower-middle | 27.9 | 22.9 | 25.4 |
| Lower quartile | 33.0 | 16.1 | 24.5 |
| Total Percent | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| N= | (1123) | (1136) | (2259) |

NOTE* Scholastic rank is based upon grade-point averages at the end of the senior year. A student's rank is determined by his performance vis-a-vis classmates in the local school.

TABLE 2. Scholastic Performance Level, by Sex: Regional Study Populations Compared

| Regional Study Population | Percent in upper-third of school class | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Boys | Girls | Total | N* |
| American high school | (23.8) | (43.4) | (33.6) | (2313) |
| West | 22.1 | 44.3 | | 575 |
| Central | 25.8 | 41.7 | | 617 |
| East | 21.7 | 44.0 | | 643 |
| Mingo | 26.3 | 43.9 | | 478 |
| Norwegian Ungdomsskole (primary school) | (30.7) | (36.6) | (33.7) | (1396) |
| North | 32.7 | 33.5 | | 471 |
| West | 26.1 | 37.9 | | 524 |
| East | 34.9 | 38.3 | | 401 |
| Norwegian Gymnas (secondary school) | (31.7) | (26.3) | (29.3) | ( 446) |
| German Volksschule (primary school) | (31.1) | (37.7) | (34.1) | (1670) |
| Giess | 30.4 | 36.7 | | 499 |
| Woren | 35.1 | 36.5 | | 688 |
| Lauter | 26.4 | 40.6 | | 483 |
| German Gymnasium (secondary school) | (31.7) | (34.1) | (32.0) | ( 885) |

NOTE* N refers to total number in study population. In this and subsequent tables cases of no information have been omitted and the base N is slightly less.

TABLE 3. Scholastic Performance Level, by Sex and Place of Residence: Regional Study Populations Compared

| Regional Study Population | Percent in upper-third of School Class: Place of Residence — Urban: town, large village — Boys | Urban: town, large village — Girls | Rural: country, hamlet — Boys | Rural: country, hamlet — Girls |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| American | | | | |
| High School | (26.8) | (44.6) | (22.3) | (42.7) |
| West | 22.4 | 47.1 | 21.8 | 42.5 |
| Central | 23.0 | 43.2 | 28.0 | 40.7 |
| East | 29.5 | 48.0 | 20.4 | 43.2 |
| Mingo | 36.3 | 42.2 | 20.1 | 44.8 |
| Norwegian | | | | |
| Ungdomsskole | (30.6) | (34.5) | (30.2) | (39.9) |
| North | 31.8 | 32.2 | 31.1 | 38.9 |
| West | 25.4 | 35.2 | 27.8 | 41.7 |
| East | 38.4 | 37.5 | 32.0 | 39.1 |
| Norwegian Gymnas | (24.5) | (27.0) | (46.1) | 25.0) |
| German Volksschule | (32.2) | (35.0) | (29.6) | (40.9) |
| Giess | 30.1 | 28.0 | 30.4 | 42.9 |
| Waren | 35.8 | 35.8 | 31.2 | 41.3 |
| Lauter | 21.5 | 45.5 | 28.3 | 38.9 |
| German Gymnasium | (31.0) | (33.7) | (32.0) | (29.7) |

BLE 4. Scholastic Performance Level, by Sex and Father's Occupational Status: Regional Study Populations Compared

| Regional Study Population | Percent in upper-third of school class: Father's Occupational Status — Nonmanual | | Manual | | Relationship* between scholastic rank and father's status | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls |
| American | | | | | | |
| High School | (37.3) | (60.2) | (21.0) | (40.3) | (.38) | (.38) |
| West | 31.2 | 67.6 | 19.8 | 37.3 | .29 | .56 |
| Central | 32.5 | 59.0 | 24.4 | 37.7 | .20 | .41 |
| East | 44.7 | 57.4 | 18.8 | 42.8 | .56 | .29 |
| Mingo | 46.3 | 55.6 | 21.6 | 44.5 | .52 | .22 |
| Norwegian | | | | | | |
| Ungdomsskole | (38.1) | (48.0) | (28.4) | (31.7) | (.22) | (.33) |
| North | 35.2 | 45.2 | 31.6 | 28.2 | .08 | .36 |
| West | 34.9 | 48.5 | 23.1 | 33.6 | .28 | .30 |
| East | 46.3 | 51.0 | 31.7 | 33.1 | .30 | .36 |
| Norwegian Gymnas | (26.7) | (28.0) | (36.2) | (23.3) | (-.22) | (.12) |
| German Volksschule | (33.1) | (43.8) | (31.1) | (37.3) | (.04) | (.13) |
| Giess | 30.5 | 44.0 | 30.4 | 34.9 | .00 | .19 |
| Waren | 37.9 | 40.0 | 34.8 | 36.6 | .07 | .07 |
| Lauter | 28.0 | 50.0 | 26.9 | 41.0 | .03 | .18 |
| German Gymnasium | (31.3) | (33.9) | (30.4) | (30.6) | (.02) | (.08) |

*Yule's Q is used as the measure of association

TABLE 5. Career Plans, by Sex: Regional Study Populations Compared

| Regional Study Populations | Percent Planning Further Formal Education* | | Percent Planning Professional Careers | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls |
| American | | | | |
| High School | (41.9) | (39.3) | (32.7) | (27.4) |
| West | 56.4 | 51.3 | 39.8 | 28.8 |
| Central | 43.3 | 37.7 | 35.7 | 24.6 |
| East | 33.5 | 37.8 | 25.3 | 30.4 |
| Mingo | 33.6 | 29.5 | 30.1 | 25.5 |
| Norwegian | | | | |
| Ungdomsskole | (34.7) | (28.8) | (27.6) | (21.6) |
| North | 27.6 | 23.2 | 25.3 | 19.1 |
| West | 38.0 | 34.8 | 32.7 | 24.4 |
| East | 38.9 | 27.5 | 22.9 | 20.7 |
| Norwegian Gymnas | (56.8) | (37.3) | (69.8) | (52.0) |
| German Volksschule | (17.7) | (25.6) | ( 5.6) | ( 1.1) |
| Giess | 14.3 | 19.0 | 7.5 | 1.4 |
| Waren | 21.9 | 30.0 | 6.8 | 0.6 |
| Lauter | 15.3 | 25.8 | 1.6 | 1.5 |
| German Gymnasium | (66.6) | (51.5) | (71.6) | (42.9) |

*"Further formal education" refers to college for American students, gymnas for Norwegian ungdomsskole students, university for Norwegian gymnas students, any formal schooling beyond the compulsory Berufschule level for German Volksschule students, and completion of the Abitur for German Gymnasium or Realschule students.

TABLE 6. Educational Plans, by Sex and Scholastic Performance Level: Regional Study Populations Compared

Percent planning further formal education

| Regional Study Population | Scholastic Performance Level: Upper third of class | | Lower two-thirds | | Relationship* between educational plan and scholastic rank | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls |
| American | | | | | | |
| High School | (78.7) | (58.2) | (31.1) | (25.2) | (.78) | (.61) |
| West | 92.2 | 71.7 | 47.3 | 35.8 | .86 | .64 |
| Central | 71.2 | 57.5 | 34.3 | 23.5 | .65 | .63 |
| East | 79.4 | 57.0 | 21.5 | 23.8 | .87 | .62 |
| Mingo | 72.6 | 45.2 | 19.5 | 17.3 | .83 | .60 |
| Norwegian | | | | | | |
| Ungdomsskole | (73.9) | (61.1) | (17.0) | (10.1) | (.86) | (.87) |
| North | 61.6 | 59.2 | 9.5 | 5.5 | .88 | .92 |
| West | 78.3 | 67.7 | 24.0 | 14.4 | .84 | .85 |
| East | 83.6 | 55.0 | 14.8 | 10.4 | .93 | .83 |
| Norwegian Gymnas | (77.5) | (47.8) | (48.7) | (35.9) | (.57) | (.24) |
| German Volksschule | (30.0) | (36.5) | (12.2) | (17.9) | (.51) | (.45) |
| Giess | 24.1 | 28.9 | 10.0 | 13.3 | .48 | .45 |
| Waren | 38.5 | 44.1 | 13.3 | 20.2 | .61 | .52 |
| Lauter | 21.5 | 33.7 | 13.3 | 19.7 | .28 | .35 |
| German Gymnasium | (80.1) | (59.2) | (58.4) | (46.4) | (.48) | (.25) |

*The Yule's Q statistic was used as a measure of association; all correlations are positive.

TABLE 7. Educational Plans, by Scholastic Performance Level, Father's Occupational Status, and Sex: Study Populations Compared

Percent planning further formal education

| Study Population | Father's Status | Scholastic Performance Level: Upper third of class | | Lower two-thirds | | Relationship between educational plan and scholastic rank | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls |
| American, High School | Nonmanual | 88.4 | 77.1 | 58.1 | 47.1 | .69 | .58 |
| | Manual | 75.5 | 49.8 | 25.9 | 22.7 | .80 | .54 |
| Norwegian Ungdomsskole | Nonmanual | 87.5 | 86.8 | 33.6 | 18.6 | .87 | .93 |
| | Manual | 65.9 | 43.8 | 11.5 | 7.3 | .87 | .82 |
| Norwegian, Gymnas | Nonmanual | 75.0 | 50.0 | 55.8 | 39.4 | .41* | .21* |
| | Manual | 78.6 | 47.1 | 42.5 | 30.4 | .67 | .34* |
| German, Volksschule | Nonmanual | 51.1 | 42.9 | 24.2 | 25.0 | .53 | .39 |
| | Manual | 25.0 | 35.3 | 10.3 | 16.3 | .49 | .47 |
| German, Gymnasium | Nonmanual | 84.0 | 60.2 | 64.4 | 52.0 | .49 | .16* |
| | Manual | 72.5 | 57.1 | 43.0 | 34.6 | .56 | .43 |

*In these cases, although Q is reported, a Chi-square test suggests that any statement of magnitude may be unreliable.